



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## He Is Our Wisdom

### Background Study

David Anguish

#### *Introduction*

1. To better understand the idea of wisdom in James, remember that wisdom as often defined today gives too much credence to accumulated knowledge and human discovery.
2. Biblically, wisdom values experience and discovery and is concerned to be practical in the most complete sense of that term, but differs from popular understandings with regard to:
  - a. Its origin: wisdom ultimately belongs to God alone (Dan. 2:20-23; Prov. 8:22-31).
  - b. Its availability: if we will have it, it must be revealed by God's grace (Prov. 2:6).
  - c. Its direction: the wise man obeys God's law (Deut. 4:6; Psa. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10).
3. As the final revelation and author of the New Covenant, wisdom is embodied in Jesus. We will see how the NT emphasizes him as wisdom and what that means for living wise lives.

#### *Body*

#### I. New Testament Overview.<sup>1</sup>

- A. The Gospels assume the OT understanding of wisdom, now focused in Jesus.
  1. We see the Jewish connection between the law and wisdom in Jesus' life in Luke 2:40, 52, where his advanced insight into the law is highlighted, and in Matthew 7:21-27 where the "wise man" is the one who "hears ... and does" Jesus' words.
  2. Given the close connection between the law (word) and wisdom/Spirit in Jewish thought, it follows that Jesus and wisdom would be closely connected.
    - a) He is "the Word" (John 1:1-5) who came to "fulfill the law" (Matt. 5:17-19), being fully anointed with God's Spirit (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa. 11:2; 61:1-2).
    - b) So, he is "the one who possesses wisdom or is the mouth of wisdom itself (Lk. 7:35 par. Mt. 11:19; Lk. 11:31 par. Mt. 12:42; Lk. 11:49 par. Mt. 23:34; Lk. 10:21, 22 par. Mt. 11:25-30)."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Besides the Gospels and Paul, only James, 2 Peter 3:15 and Revelation use σοφία (*sophia*). See Rev. 7:12, where it is an attribute of God, and 5:12 where it is a trait of the exalted Lamb. In 13:18 and 17:9, it is the insight that lets Christians interpret events of their time (see J. Goetzmann, "σοφία," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3:1032-1033).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 53.

- c) He identified with Solomon (Matt. 12:42 = Luke 11:31) and pronounced judgment against the self-righteous who ignored the weightier matters of the law (Luke 11:49-54 = Matt. 23:34-39; cf. 23:23).<sup>3</sup>
- B. Paul also speaks of wisdom (cf. Rom. 11:33; Eph. 1:17-19; 3:10; Col. 1:9-10; 3:16; 4:5), nowhere more than in 1 Cor. 1-4.

## II. Wisdom in 1 Corinthians.

- A. Paul mentions wisdom often in chapters 1-3.
  - 1. Sixteen of the seventeen uses of σοφία in the letter are found between 1:10 and 3:20.
  - 2. Ten of the eleven uses of “wise” (σοφός, *sophos*) are in the same section.
- B. As he confronts their schisms, he contrasts human/worldly wisdom (accumulated knowledge of how the world works) with the wisdom from God (cf. Jas. 3:13-18).
  - 1. It is obvious that he had human wisdom in mind in 1:17-2:5 where he makes the point that the message he preached was the cross (1:17, 19, 20-22; 2:1, 4, 5).
    - a) A related idea in the writing, especially in this section, is their pride.
      - (1) He uses *καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*) five times to call them to account for boasting in human ways (1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:7).
      - (2) They were not to “be puffed up (φυσιοῶ, *physioō*) in favor of one against another” (4:6, see 18-19), a problem that also exhibited itself in other ways (5:2; 8:1; 13:4).
    - b) His point reaches its climax in 3:18-20 where he is emphatic that “the wisdom of this world is folly with God” (v. 19).<sup>4</sup>
  - 2. It is important to understand that Paul was concerned to show the limits of human wisdom and was *not* saying that we do not need any wisdom.
    - a) He believed that, through revelation by the Spirit, we have access to wisdom from God, wisdom we desperately need (1:21, 24; 2:6, 7, 13; 3:19).
    - b) His view of wisdom was the same as what his Jewish ancestors had understood, namely that divine wisdom:
      - (1) Ultimately belongs to God alone (2:6-7).
      - (2) Is discernible by a revelation given by grace (2:9-13).
      - (3) Results in obedience that accepts “the things of the Spirit of God” and thus is demonstrated in a life that is “spiritual” (2:14-16).
- C. The embodiment of wisdom — to be imitated (4:6; 11:1) — is Christ.
  - 1. It is his mind that spiritual people make their own (2:16).
  - 2. He is the one who demonstrates God’s superior wisdom (1:24).
  - 3. As wisdom, he brings “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1:30).

