

The Wisdom of God and of Man

1. Introduction: The Meaning of Wisdom

Wisdom is generally understood to be that ability to use one's knowledge of things in order to obtain the best results. The Oxford Dictionary says, 'Being wise, (possession of) experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically; sagacity, prudence, commonsense...' The Biblical view of wisdom, whilst incorporating these elements is wider and more specialised. Since God is 'the only wise God' (cf. Romans 16:27, 1 Tim. 1:17, Jude 25 in their contexts) He is the source and fountain of all wisdom. This, of course, against the idols who are foolish, and men and spirits who lack wisdom. God's wisdom is of course unlimited, but man's is limited to his creatureliness. The term wisdom in both the O.T. and the N.T. has much which is common to both, but there are differences, as we will see.

2. Wisdom In The Old Testament

(i) The Wisdom of God

In the O.T. wisdom flows only from God, the source of all true wisdom. In Jer. 8:9 'the word of the Lord' is equated with wisdom. In Isaiah 31:2 God is wise in punishing those who go against His will: His will is wisdom. Daniel says, of God, 'To whom belongs wisdom and might' and adds that He 'gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have deep understanding' (2:20-23, cf. II Sam. 14:20, Prov. 21:30). There are many words (apart from the translated word in English, i.e. 'wisdom') and the range includes 'to perceive', 'to understand (how to act)', insight, perception, skill, and often relates to experience. Sometimes it relates to elements of conduct such as uprightness of moral living, conduct of life, and hence righteousness and pious living. In Proverbs 4:11 the father says, 'I have taught you the way of wisdom: I have led you in the paths of righteousness. (Cf. Proverbs 23:19.)

Rightly understood this wisdom of God is His utter and complete perfection. It is incongruous to think of God obtaining knowledge. Job rightly asks God, 'Hast thou eyes of flesh? Dost thou see as man sees?' (10:4). He is aware of the principle of Isaiah 55:10-11, 'Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor your ways my ways....' God is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. Yet the difference is not in terms merely of infinitude and finitude, but of Creator and creature. Hence when God would teach Job wisdom He shows him creation in its magnificent dimensions (chs. 38-42). Man's creatureliness sets his limitations (Jer. 10:23). God not only knows all things: all things are because He knows them. In His knowledge there is discrimination of what is evil and what is good. Hence, as we have seen, His punishment of evil is part of His

wisdom. In this sense the 'foolish man' is not simply one of low intellect, or deficient in sense, but one who refuses to know God and to order his life according to that wisdom (Psalm 14:1-2).

(ii) God's Wisdom and Creation

In the N.T. God's wisdom is often depicted as related to salvation. In the O.T. this idea is not absent, but primarily it relates to creation. In Proverbs 3:19ff and 8:22-31 Wisdom is virtually a hypostasis. Not only is the creation a wise matter (Gen. 1:31) but is initiated by wisdom, and executed by wisdom. All that God does is good, and the whole is very good. This is the wisdom of God. To attack God's wisdom is to attack His creation, especially to attack man, e.g. 'He who oppresses a man insults his Creator; but he who is kind to the needy honours him.' The demand for capital punishment in Genesis 9:1-7 is that attack upon the image of God (man) is virtually an attack upon God. The moral is involved in the creational, hence 'He who mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.' In Job 12:7-10 Job asserts that all creation knows what God is about, for, 'In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.' Likewise the Psalmist asks (94:9), 'He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?' In Psalm 139 there is a brilliant and beautiful exposition of God's true knowledge and wisdom in forming man in the womb. Hence the psalmist concludes (104:24) his account of creation by saying,

‘O Lord, how manifest are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all.’

In Isaiah 40:12-14 the same theme is pursued. Verse 12 speaks of His powers of creation. Verse 13 asks who instructed Him in this great venture? Verse 14 asks, 'Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?' Jeremiah 10:12 (cf. 51:15) underlines Psalm 104 when the prophet says, 'It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.' We see then that wisdom and knowledge are virtually synonymous. It has been observed that wisdom is the way knowledge is used, and this is partly true. For God to have knowledge is for Him to have wisdom. He does not create merely out of great ability. All He creates manifests Himself (Psalm 19:1f, Romans 1:19f). We see, also, that creation is purposive since Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose At the same time the issue of moral wisdom is present so that the writer adds, 'even the wicked for the day of trouble.' In Job 12:13-14 God is pictured as wise, and part of His wisdom is that He can tear down and none can rebuild; He shuts a man in and none can liberate him. This, too, relates to the moral. Of course throughout the O.T. the creational and the moral are linked (e.g. Isaiah 32:2f, Isaiah ch.11, etc.).

(iii) Conclusion

The O.T. certainly takes into consideration the fact of man's creatureliness in contrast to (and over and against) God's Creatorhood. Hence man, to understand the wisdom of God, must have Godly fear. The question, however, is complicated by man's sinfulness. If man were to live out his full creaturehood there would be no conflict with God's Creatorhood. This is the point made in the last four chapters of Job. The conflict of evil with God also makes the matter of wisdom complicated. However, a time (eschatological) is promised when true wisdom will be seen, and it

will triumph (e.g. Isaiah 33:5-6, ‘...He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge’). Such a picture is seen in Isaiah 11 where Messiah will have upon him the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and godly strength. As a result justice will obtain, and all God's true creative functional elements will come into operation. This equates with the promises in Isaiah 65 and 66 of ‘new heavens and a new earth’.

