

Dear Friends,

In Exodus, when Moses started selecting people to build the tabernacle and its furnishings, he looked for men who were wise.

*And thou shalt speak unto all that are **wise hearted**, whom I have filled with the **spirit of wisdom**, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.* (Exodus 28:3; emphasis added)

Over time, this and other similar passages in the tabernacle construction process in Exodus lead me to the best working definition of "Wisdom," true Biblical wisdom, that I can offer. Biblical wisdom is "Skill, godly skill, in the art of living life." Biblical wisdom is never proud or boastful. She never calls attention to herself or promotes herself and her ways. She graciously leads and helps others grow stronger in their faith and godly walk.

Solomon was David's son. As much as we love David--how could we not--the man was not the best fatherly example to his sons. Solomon found himself as a young man in a truly handicapped situation. He had wealth beyond imagination, power, position. He had it all. But he had to learn life the hard way, in the trenches of experience until that day when God gave him a choice, and Solomon chose wisdom and God's way over all the vain ways he had learned by experience. As a wise father, Solomon hopes to pass what he has learned to his son in Proverbs, so that his son can grow to spiritual and personal maturity by the wise instruction of Proverbs, and not by blind experience.

In our study passage, Solomon warns his son. Wisdom doesn't spring up in a person overnight. It takes time and focused effort. You don't eat a gallon of honey in one sitting. You eat it in small portions over time. By eating it in this way, it is good for you. Likewise, the growth of knowledge into true godly wisdom does not occur overnight. You can't memorize enough Bible verses to automatically become wise. We've likely seen the sincere believer who can quote verses to you right and left, but he has little or no true insight into how to interpret, much less apply those verses to his heart and life. Instead of becoming wise, these folks more often simply become intolerable legalists. They beat up on you, but they also beat up on themselves. They major in "Miserable."

We live in a most unusual and trying season for serious Bible believers. How do we discover true Biblical wisdom to deal wisely with the new and different challenges we face with the social fallout from COVID-19? Some folks shout that Christians should defy and ignore the cautions and/or regulations against church gatherings and just meet as usual. They fail to consider the clear teachings of Scripture in Romans 13, that believers are to be subject to, not to defy, civil government. I live daily with the loneliness of not seeing my brothers and sisters in church weekly and fellowshiping with them in person, but I do not at all see anything that has happened as a calculated or concerted effort against Christians. I see a sad and non-productive mix of politics and medical knowledge that has not managed the problem "Wisely." But I have not read of any governmental regulation that singled out Christians for persecution. The regulations of which I am aware in our region have been publicized for all religions, as well as for any other public gatherings. Is the government also persecuting professional sports? The Rose Parade (Cancelled for the first time since World War II)? Biblical wisdom does not run blindly into paranoid claims of conspiracies and persecution. It weighs reality and follows Scripture.

Consider just one pastor's reflections--I claim no other expertise. I did not become an overnight medical expert. I have been blessed to have personal conversations with doctors from Loma Linda University Medical Center. I have heard from doctors from various other centers of medical excellence and reputation. Yes, you'll occasionally read or hear of a "Doctor" who promotes his opinion, despite his training. However, the counsel I have heard from these centers of respected medical expertise (No political agenda or interest whatever) has been encouragingly similar. Use wise common sense. If you

have symptoms or have knowingly been exposed to the virus, quarantine yourself; avoid being around other people. You can be free of any symptom and still pass this virus to others, especially to the most vulnerable. When you must go into a public place, wear a mask. To the extent possible, practice social distancing; stay six feet away from other people. And wash your hands often. If I had listened to all the confusion on the news channels during the last six months, I'd be hopelessly confused. My habit has been to listen only to people from the medical community who have no political investment or involvement, preferably the doctors who know me and my health history. And I plan to continue listening to them for my choices and practices for the duration.

How does "Sister Wisdom" guide us in such challenging times as these? I believe she reminds us of the basic intelligence God gave us--to use it in our choices and actions. I believe she also urges us to exercise kind grace toward others who may not agree with us. Remember the character of Bible wisdom.

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17)*

So another believer, someone you've known and respected in the faith over time, has a different thought about how to deal with the virus than you. How do you deal with them? How do you treat them? From your heart, day in and day out, you memorize James 3:17, and you work to faithfully and consistently practice these traits toward your brothers and sisters. Never forget. Eventually this season will end, and we shall return to something we vaguely remember as "Normal." Do not say or do anything to them that you shall then regret or that shall any way impair your gracious fellowship with them when "Normal" returns. How do you respond to them with 1) a "Pure" heart, 2) peaceably, 3) gently, 4) entreatably, 5) mercifully, 6) in a manner that promotes spiritual good fruit, 7) impartially, and 8) sincerely?