## III. Surrendering to His Wisdom.

- A. The Jewish emphasis on obedience as evidence of a wise life with Paul’s emphasis on “the folly of what we preach” (1:21) shows how starkly different God’s wisdom is.
  - 1. We get at the idea by thinking about different approaches to reality in our world.

<sup>3</sup> Wisdom and justice are connected in the OT (Deut. 16:19; 1 Kings 3:28; Psalms 37:30; Proverbs 1:3; Jeremiah 40:4), and, of course, they are emphasized and connected in James (1:5, 9-11, 26-27; 2:1-17; 3:13-18; 5:1-11).

<sup>4</sup> “Folly” (μωρία, *mōria*) is another important word in Paul’s argument; cf. 1:18, 21, 23; 2:14; 3:19.

- a) Think of the debate about modernism vs. postmodernism.
- b) Both modernism, with its view that truth can be known, and postmodernism, with its view that people learn truth in different ways, have commendable points.
- c) But, they are not the only options, as an essay I was required to read in one of my graduate courses showed; the NT world had a *pre-modern* view.
- 2. Thinking that through helps us see a key point in Paul's exposition of wisdom.
  - a) Consider his statement about "the rulers of this age" in 2:6-8: why didn't they get it? The ways of "this age" got in the way.
  - b) They weren't alone: the Corinthians had the same problem (1:26-29).
- B. As "our wisdom" Jesus embodied the folly of the cross, a way of life, not just an event.
  - 1. Is "the way of the cross" — the wisdom of God — any easier to accept now?
  - 2. Is it any less encumbered by distractions associated with the way of the world?
    - a) Paul told the Corinthians education would not work (1:26).
    - b) He told them political power would not work (1:26)
    - c) He told them being in the right circles would not work. (1:26).

### Conclusion

- 1. Someone once told me about a trip to Nashville and a historical tour of the Lipscomb University campus, property that was originally David Lipscomb's farm. Reportedly, during the Civil War battle to take Nashville, a Union officer was sent to ascertain Lipscomb's position. Lipscomb, who counseled neutrality throughout the war, impressed the man who reported, "I don't know what side Lipscomb takes in the war, but I know he believes in Jesus."
- 2. That singular stance and what it meant to Lipscomb was evident in an important idea he later became famous for advocating. Largely because of what he observed during the war, especially on the parts of some brethren, Lipscomb re-thought the whole issue of civic involvement and ceased things he had practiced prior to 1861. He argued against *all* participation in civil affairs.
- 3. Though more widely accepted then than now, sincere brethren debated his conclusions. That's still a worthwhile discussion, but it should be undertaken in the knowledge that, for Lipscomb, everything was to be decided in light of John 18:36. In response to Pilate's incredulity that he made no effort to resist the evil that was being done at his expense (cf. Matt. 5:38ff.), Jesus declared that his kingdom was not from this world and would not operate as worldly kingdoms do.
- 4. His way was folly to Pilate, the Jewish rulers, and his disciples. But, it was the way Paul would tell the Corinthians embodied the wisdom of God. It was radical, and when the disciples accepted it, they became his agents to change the world. If all we do were as rigorously subjected to that standard, I wonder how different we would be.
- 5. Jesus is still our wisdom. Will we accept his way completely enough to consistently order our way after his, throwing off the distracting worldly ways that hinder us?

August 14, 2011; updated Wednesday, September 28, 2016  
[www.davidanguish.com](http://www.davidanguish.com)