We cannot then, study O.T. and N.T. presentations of wisdom, both of God and man, without taking into consideration the fact of the rebellion of angelic powers and the fall of created man. In fact it is the wisdom of God which, long before creation, took this into account (I Cor. 2:6-10).

3. Wisdom In The New Testament

(i) Introduction

Nothing of God's wisdom as it relates to creation is absent in the N.T. Nevertheless, although the O.T. does not speak specifically of God's covenant with Israel, and even with Abraham as ‘the wisdom of God’ there is no reason to doubt that it is. In fact it is the writings of the covenant people s the covenant people which makes them look at the wisdom of God as demonstrated in creation. The God of all wisdom as against the false gods is emphasised in Daniel 2:30 and 5:11 and 14. Also we have seen that true wisdom is the keeping of piety in man, and God is the source of that piety. Likewise when the tabernacle has to be built and its furniture constructed, as also the garments of the priests, then the artificers need the ‘spirit of wisdom’.

In the N.T. God's wisdom is primarily salvific. Christ, in fact, is God's wisdom, and we shall see what this means. However, it is the plan of God which indicates His true wisdom, and we shall look at this briefly.

(ii) God's Plan the Wisdom

In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul speaks of the plan of God. In verse 9 he says, He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to the purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time to unite all things in him.’ Notice that one needs to have wisdom to understand the ‘mystery of the plan’. ‘The mystery’ is that secret closed to the uninitiated (those who do not have ‘ears to hear’), but quite open to the initiated. ‘Insight’ is virtually a synonym for Biblical wisdom. In 1:17ff Paul prays that his people may have ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’. Again God's plan which is wisdom cannot be known without wisdom. Hence in I Cor. 2:6-7 Paul says, ‘Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom... .a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.’

We can come then to this conclusion, that God's wisdom is in this, that He planned the history of the creation. It was not to be creation and only creation, but it was to be that creation which would be glorified.

This being so, then His wisdom, from the beginning, is salvific. It must incorporate His covenantal purposes, for the end of these is glorification. The whole word of creation and redemption, then, incorporates the wisdom of God.

(iii) God's Communication of Wisdom

In Luke 11:37-54 Jesus opposes the 'wisdom' of the legalists, chiding them with not understanding. He says they killed the prophets. In Matthew 23:1-39 he delivers the same message. In verse 34 he says, 'Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify...' In Luke 11: 47f, he says, 'Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed... Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute...'' From this it is evident that God's wisdom was in sending the prophets and communicating the plan. He does nothing but what first He tells His prophets, that they may tell man so that man may know the Wisdom. In fact this principle Jesus (as Lord) will continue. This accords with I Peter 1:10-12 where the prophets know something of the mystery they are communicating through the Spirit of Christ.

In no sense is God's wisdom a gnostic or esoteric thing. Men could, if they would, know it. As we shall see Christ the Son is the revelation of this wisdom and Jesus was never cabalistic, never esoteric. His actions were as significant as his words, and all were spelt out in human ways, and in understandable language. Hence in the N.T. all that Jesus is and does is the true wisdom of God.

With this brief introductory note we may now proceed to see and compare both the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man.

4. Man and Wisdom

(i) The Creation of Man

If God is the only wise God, and if all wisdom flows from Him, then man, as created was the image and glory of God. Wisdom was part of his being. Romans 1: 21 says simply that they knew God. Thus they understood His wisdom, that is as far as created man could, and needed so to do. Man reflects all the Being of God. Hence he is to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and mind is not divorced from heart any more than true knowledge is divorced from wisdom, or wisdom from knowledge. 'To know' in the O.T. is to have true intercourse with God.

Man, like every part of creation was 'good', and with the whole creation 'very good'. That is, he functioned harmoniously within creation. Creation was of course itself harmonious. Insofar as man feared God and walked with Him insofar he would know the wisdom of God. For man this was spelled out in the mandate given (Gen. 1:28ff). Man was informed of his place and function within creation. He knew all he needed to know. He had to go about doing it. In this sense he lacked no knowledge. He would need wisdom to act according to that knowledge, but nothing indicates that he lacked the necessary wisdom. The command implies both promise from God and ability for man.

(ii) The Loss and Gaining of Wisdom

The fall of man, or the principle of temptation and rejection is given in a number of passages. These are Genesis 3:1-10, Romans 1:19-32 and Job 15:17-35. Job 15:25 says, '...he has stretched forth his hand against God, and bids defiance to the Almighty'. This is virtually the principle of Genesis 3:1ff, for Genesis 2:9 says 'every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food'.

Every tree, then, had that quality. The tree forbidden to man was 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. It was not 'the tree of good and evil'. Man was not to have 'the knowledge of good and evil' in the way that rebellion would bring it to him. This would not be true wisdom. However, the serpent tempts the woman and she sees that the tree is 'Good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.'