Folks, if we remember faithfully and consistently to treat each other according to Biblical wisdom, as directed in this one verse alone, we shall survive this ordeal with a healthy faith and with our godly friends still on friendly terms with us. That is our most important task. Lord help us to keep it prominent in our minds--and in our words and actions toward each other.

Love in Jesus,

Joe Holder

### **Wisdom Has its Own Sweet Reward**

*My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; And the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: When thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, And thy expectation shall not be cut off. (Proverbs 24:13-14 KJV 1900)*

Solomon nicely captured the idea; as food to the body, so is information to the soul. Feed your body nothing but junk food, and your body will become weak and unhealthy. Feed your soul bad ideas, error and foolish information, and, likewise, your soul shall become weak and unhealthy. Your faith shall become stagnant and unfruitful, and you will slowly shift from godly self-examination to ungodly criticism of others.

Solomon wrote the Proverbs to his young son (Proverbs first chapter), obviously hoping his son would learn from his writings instead of only from bitter experiences, as he had learned. Honey is a rich food. Eaten in small quantities at a time it is healthy, the implication of the lesson. However, if you ate a large helping of honey, it could make you sick, and it could be unhealthy. The novice believer who is just beginning to take Scripture and his/her faith seriously often tries to read, study, and absorb the whole Bible in an impossibly short time span. They are liable to the same kind of problem. Example.

When I first started reading my Bible seriously, I started reading the New Testament through. I imposed no timeline. Whenever a passage caught my interest, I'd pause and study that passage to my satisfaction before reading beyond it. I lingered with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), with many sections of John, and with much of Romans. More than once I stumbled and struggled, but I found satisfactory answers and continued my study. When I arrived at Hebrews, my first impression was excited joy. There was so much spiritual wisdom; it always took me back to Jesus, and it linked many Old Testament passages to Jesus and His work for His people. By the time I reached Chapter 7, I found myself intensely struggling. I was becoming paralyzed by "Information overload." There was so much good information, rich spiritual truth about Jesus, that I simply couldn't absorb it. I literally took a pause from Hebrews and went to other Scriptures for a brief season before going back to Hebrews. To this day, Hebrews brings me rich joy, but it also commands my respect.

It is best to consume honey in measured quantities. Eat just as much as is healthy for your body, as much as your body can profitably process and use. Biblical truth, knowledge of God and His work and will in us and for us, is similar. Most pastors have met that zealous believer who has gone through the Bible in rapid-fire fashion, thinking foolishly that he has absorbed its most important truths, so he needs no one to teach him a better way. After all, he got his information regarding his way from Scripture. Yes, he got it from Scripture, but he failed to absorb it, to rightly divide or interpret it. His "Consumption" of Scriptural truth is comparable to your trying to eat a pint of honey in one sitting and think that your body can beneficially process that much honey. Impossible. Paul perfectly describes the problem with the novice. (1 Timothy 3:6) Instead of absorbing all he reads, the novice thinks he knows more than he really knows, leading him to become puffed up in himself with pride. Instead of the strong exemplary guide to all other believers that he prides himself to be, his pride makes him an easy prey of the devil. Actually, Solomon makes this point.

*It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Proverbs 25:27-28)*

Pride in our heart is equivalent to a gaping breach in the walls of a city under attack. The enemy can easily take advantage of the city's weakness, its vulnerable spot, and enter at will. Satan likewise can invade the novice's life and feed his pride all the more. For a believer, however sincere, to think he/she can gain a wise and in depth grasp of Scripture truth sufficiently to be classified as "Wisdom" alone and in a fairly brief time is as realistic as a young pre-med student thinking he can bypass years of medical school and residency training, that he can simply read the main books thoroughly and become a brain surgeon in less than a year. I hope you are not one of this man's patients!

*My son, eat thou ??honey, because it is good; And the ??honeycomb, which is sweet ?to thy taste.* Honey has a built-in incentive for us to eat it. It tastes really good. Remembering its taste urges us to go back for more. If we wisely study Scripture, it is similar. That is Solomon's point to his son and to us. If we rightly approach our study of Scripture, it will also urge us to go back for more—because it is as tasty to our soul-appetite as honey to our natural appetite. And it is also "Good" for us.

