

HEAVENLY WISDOM

Objective

To define wisdom, its components, how it can be attained and how it differs from earthly wisdom.

References

Holy Scripture

Scriptural verse

‘Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.’ (James 3:13)

Lesson Outline

When asked by his disciples what the greatest of virtues was, St. Anthony replied that it was wisdom.

What is wisdom?

Wisdom has two components, knowledge of truth and correct action.

1. Knowledge of truth – this is the knowledge of God and the precepts that He has set to govern our lives. It is knowledge of what pleases and displeases Him and is also knowledge of how He operates. It is knowing that God is Almighty and in control of all things but at the same time He respects human will, the laws of science, medicine etc. Knowledge of truth is acquired through study of Scripture as well as experiencing God in one’s life.
2. Correct action – this is the application of the knowledge that has been acquired. To act, I must have the knowledge but also the ability to take positive action that is in line with my knowledge of the truth.

According to the Bible, a fool is someone who either lacks knowledge or lacks the ability to take the correct action.

Proverbs 1:22 – a fool hates knowledge; he doesn’t seek to study and learn the truth.

Proverbs 14:17 – a fool’s actions are not correct, they are rash and impulsive.

How do I acquire the two components of wisdom?

The first component in some respects is the easier of the two; I diligently study the word of God. The second is the harder one because it involves a great degree of self-control.

Self-control is something that we are not born with or have in our genetic code. Watch how a child plays and interacts with others and you will see that most of the time it’s done on impulse. Our parents discipline and train us to curb those impulses and we, through trial and error, learn that we can’t give in to every thought, desire or emotion that we experience.

Yet self-control is the one virtue that we spend all of our lives trying to master and that’s why we fast and have certain ascetic practices. St Augustine once said: "To many, total abstinence is easier than perfect moderation". Self control is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Areas in our lives where we can lack control:

Our eating habits – eating all the time even when we aren’t hungry.

Our emotions:

- Anger – When we are angry we say and do things that we regret, and that are hurtful to others (see Proverbs 16:32). Man’s wrath does not produce God’s righteousness and we know that God’s righteousness is full of wisdom.

- Our feelings towards other people – emotions cloud the mind and our rationality. Emotions that are not controlled or sanctified will lead our decision making process and we will end up with poor decisions.
- Anxiety – during periods of extreme, uncontrolled anxiety we behave in ways to alleviate the anxiety and those ways may not be the wisest. For example, when we panic, we do things that may actually be contrary to logic and common sense.
- Talking too much – when we talk a lot and never stop to think before we speak then we will ultimately say things that we will regret later on.

Our church helps us develop self-control by giving us practices, such as fasting. A person who can exercise self-control in food can then learn to exercise self-control in all the other aspects of his life.

When we engage in something too much we actually lose enjoyment of it, everything in excess loses its pleasure.

Why is Wisdom important?

1. Virtue without discernment is vice. For example, too much patience may lead to permissiveness, too little talking maybe a problem when I am called to give an honest testimony.
2. In order to live with others I need to learn how to deal with different types of people. I cannot deal with all people in the same way. Some are sensitive, some are easily angered, some are insecure, etc. The Bible states that the one who wins souls is wise.
3. I need wisdom in making sound decisions.
4. I need wisdom to know when the right time is to ask someone something.

St. James tells us that there are two types of wisdom, a heavenly one (discussed above) and an earthly one (see James 3:13-18).

- Earthly wisdom can be thought of as wisdom but it isn't. This is when we tell half-truths, and purposely deceive others, our bosses, the government, etc. This is where we include the fine print that no one can read;
- Earthly wisdom is when we use deception in order to get something that we believe is good for us from families, from the church, etc. The end doesn't justify the means;
- Earthly wisdom includes not admitting our mistakes but instead blaming others and finding ways to get out of thing;
- Earthly wisdom is when we practice virtue with pride and in order to show off in front of others;
- Earthly wisdom is based on what feels right or good and not based on the knowledge of the truth;
- Earthly wisdom is based on doing what's right and best for me even if it is at the expense of others.

Conclusion

How do we achieve heavenly wisdom?

1. Ask God for it, like Solomon did in the manner James instructs us to (see James 1:5)
2. Learn from the Lord Jesus Christ's wisdom; see how He spoke to the Pharisees, to the women, to the disciples. Study how different people in the Bible took decisions and what were those outcomes.
3. Ask advice from the elderly and those who have spiritual discernment.
4. Learn and exert self-control

Activities/Discussion Points

1. Compare and contrast earthly wisdom with heavenly wisdom.
2. What are common behaviors that we consider wise but do not measure up to the Bible standard?