This must mean that the woman sought wisdom she did not have, and that that wisdom related to knowing good and evil apart from God. The serpent said, 'You will be as God.' Already they were like God, but they were that as contingent upon God. Now there would be a rejection of contingency, the gaining of wisdom apart from (creaturely) dependence upon God. In modern terms 'autonomy brings true wisdom'. If Job 15:17-35 refers to this incident (and it does in principle) then so does Romans 1:19-32. Here again man knew God. However, he refused to honour God or be thankful for God Himself and what He had done (in creation). Paul says, 'They became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.' He surely does not mean that their intellectual capacity altered, but rather that their way of thinking now had a crookedness, a bias which it had not had in the innocence of creation. God refused to perpetuate this endlessly. He said, 'Man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil'. For this reason He prevented man from eating of the tree of life. Man was now imprisoned within his 'wisdom'.

Paul says in Romans 1:22, 'Claiming to be wise they became fools'. This is a most significant statement for it means that at the core rebellious man is foolish. No matter how seemingly high his wisdom, it is in fact foolishness. Paul then adds, 'and (they) exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or animals or reptiles'. In other words foolishness - the opposite of wisdom - is a matter relating to morality and religion. The true foolishness is that attitude and mind-set which issues in broken relationships with God, man and self, and which brings untold misery. Breaking with the true wisdom of God, man can only have and execute foolishness.

Going back to the picture of man in his innocent creaturely dependency upon God, we see a person who is whole, and for his stage of experience a probationer, yet possessing all the wisdom he needs at that point of being. To covet 'a tree to make one wise' means (a) The belief that God has withheld something which man needs and which is indispensable, and (b) That wisdom can be known apart from God. The truth is that God is the only wise God, the only source of true wisdom, and to deny and oppose this is to land one in hopeless foolishness. Without doubt man has a keen mind, and a brilliant intellect. However, his bias is what makes his thinking to be foolishness.

We must also recognise that if God manifests and executes His wisdom in creation (and by it), then to deny God is to deny the essential nature of creation, and so of man. This, too, is foolishness.

(iii) Man's Loss in the Denial of True Wisdom

The prophetic body of truth within the Scriptures makes it clear that God has planned man's good end, and the fulfilment of creation in restoration and (its) glorification (Romans 8:18-25). God's plan for man's glorification also shows that God did not expect His plan to be fulfilled through Adam. The fall of man is clearly incorporated in His plan, and His wisdom was always centred in Christ. The prophets have always made this intention known, in some form or another, and even the proclamation of God by creation (Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1f, Acts 17:24-28) means that man had knowledge of the deep wisdom of God in His salvific purposes. They knew the God of glory intended all glory to His creation.

Man's denial, then, has to be maintained (and sustained) in the face of the facts, creational and prophetic.

(iv) Satanic Wisdom

Whilst doubtless Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 refer, ultimately, to Satan and portray him as corrupted by self-love and inordinate ambition, yet no chronology is given. If the reference in Ezekiel 28:13 is chronologically to the time of creation, then Satan as an angel of God fell at that time. His 'wisdom' was to be like the Most High God' and to control the angelic principalities and powers (Isaiah 14:12f). The New Testament enlarges on his 'system' which is doubtless also represented by the Babylonish pattern shown in the Book of the Revelation.

Paul shows in Acts 17:24-28 (cf. Deut. 32:8-9, Daniel 10 and 11, Genesis 28: 12 and John 1:51) that the world order, chronologically, ethnically and geographically has been set purposefully that men seek God and find Him. Satanic wisdom is to destroy this pattern. Satan in conversation with Jesus (the Temptation) avers that all the kingdoms of the world are under his authority, and he does what he pleases. The Scriptures in fact speak time and again of Satan deceiving the nations, and in fact of deceiving the world (cf. Revelation 12:9, 13:14, 18:23, etc.). Likewise the Scriptures speak much of the deceit of sin (Hebrews 3:13), of riches (Matt. 13:22), of fleshly lusts (Ephes. 4:22). This Satanic wisdom seeks to ape the true wisdom (II Thess. 2:10, II Cor. 11:12-15). This imitating is a tacit recognition of the reality of true wisdom. Somewhere behind this false wisdom true wisdom beats in upon evil men and angels as is seen in Romans 1:32 where men know judgement will come upon evil, and in Revelation 12:12 where Satan knows his doom is sealed. Doom is across the whole system of evil and its foolishness. Yet as Christ pointed out, Satan was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He cannot know the truth, i.e. he cannot know true wisdom.

(v) Human, Worldly Wisdom

This is simply man's illusion that he can succeed without God. We will later discuss more particularly Paul's discourse in I Cor. ch. 1. In this passage the wisdom of man is equated with 'the wisdom of this world', and the terms aeon (age, system) and *kosmos* (world, created world, world of men) are used interchangeably. Such wisdom is the reversal of God's wisdom as seen in Romans 1:20-32. This is why it is innately foolishness. It cannot succeed since it goes against the essential nature of things.

(a) Man's Wisdom in the O.T.