*So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul.* To arrive at this stage in spiritual maturity is quite an accomplishment. "knowledge of wisdom" means that you have reached the point in your study and knowledge of Scripture that you can discern the difference between "Knowledge of wisdom" from "Knowledge of folly," or "Knowledge of error." Your spiritual mind has absorbed what you've studied so that you become a wise and discerning student of Scripture, as well as an equally wise and discerning believer who recognizes error and knows to avoid it. Jesus emphasized this wise habit. Not only did He teach us to take special heed or care of how we hear, hearing Scripture, His words, in believing faith, but that we also take special heed to "What" we hear.

*And he said unto them, Take heed **what** ye hear: with **what** measure ye mete, it shall be measured to*

*you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.* (Mark 4:24-25; emphasis added)

If we faithfully follow Jesus' teaching in our practice, once we discover that a person believes and promotes error, we shall first admonish that person to reconsider their error (Titus 3:10), twice if necessary. However, Paul's teaching in this verse follows Jesus' word precisely. Paul taught us to reject those who, twice admonished, stubbornly continue in their error. If you "reject" this person, as Paul taught, you shall not continue listening to them teaching or promoting their error. If we practice Jesus' teaching in the above lesson, we shall "...**take heed what**" we hear by simply not hearing error, once we become aware that a person is teaching it. All too often, naïve believers ignore their own realization that a person is teaching error and continue admonishing that person endlessly instead of following Paul's "...*first and second admonition.*" Knowledge of wisdom means that we come to recognize wisdom and to know the difference between wisdom and folly, between truth and error.

*When thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, And thy expectation shall not be cut off.* "When thou has found it..." implies that it is not automatic or, for that matter, even easy to find. Scripture teaches that this elusive thing called wisdom requires intense focus, as well as faithful consistency, to reveal herself to the seeker of wisdom. You can't memorize enough Scripture to become wise. She is a faithful and invaluable friend, but she shall remain elusive until she knows that you are serious, dedicated, and faithful to her, not using her for your own gain.

...*then there shall be a reward....* True Biblical wisdom is one of many virtues that "Has her own reward." She indeed rewards those who gain her authentic friendship. The language is surprisingly simple, but do not overlook or ignore its rich content. "**then**," those who discover wisdom and gain her "Friendship" receive a "Reward" that those who fall short of her requirements cannot realize or receive. Her "Reward" is conditioned on our faithful and right devotion to her teachings and insights over much time, much like the brain surgeon. You become a board certified brain surgeon only after years of education, training, hands-on supervised experience, and testing. I've been disappointed on occasion during the current COVID-19 "Culture." A few people whom I know well enough to know they never attended medical school, much less became board certified in a medical specialty, heard one man, doctor or not, speak his opinions, and they suddenly claim to know more than the medical community in the whole country. Really? I would ask the folks who listen to these people claim knowledge far above their qualifications, "If you contract a deadly illness not related to this virus, will you go to this person and trust them to treat your medical condition?" Of course they wouldn't. So why do they trust this person's self-claim of knowing more about the virus than the whole medical community? Before I believe a person's claims about something, I want to know their qualifications. Did they read three textbooks on brain surgery and "Hang out their shingle," claiming to be a brain surgeon? Self-proclaimed expertise fails the test. Sister Wisdom is likewise discerning. She only gives her rewards to those who prove over time to have learned her virtues and judgments—and have learned to kindly practice them. Self-proclaimed wise people never know her true rewards.

*And thy expectation shall not be cut off.* Our world is full of people who know how to make empty promises sound credible and appealing. What happens if you believe one of these charlatans of truth? You'll eventually be disappointed. Your expectation will at first linger, and your hope will hang on. Surely he told me the truth. He made you an empty promise that he either had no intention of fulfilling, or he sincerely made you an empty promise that he simply could not fulfill. Either way your "... expectation is cut off."

Ah, but dear Wisdom's reward, once given to the believer who has earned it in the trenches of hard work, hard study, and faithful Biblical integrity, shall not later fail her friend or be cut off.

When faced with an especially difficult decision of utmost importance, how do you choose the people

to whom you go for counsel? Why go to one person, but not remotely think about going to another? You have some sense that one has earned his/her friendly relationship with Sister Wisdom, and the other has not. You trust one to speak with wisdom and with integrity. And, if you chose wisely, your "Wise" friend will gladly share his "Reward" with you with no pride and no sense of superiority over you. He will speak softly as your friend, but with words that help you find your answer, and feel content with it. Thank you, Lord, for the truly wise people You have put in our lives.

Elder Joe Holder