

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

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Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

33. Wisdom

Composed by Paul Mallison

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Contents

A Quick Word.....	iv
Suggestions for Study Groups.....	v
I. Being Wise	
a) Prologue: The Precedence of Godly Wisdom	2
b) Wisdom through God.....	5
c) Wisdom through Others.....	7
d) Wise Speech (I): Instructions.....	10
e) Wise Speech (II): Insights.....	12
f) Wise Personal Practices.....	15
II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge	
a) Foolishness.....	20
b) Foolish and Ungodly Practices	23
c) Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results	26
d) Spiritual Ignorance (II): Knowledge Lacked.....	29
e) Epilogue: Blessings of Wisdom	32
Topics in This Series	35
Overview of <i>The Bible Unpacked</i>	37

A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. Being Wise

Wisdom is one of the attributes most highly valued in the Bible. Thankfully the Bible says much about how we can gain wisdom. The Bible also contains very astute advice on other topics associated with wisdom, notably speaking – a key medium that we use in relating to others.

a) Prologue: The Precedence of Godly Wisdom

Note that the term “godly wisdom” is used in this section to denote the wisdom which the Bible advocates, wisdom which is based on the Bible’s teachings.

Godly wisdom is superior to anything else

PROV 4:7A *Wisdom is supreme ...*

PROV 8:10–11 [WISDOM:] *Grab hold of my instruction in lieu of money and knowledge instead of the finest gold, ¹¹because wisdom is better than precious gems and nothing you desire can compare to it.* 1sv

The speaker here is wisdom personified.

Worldly wisdom is flawed and inferior to the wisdom of God . . .

1COR 3:18–19 No one should fool himself. *If anyone among you thinks that he is wise by this world’s standards, he should become a fool, in order to be really wise. ¹⁹For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God’s sight. As the scripture says, “God traps the wise in their cleverness”;* ... GNT

Here Paul portrays worldly wisdom as inferior to the wisdom of God – to both the wisdom of God himself (v. 19) and to godly wisdom (v. 18), which ultimately comes from God. Note that in saying that one should become a “fool” (v. 18), Paul means that one needs to forgo aspiring to the flawed wisdom of this world and recognize the shortcomings of one’s understanding – in effect see oneself as a “fool” – in order to be open to true, godly wisdom.

. . . Worldly wisdom is ultimately futile, even detrimental

1COR 3:20B *“The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”*

ROM 1:21–23 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF WICKED PEOPLE:] For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but *they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.*

The claim to be wise (v. 22) may have had some substance, but clearly this was a wisdom apart from God (vv. 21, 23) – worldly wisdom. As such it produced futile thinking and foolishness (v. 21b), manifested in foolish actions that would prove very detrimental (v. 23; cf. vv. 24–32).

So, get godly wisdom and be wise . . .

PROV 4:5, 7 [A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding; do not forget and do not turn aside from the words I speak. . . . ⁷Wisdom is supreme – so acquire wisdom, and whatever you acquire, acquire understanding!*

EPH 5:15 Therefore be very careful how you *live – not as unwise but as wise, . . .*

. . . Seek out wisdom and knowledge

PROV 2:3–5 . . . yes, *if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.* ESV

PROV 15:14 *The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly.*

Why is wisdom so valuable?

How can one distinguish between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom?
What is the difference?

Do you ever think about gaining more wisdom? How badly do you want it?

b) Wisdom through God

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom

PROV 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* ESV

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom as it leads us to base our thinking and life on God and his teachings or commands – the source of true wisdom for life. For fear of God moves us to obey God's commands and do what is right, thus manifesting wisdom (as indicated in the following two subsections).

Obeying God's commands brings wisdom . . .

DEUT 4:5–6 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Look! I have taught you statutes and ordinances just as the LORD my God told me to do, so that you might carry them out in the land you are about to enter and possess. ⁶*So be sure to do them, because this will testify of your wise understanding to the people who will learn of all these statutes and say, "Indeed, this great nation is a very wise people."*

PS 119:100 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I have greater wisdom than those who are old, because I obey your commands.* GNT

. . . Accordingly, wisdom involves doing what is right – and shunning evil

PROV 4:11 [A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *I will guide you in the way of wisdom and I will lead you in upright paths.*

PROV 14:16 *A wise person is cautious and turns from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and is overconfident.*

One should in fact ask God for wisdom, . . .

JAMES 1:5 *But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him.*

Ps 119:34, 66A [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Give me understanding so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart. ... ⁶⁶Teach me proper discernment and understanding!*

... for it is God who gives wisdom

DAN 2:20B–21 [DANIEL:] *May the name of God be blessed forever and ever; wisdom and power are his for evermore.* ²¹*It is God who alters the times and seasons, and he removes kings and promotes kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.* ISV

Explain in your own words the connection between fearing God and wisdom.

Why does obeying God's commands bring or show wisdom?

When was the last time you asked God for more wisdom? Do you need to make such a request an ongoing prayer point?

c) Wisdom through Others

Note that, largely at least, the verses in this section speak of wisdom being acquired through godly people. Such wisdom is ultimately from God.

Pay attention to instruction, . . .

PROV 23:12, 19 *Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge. . . .*¹⁹*Listen, my child, and be wise, and guide your heart on the right way.*

. . . for wise people heed and learn from instruction

PROV 13:1 *A wise son heeds his father's instruction . . .* NKJV

PROV 9:9 *Give instruction to a wise person, and he will become wiser still; teach a righteous person and he will add to his learning.*

Listen to advice

PROV 19:20 *Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise.* NCV™

Accept rebuke . . .