This will naturally be of two kinds:- (a) The wisdom of those who are godly, and (b) The wisdom of those who oppose God. We will deal with '(b)' first because this is where we always find unregenerate man. Job 15:17ff needs to be read to see the utter misery and loneliness that the man experiences who defies God. This is very much like the disjunction and dislocation of the human psyche as experienced by the rebellious man of Romans 1. It fits with Adam's fear of God when he rebelled, and what is known as angst among human creatures, the empty dread and guilty fear which results from loss of fellowship with the Creator. Men have to worship the creation rather than the Creator, hence their religious foolishness. In passages such as Job 11:6-9, Isaiah 40:14, 28, Psalm 92:6, 139:12 and

Proverbs 8:22 we see something of the difference between the wisdom of God and the ignorance or foolishness of man.

It would be an impossible task to cover the wisdom of the ungodly. The positive teaching passages in Proverbs concerning godly wisdom are an indictment on those who do not follow this way. They are also a strong warning. At core they are saying, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' and this means that the foolish are those who have no fear of God. Thus the man of Psalm 14:1 is not so much an atheist as one who says, 'God will not act' (cf. Eccles. 8:11). Man's foolishness is seen in his desire for the tree 'to make one wise', and the resultant homicide of Abel, the corruption and the violence across the face of the earth, the attempt to build Babel, and indeed the refusal to obey the original mandate of Gen. 1:28f. For man God's wisdom was for him to live simply, and so, wisely, upon the face of the earth, and to be true creatures of creation.

This rejection of wisdom by man brings man into conflict with God. Proverbs 21:29-30 says, 'A wicked man puts on a bold face, but an upright man considers his ways. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the Lord.' In Isaiah 19:11-15, 29:14, and 31:1-3 the wisdom of Egypt is foolishness. It cannot prevail. Nor can the 'the wisdom of their wise men' (of Israel) prevail. It must perish. All this is because God's wisdom is eternal, unchangeable, and so cannot be gainsaid. His wisdom is the wholeness and perfection of His knowledge which nothing, by nature of the case, can possibly escape. Everything is exposed to God. For man to defy God is persistence in foolishness. God alone knows what is good and evil, and so He alone can judge 'righteous judgement'.

Under '(a)' we see the true wisdom of the true man. Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 15: 33, Psalm 111:10, Job 28:28 we see again that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. Such fear is not slavish, but strong and wholesome. It fears to have arrogance, and to pit itself against God. It is a holy awe, a dread and love of God (cf. Psalm 130:1-4). The wise man is simply one who obeys God. He recognises his innate lack of wisdom and so he applies his heart to wisdom. Psalm 90:12 says,

'Teach us so to number our days: that we may apply our hearts to wisdom'.

The getting of wisdom is a great thing. Solomon knew his need for wisdom in order to rule well (I Kings 3:12). The idea of applying one's heart to know wisdom is quite strong. Proverbs 2:2, 22:17, 23:12, Eccles. 7:25, 8:9, 16 speak of deliberate application of the heart.

The wise man is also the simple man, Eccles. 9:13-16 tells the story of 'a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered (the besieged) city'. The man was forgotten because he was poor, and his wisdom was not recognised. In Proverbs 10: 19, 11:13 and 17:27 the wise man is one who can control his tongue and not be moved by the praise of men. Throughout the Book of Proverbs the wise man is simply one who lives an upright life. Such wisdom will save man from immoral disaster. The man who is not wise in his own eyes and does not lean to his own understanding, and who receives with meekness the discipline of the Lord - he is the wise man. He sees that God has created in wisdom and he accepts the right order of things. This involves respect for man created by God, a refusal to covet or steal his goods, to use deceit in business, and so on. The writer of Ecclesiastes sees applying one's heart to wisdom as the acceptance of the order of things, especially the judgement and retribution of God. The wise man rejects all things as vanity, except as they are ordained of God. To remember God in one's youth is to follow the true order of (moral) creation.

(b) Man's Wisdom in the N.T.

In the O.T. the wisdom of the elders is constantly needed. Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt but it meant nothing, virtually, without the guidance of God (Exodus 33:15). In Jeremiah 18:18 the normal pattern of the nation is envisaged, i.e. the law from the priest, counsel from the wise, the word from the prophet. As Moses needed the wisdom of the elders, so in Proverbs the 'multitude of counsellors' represent the best expression of wisdom, and so safety (11:14), joy (12:20), success (15:22), and victory (24:6). When then we come to the N.T. we find that wisdom is to be found at the hands of the elders (the Sanhedrin) who rule the nation under the Romans. The lawyers, the scribes and the Pharisees and Sadducees of the sects all purport to give wisdom.

