

MOST FOOLS ARE HIGHLY EDUCATED!

Today's Text: (a) Prov. Chaps 2-4, 8-10; (b) 1 Cor. 1: 18-25

Extracts:

- 1. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding. ...*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding* [Prov. 9: 6, 10]**
- 2. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. .. *Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* [1 Cor. 1: 18, 24, 25]**

Karl Marx [1818-83] is best known for his views of life which influenced the founding of communism, the philosophy of government which held sway in the now defunct Soviet Union and Eastern Europe up to the 1980's, and still operates (in a modified form) in China. Bertrand Russell [1872-1970] was a famous British mathematician and philosopher who also won a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. Carl Sagan [1934-96] was a professor at Cornell University who popularized astronomy and astrophysics on television. What do the three men share in common? They were all atheists!¹

An atheist is a person who does not believe in the existence of God. Karl Marx's Communism rejects God. Bertrand Russell was an advocate of sexual freedom and Carl Sagan helped people to use critical thinking and skepticism to reject God. The Scriptures say, "the fool has said in his heart, 'there is no God'" [Ps. 14: 1]. Therefore, in spite of their high learning, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell and Carl Sagan were fools!

How many of us belong to their league? How often have we associated high learning or brilliance with wisdom and poor education or ignorance with foolishness? Do you know that it is quite easy to be a fool? Would you consider yourself wise or foolish? These are some of the issues that we shall address in today's lesson. There is no better book in the Bible to guide us on the subject than the Proverbs, written by Solomon, the man endowed by God as the wisest in history [1 Kgs 3: 12].

¹ "Famous Atheists, Skeptics and Freethinkers,"
http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/ath/blath_bio_index.htm

1. Wisdom and foolishness come from the heart, not the head!

In English folklore, there is the story of two foolish goats that came from opposite directions to a narrow bridge. Each of them claimed the *right* of way and neither of them was ready or willing to yield to the other. In the process of forcing their way through, both of them plunged into the deep river and drowned.

Why were they called foolish? It is because they both used their heads where they could have used their hearts! In their heads, they found logic and rationality. Therefore, the problem of crossing the bridge was defined in terms of rights [‘who arrived first should cross first’] and pride [‘why should I be the one to yield?']. However, if each had been a little considerate, one would have allowed the other to go first. That would take humility and selflessness, which are issues of the heart, not of the head! You can then understand why God gave Solomon “a wise and understanding heart” [1 Kgs 3: 12] and “the fool has said *in his heart* ‘there is no God’” [Ps. 53: 1]. Both are issues of the heart. Therefore, they have nothing to do with high education or high intelligence.

Of the several definitions of wisdom in the Webster’s dictionary, the one that is most applicable for our study is “the personification of God’s will in the creation of the world.” Putting words in the mouth of wisdom, Solomon wrote, “*The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old... Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was His daily delight*” [Prov. 8: 22, 30]. We also know that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him.... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” [Jn 1: 1-3, 14]. Paul has called *Jesus the Christ* “*the wisdom of God*” [1 Cor. 1: 24]. Therefore, there is no wisdom outside of God. Any wisdom that is based on any other premise is foolishness! That is why the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and the person who says in his/her heart that there is no God is a fool.

God grants us wisdom through many channels, such as common sense [2 Sam. 20: 14-22], commercial success [Ezek. 28: 3-5] or technical and mechanical skills.

We all have *natural talents* for different things. When we go to school, all we do is to enhance those talents to make us professionals in our chosen fields. Today, some of us are very successful teachers or preachers, doctors or lawyers, architects or artisans, sportsmen and women, etc. Have we ever considered the fact that they are all manifestations of wisdom that God has given us to glorify His name or to fulfill His purpose? Let us take a few examples from the Scriptures.

On Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He also gave specific instructions on the garments for the priesthood and the vessels for

worship. On the former, God said to Moses, “You shall speak to *all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom*, that they make Aaron’s garments” [Ex. 28: 3]. When it came to the construction of the tabernacle, God told Moses, “Bezalel and Aholiab, and every *gifted artisan in whom the Lord has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary*, shall do according to all that the Lord has commanded” [Ex. 36: 1]. In another example, when Solomon was building the temple of God in Jerusalem, he used the services of a bronze worker called Hiram who “was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill in working with all kinds of bronze work” [1 Kgs 7: 14].

Even in public speaking, it is God that gives us what to say and how to say it. For example, when Moses made excuses that he was not an eloquent speaker, that he was slow of speech and of tongue, God assured him, “Go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say” [Ex. 4: 10-12]. This point was amplified by Jesus when He told His disciples, “Settle it *in your hearts* not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer for *I will give you a mouth and wisdom* which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” [Lk 21: 14-15].

What then is wisdom? What is foolishness? When we apply our knowledge and understanding (that are based on God-given talents and opportunities) to deal with our daily worldly problems and challenges *in accordance with God’s purpose and glory*, we are said to be wise. However, when we *misapply* them, that is, use them to glorify self or Satan, we are said to be foolish.

2. How we manifest foolishness!

It is quite easy to think that foolishness is far-fetched. Unfortunately, we all can manifest foolishness if we are not careful. Consider the following circumstances:

a) *We could be misguided!*

As we saw earlier, whoever believes in his/her heart that there is no God is a fool. However, there are some people, such as most Jews or all Moslems, who believe in God but reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Would you consider such people wise or foolish?

In the words of Jesus, “He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” [Lk 10: 16]. We know that He was sent by God the Father. Those who have rejected Jesus have actually rejected God. Therefore, they have not behaved wisely. They have been misguided!