Nevertheless we find the same picture as in the O.T. The godly worshippers of God know a wisdom which is hidden from others. In Isaiah 5:20-23 there are those who are 'wise in their own eyes' and these are evil and immoral. In the N.T. Jesus can speak of those who have darkness within, which they actually call light (Matt. 6:22-23). Hence he is constantly warning against the so-called wise men. He quotes a powerful proverb, 'Wisdom is justified by her children', meaning that the kind of fruits produced indicate the kind of wisdom obtaining - whether true or false. Thus in Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus castigates the cities of Galilee in which he has done mighty works. They have lacked wisdom in that they did not respond to him. Nevertheless he thanks his Father 'that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them unto babes'. 'The wise and understanding' are in fact not wise but foolish and the day of judgement will reveal this. These very ones are those who have not understood the wisdom of God. In Luke 11:49 (as we have seen) The Wisdom of God has sent the prophets. The prophetic truth is God's wisdom, yet these contemporaries of Jesus - as also their fathers - have missed this wisdom.

Comparison of Worldly and Godly Wisdom

A most important section on wisdom is that in the first two chapters of I Corinthians. The principle runs something like this: 'Christ is made known unto us as God's wisdom (1:30)' amongst other things. The world has its wisdom (2:6). This wisdom has plausible words (1:17, 2:4), but no true power (2:5). It is a wisdom of those perishing (1:18). It's wisdom cannot bring knowledge of God (1:21). For the ungodly Jew¹ demands signs (1:22), which is equivalent to the Greek demanding 'wisdom' (1:22) because the Gospel is 'unwisdom' to him. The so-called wisdom of man is not viable before the so-called foolishness of God, for the latter overcomes the former. Had the world in its so-called wisdom understood the true wisdom of God it would never have crucified the Lord of glory (2:7-8).

What then constitutes the difference between 'the wisdom of this age (aeon)', 'the wisdom of this world (kosmos)', 'eloquent wisdom', the 'wisdom of men' and the 'wisdom of God'? The answer lies in man's rebellion, and his twisting of truth and reality, and therefore his inability to comprehend the grace of God in Christ. The world, and man captured in that world cannot see that God's true

¹ Jesus, in fact, constantly calls the Jews who oppose him 'the world', especially in John's Gospel. They do not understand him and will kill him (7:1ff). Also they are of their father the Devil (John 8:44-46), but they will be convicted (15:25-26, 16:7-11) and will know God has sent him (17:23). That is, the Jews have worldly wisdom, in spite of their covenantal history and traditions (cf. Matt. 21:28-32 and 23:27-28).

wisdom is a cross, and the crucified Christ. The wisdom of the world actually prevents it from knowing God! God's wisdom is a saving wisdom (1:21). God seems to be weak (1:25) in going through the process of the Cross, but this is God's wisdom. The worldly-wise count religious ritual or intellectual brilliance, or even high social standing as true wisdom. God's wisdom is such that the weak, the nonentities, the foolish, the low and the despised are used by Him to confuse and confound as well as to surpass the clever, brilliant and high-caste citizens of the world.

Put in a slightly different way true wisdom is of God, and it is incomprehensible to ego-centred sinful man, no matter how well he is endowed intellectually or socially. God's wisdom planned creation and man's glorification before even the world began. That wisdom decreed Christ as the means of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and this is the true wisdom for man (1:30). It is the very wisdom of God. This, then, leads us to the great truth that Christ is the wisdom of God.

Christ the Wisdom of God

We have noted in Proverbs 8 wisdom is almost an hypostasis, that is a personality, and as such a person of the Godhead. A comparison of Proverbs 8:22ff and Revelation 3:14 ('the beginning of creation') would make this one, Wisdom, as the very Word (Logos) himself, as seen in John 1:1-3 (cf. Col. 1:15-17). This Word became flesh (John 1:14), and in that sense Wisdom became incarnate. Yet it is not wholly in this sense that Christ is Wisdom incarnate. In one sense in I Cor. chs. 1 and 2 and in Colossians Christ is the wisdom of God in that wisdom is incarnate in him. Hence such statements as '...Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3) which links with 'For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell' (Col. 1:19), and 'For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily'. These statements seem to say that the wisdom of God is incarnate in Christ.

There is, however, a deeper thought than this, even if this is included. The thought is that the person and action of Christ are themselves the outworking and effecting of God's wisdom. When I Cor. 1:30 says, 'He (God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption', it means that Christ has effected these things by his incarnation and ministry. Some translations see that wisdom as 'righteousness, sanctification and redemption'. We saw in the O.T. that wisdom is God's creation. Having true wisdom is to know the Creator and so the nature of creation, and man's part in it. To put it another way true wisdom is knowing things as they are, and knowing how to live in them, and live in them with knowledge and discernment. In the N.T. wisdom is knowing God's plan (I Cor. 2:6ff, Ephes. 1:8ff) to be that of (a) Redemption, (b) True filiation, and (c) Ultimate glorification. This knowledge of the plan must be followed by consequent right action in one's life.

In Romans Paul sets out the true work of God in justification, sanctification and glorification. He then discusses the purposes of God for the Gentiles and for Israel and concludes in 11:33-36 with a great ascription. He says, 'O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable are his ways!' By this he means, 'God has planned all things well. Everything He does is right and true, even though we do not see it that way!' In chapters 1-8 he discusses the theme of redemption, including justification and something of sanctification. In chs. 9-11 the future of the nations, and in 12-16 the practical outworking of God's righteousness. In I Cor. 2:6-14 he discusses the wisdom of glorification, a theme also outlined in Romans 8:17ff. In Ephesians 1:3-14 he speaks of God's plan for redemption, filiation and glorification. He says in 1:9 (cf. 1:17) that we need wisdom to understand this wisdom. This wisdom is

the 'spirit of wisdom'. In fact in I Cor. 2:10-14 the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who teaches, i.e. 'We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit'.

Christ, then, is God's wisdom, in that God effects salvation, reconciliation, and the ultimate renewal of all things by His Son incarnate. In Christ are 'hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. Paul prays for the Colossians that they may have 'all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ...' He surely means that the plan of God is effected in Christ, thus displaying the riches of wisdom and knowledge. In Ephesians 3:1-11 Paul speaks of 'the plan of the mystery'. The mystery is an open secret to the wise, but a concealed one to the unwise. Paul says the mystery of the plan is the unity of the Jew and Gentile in the one body. He says this plan has been realised in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). This he calls 'the manifold (variegated, multicoloured, profusely diverse) wisdom of God'. He must mean that there are many facets and aspects which defy total knowledge of it, but that it has been totally effected.

Summed up, we may say, simply, 'To know the wisdom of God is to know Christ. To know this wisdom is to live consonant with it. Such true living is wisdom in action

5. The Getting and Using of Wisdom

(i) Introduction

We have already seen that wisdom, generally speaking, is not the abundance of knowledge, or brilliance of intellectual ability, but the discernment and understanding of things as they really are, i.e. creationally (O.T.) and salvifically (N.T.). To know the facts and creation and its functions, salvation and its operations may well be the basis of wisdom, but wisdom is the accrued and practical discernment of these matters with their consequent modes of living. Paul shows that 'the old man', and 'the world', and indeed 'apostles of (false) light' are all elements which beat into the consciousness of man, seeking to recover him from godly wisdom to the wisdom of this world. The getting (and maintaining) of true wisdom is therefore a constant battle. Paul, realising the Cross to be the wisdom of God says, 'I resolved to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified', and so implies a battle to remain with this attitude and understanding.

(ii) Getting and Using Wisdom in the O.T.

Both in the O.T. and the N.T. wisdom is a gift of God. Since man has rejected his natural creational wisdom he needs to be given wisdom. To live in conformity with the wisdom of God requires the grace of wisdom. He would always have needed wisdom from God in order to grow and mature, but he has lost, in the fall, that foundational wisdom which was his key to true knowledge and understanding. Hence in history men have had to apply to God for wisdom. Man has to cease from his own (supposed) wisdom (Proverbs 23:4). Of course, as with all the gifts of God, one has first to desire the gift (such as did Moses and Solomon), and then to have an intention to use it. One must also use the gift for God's glory and purpose and not his own.

In relation to the gift of wisdom is the Spirit. In Isaiah 11:2 Messiah will have the gift of the Spirit who is himself, 'The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord'. When we see that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of (true) wisdom, and that knowledge and counsel relate to wisdom, then we see that a man can be enlightened along that line which God desires. For example, Joshua was 'full of the Spirit of wisdom', imparted by the laying on of hands by Moses (Deut. 34:9, cf. Numbers 27:18).

Moses of course had been given the same Spirit and had seen it imparted to his elders. Likewise wisdom is equated with skill or ability, and this is seen in the fashioning of the high priest's garments (Exodus 28:1ff) and the tabernacle together with its furniture (Exodus 31:1ff, 35:30ff). These artificers are filled with the Spirit of wisdom and skill. This is not only to be able to form their work, but to understand why it should be as it is. Solomon receives the gift of wisdom, as we have seen, and it is this which is admired by the queen of Sheba (I Kings 10:1ff), so that 'the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.'

In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes the getting of wisdom is most important. The wisdom which Solomon has he wishes to impart to the simple, to the youth, and to men who, already being wise, wish to gather further wisdom. This precious wisdom is to be heard with a willing spirit and to be stored up, as precious, for the day of need. At the same time it is a practical way of life. One applies one's heart to wisdom. It is not merely information received, or even knowledge gained. It is the discernment which needs to accompany knowledge, and the root of it all is the fear of the Lord. In Ecclesiastes, again, the writer seeks out wisdom. He sees through the folly of life, its emptiness and vanity, but he is sure that God has ordered all things well. Only man misuses them and meets just retribution for so doing.

In the book of Job there is a constant wrangling. If Proverbs commends the combined wisdom of a group of counsellors, then the book of Job shows the futility of argument without true wisdom. Job has to be shown the dimensions of creation in a way not hitherto seen. Then the fear of the Lord is renewed within him, and he is not 'wise in his own conceits' as are his counsellors.

In the Psalms the psalmist sees that God in His wisdom has made all things, i.e. they conform to the pattern of true wisdom (Psalm 104:24). He says, 'the mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom (37:30)', showing that true wisdom is moral. Hence in Psalm 51 David cries for renewal of his heart. He says, 'Behold, thou requirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.'