Cornelius, a Roman army officer, was described as “a devout man and one *who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always*” [Acts 10: 1-2]. In spite of such steadfastness, God still sent an angel to him to invite Peter to tell him what

to do. Peter came and preached Jesus the Christ to Cornelius and his household. They believed and the Holy Spirit fell on them and they received water baptism [vv. 3-48]. Cornelius behaved wisely by accepting Jesus as the Son of God.

b) *We could be playing the philosopher!*

Deep down in our hearts, some of us do not believe that only genuine Christians will go to heaven. In that sense, they see Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other leading religions as equal, if not preaching the same peace and love. They see Jesus as one of the world's leading religious founders, in the class of Mohammed and Buddha! Even if they claim to believe in God, the rejection of the divinity of Jesus automatically translates as the rejection of God as we saw earlier. Therefore, such "believers" are mere philosophers!

When Paul came to Athens, he encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who called Paul "this babbling" for preaching to them Jesus and the resurrection [Acts 17: 18]. The Athenians had a reputation to want to hear the latest doctrine for that was their idea of wisdom [1 Cor. 1: 22]. After Paul's sermon, "some mocked him, while others said, 'we will hear again on this matter'" [Acts 17: 22-32]. Those who mocked him were philosophers. Those who wanted to hear more behaved wisely.

c) *We could be practising atheists!*

We could claim to be practising Christians who believe in God and accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour. Yet, in our daily walk, we are practising atheists! For example, do we really fear God when we *persist* in offering or taking bribes (as government or corporate officials or police officers) or run an abortion clinic (as a doctor) or a brothel (as a prostitute or pimp)?

Jesus queried the hearers of His earthly ministry, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" [Lk 6: 46]. Do we merely draw near God with our mouths while our hearts are far away from Him? [Is. 29: 13; Matt. 15: 8-9]. If we do not put our faith into practice in everything that we do, we are atheists who are behaving foolishly!

3. Wisdom to the rescue!

The book of Proverbs comes in here to give us a wholesome diet on wisdom. Let us examine them under the *values* and *practice* of wisdom:

a) *The values of wisdom*

Bear in mind our working definition of wisdom: *action based on God-sanctioned principles and gifts for His purpose and glory*. When we behave wisely, we can experience the following values of wisdom in our lives:

- Love of knowledge: Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge [**Prov. 1: 7**], “fools hate knowledge” [**v. 22**] and God’s people perish for lack of knowledge [**Hos. 4: 6**]. Therefore, wisdom makes us hungry for knowledge of God’s word and guidance in everything that we do. It makes us humble to accept that we do not know it all, that we have to rely on the expertise and gifts that God has given to others to assist us to achieve His purpose.
- More precious than gold and material things: We are enjoined, “Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; *for wisdom is better than rubies, and all things one may desire cannot be compared with her*” [**Prov. 8: 11**]. It is instructive that many of us compromise our integrity and fear of God for material gains. In the end, the benefits that we derive there from do not last but our disgrace can last forever!
- Rewards of wisdom: When we are God-led in applying our talents and skills, we are assured of peace and long life [**Prov. 3: 2, 16, 17**], favour and high esteem in the sight of God and man [**v. 4**], physical health and strength [**v. 8**], and a free hand of resources [**vv. 9-10, 27-28**]. We no longer detest correction from our parents and elders for God also corrects those He loves [**vv. 11-12**]. When a wise person is rebuked, s(he) will continue to love [**Prov. 9: 8**].

b) *The practice of wisdom*

Since wisdom is so important in our walk with God, we need to learn some basic principles of practising it. Here are some of them that we can pick up from the book of Proverbs:

- Seek only the knowledge from God: Wisdom says to us, “Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you....Whoever listens to me will dwell safely; and will be secure without fear of evil” [**Prov. 1: 23, 30**]. Wisdom adds, “Listen, for I will speak of *excellent things*, and from the opening of my lips will come *right things*; for my mouth will speak *truth*” [**Prov. 8: 6,7**]. Certainly, Satan will compete for our attention space as we struggle to go God’s way. We shall be bombarded with satanic literature on Evolution-based approaches to human wisdom. We shall be tempted to think that our ability to articulate high-sounding philosophical theories is equivalent to wisdom! Don’t be

deceived. Peter and John were poorly educated fishermen but they confounded the learned members of the Sanhedrin when they spoke eloquently and boldly about God and Jesus [**Acts 4: 13**].

- Pray or ask for wisdom in every situation: Wisdom says, “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching *daily* at my gates, *waiting* at the posts of my doors” [**Prov. 8: 34**]. That suggests that *in every circumstance*, we should ask or pray for wisdom, which is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 8**]. James writes, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” [**Jam. 1: 5**].
- Avoid complacency: We are warned, “the complacency of fools will destroy them” [**Prov. 1: 32**]. This comes about when we begin to take God for granted, when we think that we have completely figured out how to relate to Him. That is why God has said, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might; nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, *that he understands and knows Me; that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, for in these I delight*” [**Jer. 9: 23-24**]. When you act on presumption rather than faith, you are acting out of foolishness, not wisdom.

4. Conclusion

God has given you the opportunity and the means to develop your God-given talents. Now, you are successful in your chosen field of human endeavour or on the way there. You are smart, intelligent and articulate. You are respected and your views are sought in important places. But are you sure that you are applying your gifts for God’s glory or to fight against His kingdom? Like most of us who are hardly honest about critical self-analysis, you may not be able to assess your situation. So, let me show you an easier way. Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God [**1 Cor. 1: 24**]. If you can look up to Him who is the author and finisher of your faith [**Heb. 12: 2**], and take up your cross daily and follow Him, then you can claim to be behaving wisely.

It is foolish to be or remain a fool!