In the book of Daniel the young Jews are selected because they are men of skill and wisdom. Indeed Daniel proves to be a wise man. In 1:17 it is said, 'God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom'. This is why Daniel says, '....He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things....' He praises God that '...Thou hast given me wisdom and strength, and hast now made known to me what we asked of thee...' (2:20-23). Later Belshazzar exclaims of Daniel, 'I have heard of you that the spirit of the Holy God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.'

In every case the disposition of the one receiving and using wisdom has to be that of living consistently with what one knows. Indeed one has to live by the truth the law has imparted. Psalm 119 is a beautiful study on the condition of the heart that enquires into the law, delights in it, and seeks to live in accordance with it.

As we have said, wisdom, in the ultimate, is moral. This is underlined by the opposites to wisdom. Foolishness is not having wisdom. In Proverbs the term 'simple' means one who is ignorant of truth and lives in ignorance. To believe God is to obey Him and learn to walk in wisdom.

(iii) The Getting of Wisdom in the N.T.

Again wisdom is a gift. James says this quite plainly. 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him' (1:5). This wisdom comes from above, for God is the Father of lights and His giving and His gifts are perfect (3:15, cf. 1:17). It was recognised that Jesus had received wisdom as a gift - 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him?' (Mark 6:2). Peter speaks of 'the wisdom given to him (Paul)', whilst Paul prays for his converts that they 'may be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Christ)' (II Pet. 3:15, Ephes. 1:17). Jesus himself promises the gift of wisdom in rebutting the enemies of the Gospel, 'For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your enemies will be able to withstand or contradict' (Luke 21:15), and indeed this is exactly what Stephen had for it was said of him, they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.'

This leads us on to our next point, that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. We saw this in Isaiah 11:2 in regard to Messiah, as also in regard to Moses, Joshua, Bezalel, and Daniel (amongst others). In the N.T. the Holy Spirit is God's gift to man who believes. Thus he is 'The Spirit of wisdom and revelation'. At the same time man who has this Spirit develops the 'spirit of wisdom and revelation' by habituation. He wants such wisdom. He lives in such wisdom. He is habituated in it by the Spirit and his own response to the Spirit.

We have seen that the people of God have the wisdom of God in that they are the beneficiaries of Christ's life and work, which is itself the wisdom of God. Hence they have wisdom, along with righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Further, they know the truth of that wisdom in God. This relates, as we have seen, to redemption, sanctification, filiation and glorification. These, however, are not merely doctrinal themes but ways of life, of practical living. This had to be the case with the O.T. saints and is the way of those following them.

(iv) The Using of Wisdom in the O.T. and the N.T.

(a) In the Old Testament.

In the O.T. men and women of wisdom walked according to the law of God. They saw the wisdom of it. They also obeyed God in His plan for them and their people. One gains wisdom by listening and learning. Old men, reasonably speaking, must have gained wisdom with the passage of the years, especially if they were those who had the fear of the Lord in their heart. So in Job 12:12, 15:10, 32:7, cf. Ezek. 7:26. However, the giving of wisdom is also a ministry in life such as by the writer of Proverbs, and the Preacher of Ecclesiastes.

In Proverbs it is giving heed to wisdom which prevents a man doing that which is evil, and which promotes practical piety. Proverbs 8:36 says, 'those who hate me (i.e. wisdom) love death'. He who finds wisdom finds life (8:35), because to listen to wisdom is to gain wisdom for the future (19:20) because he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

Wisdom is experienced in a filial situation. In Deut. 32:6 the foolish and senseless are those who do not recognise God as Father. Psalm 111:10 says, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they who practice it.' This accords with Job 37:24, 'Therefore men fear him: he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.'

The practice of wisdom as set out in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is that of morality and piety. These elements do not need to be spelt out but they parallel the true use of law. Such wisdom deals with elements such as seeking and attaining right conduct, and the refusal to be caught in bribery, strong drink, bad company, sexual immorality, unlawful gain, unadvised speech, and so on. We have seen that 'the mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice' (Psalm 37:30). Psalm 19:7 says, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.' Deut. 16: 19 says a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and forbids such. The wise man must remain wise, and moral. Psalm 119:98 says, 'Thy commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.'

We conclude then that there is no getting of wisdom apart from a right disposition, and no impartation of it apart from right use of it.

(b) In the New Testament.

The new man of the N.T. is the one born of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. He is also the Spirit of revelation. He reveals the whole world of God, the very Kingdom of God itself (John 15:26, 16:7-15, I Cor. 2:12, John 3:3ff).

To live in wisdom is to know the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It is to see the wisdom of God as Christ, in redemption, sanctification and glorification. The context is filiation. Hebrews 12:3ff speaks of the Lord chastising His true sons. The Father's wisdom is to bring them into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13). At the same time this wisdom is the wisdom of the Cross, and the person of Christ. Hence to live in wisdom is to live in Christ.

In the N.T. to live in Christ is to be a new creation, so that the old has passed away and the new has come (II Cor. 5:17). To live in Christ is to know and share in and use the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are in Christ (Col. 2:2-3). In this context the wise man has all 'the riches of assured understanding and knowledge of God's mystery, Christ'. In practice this means knowing the will of God. In Ephesians 5:15-17 Paul says, 'Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.' To know the will and do it is practical wisdom. Often wisdom can be seen by its opposite - foolishness. In the parable the foolish servant thinks his master delays his coming and begins to beat his fellow-servant. The wise man looks for his appearing!

The principle 'Wisdom is justified by her children' which some think refers to Christ himself accords with Matt. 5:16 where good works done glorify the Father. The deeds we do of wisdom justify wisdom. Likewise in James wisdom shows the patience we have, especially under heavy trials (1:5, 3:17). The wise man is typified by his works. 'By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.' The opposite to wisdom is to have bitterness, jealousy and selfish ambition, resulting in vile practice and every disorder. What is the quality of this wisdom? '... is from above, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity' (James 3:13-18).

The passage quoted above from Ephesians 5 relates to those who are outside the Kingdom. One walks as light before them. One knows the will of the Lord and fulfils it. The 'foolish' in the N.T. are those outside Christ, who walk after the manner of the Gentiles or who, being Jewish, demand a sign. Yet one is concerned for them. Into this world Christ sent his disciples to proclaim the Gospel. These are the people who 'professing themselves to be wise, became foolish'. Hence Paul, knowing the Gospel as the wisdom of God, is under obligation to preach it. He was transformed by it, and he knows how man needs it. Hence he says, 'I am under obligation, both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish'. Hence he proclaims. To walk in wisdom is to know the whole truth and so to proclaim it. Part of that proclamation is the manner of living of the proclaimer. This is clear from I Thess. 1:6ff. In Colossians 4:5 Paul says, 'Conduct yourselves wisely towards the outsiders, making the most of the time One lives in a godly manner, and one affects the ungodly, the unwise.

Linked with this life of wisdom are the special gifts of God, given to His church. In I Cor. 12:8 Paul says, 'To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge through the same Spirit.' Whatever these gifts are they are bringing necessary wisdom and knowledge to the church, either for increasing wisdom, or giving guidance to right action. Summed up, then, the using of wisdom is to walk in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31), to do His will (Ephes. 5:17, cf. Romans 12:1-2), to walk in light (Ephes. 5:1ff) and to proclaim God's wisdom who is Christ. When one needs special wisdom it will be given, and often God will volunteer an utterance of wisdom and knowledge where it is needed.

6. Conclusion On Wisdom

To this point we have considered the specialised Biblical teaching on wisdom. We have not, however, considered wisdom generally. It is this general view of it which is most helpful and most heartening.

Man in innocency yet had to learn, and to learn wisdom. If wisdom is knowing things as they essentially are by creation and appointment, and having the discernment and knowledge to live within them, especially placing God first in His creation, then wisdom has a wide range. Eccles. 3:11 says God has made everything appropriate in its own time and has put the world into man's heart so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning. Knowledge of itself may become a point of pride (I Cor. 8:1), and Paul says that if I have all knowledge and not love I am nothing (I Cor. 13:2).

The enlargement of knowledge may well provide a basis for increasing wisdom, but not without the fear of the Lord. With this one is meek and teachable. Man needs to be taught. Information must be imparted, but the impartation of wisdom from one to another is a difficult task. Only the one who has ears to hear will hear. Much of man's bickering comes about because the debaters each thinks he has the true wisdom, when none may possess it. When all do then there is agreement.

The many references to teaching in the Old and New Testaments means that man lacks wisdom and must have this supplied. Elders need to be persons of wisdom. They also need to be 'apt to teach'. The gaining of wisdom is through wise teachers. In the O.T. these were prophets and priests. In the N.T. the Holy Spirit leads into all the truth, yet does this through those who possess the true apostolic doctrine.

To sum up: man, of himself, is without wisdom. He needs 'the only wise God', and so the 'wisdom of God' as against the 'wisdom of man' and the 'wisdom of the

world'. God has been wholly wise in creation, providence and salvation. Christ is the epitome, expression and effectuation of that wisdom. Hence one looks to Christ to see that wisdom and one lives in him to share the outworking of that wisdom in good moral life, piety, ethical righteousness and Gospel proclamation. In this way, not excepting the path of suffering, man grows in wisdom. Ultimately the Wisdom of God, which inspired and directed the prophets will glorify the sons of God (I Cor. 2:6, cf. Romans 8:30).

All of this stimulates us to gratitude, praise, obedience and wonder. We cry with Paul,

'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and how inscrutable His ways!'²

And we add,

'To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ!'

² Note:- No matter how wise man becomes some things are hidden from him. They may be hidden for a time, and may be appointed, in knowing, for a special occasion. All wisdom (i.e. wise knowing) is a gift from God so that man depends upon God for this. In Rev. 13:18, concerning the mark of the beast, the writer says, 'This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.' Later (17:9) in regard to the beast, its origins and its life-span, the writer records, 'This calls for a mind with wisdom...' He then describes certain elements which relate to understanding. Doubtless God's mind is inscrutable. By looking at Him we cannot know His ways. He must disclose them. All we need to know, and which is necessary for practical wisdom, He has divulged. There are, however, limits to man's knowledge. With what he has he may well fill out good wisdom if he has the mind and heart for that.