PROV 15:31 *Whoever listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.* ISV

. . . Additional insights on accepting rebuke

ECCL 7:5 *It is better to listen to a wise person's rebuke than to listen to the praise of fools.* ISV

PROV 27:6 *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.*

Emotional wounds resulting from a friend's rebuke can be trusted to have been inflicted with one's benefit in view.

Heed discipline and correction

PROV 15:5, 32 *A fool rejects his father's discipline, but whoever heeds reproof shows good sense. ...³²The one who refuses correction despises himself, but whoever hears reproof acquires understanding.*

Here “reproof” appears to refer to a rebuke or reprimand, a form of discipline (v. 5) or correction (v. 32).

Further insights on gaining wisdom

PROV 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

PROV 14:29 *Patient people have great understanding, but people with quick tempers show their foolishness.* NCV™

PROV 27:17 *As iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens his friend.*

As one piece of iron can be used to sharpen another, so through discussion and debate with another, one can sharpen one's mind.

Think of a time that you received rebuke or correction. How did you respond? How open are you to accepting and learning from correction?

Explain the connection between wisdom and either: humility (cf. Prov 11:2); or patience (cf. Prov 14:29)?

Do you actively try to gain more wisdom? What things should you do - or do differently - to do so?

d) Wise Speech (I): Instructions

Be quick to listen and slow to speak

JAMES 1:19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

Be careful when speaking

PROV 13:3 *Those who are careful about what they say protect their lives, but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.* NCV™

Use few words

PROV 10:19 *When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise.*

ECCL 6:11 *The more words there are, the more pointless they become. What advantage do mortals gain from this?* GW

Speak gently

PROV 15:1 *A gentle answer quietens anger, but a harsh one stirs it up.*
GNT

2TIM 2:25 *The Lord's servant must gently teach those who disagree. Then maybe God will let them change their minds so they can accept the truth.* NCV™

Speak graciously

ECCL 10:12 *The words spoken by the wise are gracious, but the lips of a fool will devour him.* ISV

COL 4:6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.*

Do not sin in what you say

PS 17:3B [DAVID:] *I am determined I will say nothing sinful.*

Note: Instructions and insights on giving rebuke

LUKE 17:3 Watch yourselves! *If your brother sins, rebuke him.* If he repents, forgive him.

2TIM 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, ...* GNT

PROV 27:5 *Better is open rebuke than hidden love.*

Open rebuke is better than love that is shut off. The implication here may well be that one who truly loves another will openly rebuke them (cf. CEV) if the need arises.

Why is speaking gently so effective?

What is meant by speaking “graciously”? What does it involve?

What factors should we consider in: (a) deciding whether to rebuke someone; and (b) actually giving a rebuke?

e) Wise Speech (II): Insights

One's words are determined by one's "heart"

MATT 12:34–35 [JESUS, TO THE PHARISEES:] Offspring of vipers! *How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.* ³⁵*The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury.*

In v. 35, "treasury" refers to the thoughts and feelings that people have stored up in their hearts.

Consequently, the righteous speak wisely

PROV 10:31–32 *The words of the righteous overflow with wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out.* ³²*Righteous lips know what is prudent, but the words of the wicked are perverse.* ISV

In keeping with the assertion of the previous subsection (that one's words are determined by one's "heart") and in view of the teaching earlier in the chapter that wisdom comes through God, it follows that wise speech is produced by a godly or righteous heart. As such, the righteous speak wisely – as is indicated in this passage.

Wise speech is of great value

PROV 25:11 *Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken.*

The speech of the wise imparts wisdom and knowledge

Ps 49:3 [A WISE PERSON:] *My mouth shall speak wisdom, And the meditation of my heart shall give understanding.* NKJV

PROV 15:7 *The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but not so the heart of fools.*

Further ways wise speech benefits others

PROV 12:18 *Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but the words of the wise bring healing.*

PROV 13:14 *Instruction from the wise is like a life-giving fountain, to turn a person from deadly snares.*

Beware: The tongue has great power, capable of evil and destructive effects

JAMES 3:4–8 And look at ships! They are so big that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are steered wherever the pilot pleases by a tiny rudder. ⁵*In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast of great achievements. A huge forest can be set on fire by a little flame. ⁶The tongue is a fire, a world of evil. Placed among the parts of our bodies, the tongue contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be or have been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil filled with deadly poison.* 1SV

The tongue has great influence over the whole body, capable of devastating effects on one's life and on others. In saying that the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (v. 6), James appears to allude to its evil disposition having Satanic origins – which ultimately is true of all evil. Note that with the use of "tongue", James is speaking ultimately of the heart which manifests itself in the words of the tongue.

How does one's heart determines one's words (cf. Matthew 12:34-35)?

How can we better control our tongues?

In reflecting on this and the previous sections, what aspects of your speech do you most need to improve on? What can you do about them?

f) Wise Personal Practices

The following topics are prominent in what are known as the Bible's wisdom books, notably in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes – as well as occurring elsewhere in the Bible.

Be self-controlled . . .

TITUS 2:6 [PAUL, INSTRUCTING TITUS WHAT TO TEACH:] Tell the young men to *have self-control in everything*. CEV

. . . Self-control comes from God and wisdom

2TIM 1:7 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] For *God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control*.

GAL 5:22–23 But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control*. Against such things there is no law.

PROV 29:11 *Foolish people lose their tempers, but wise people control theirs*. NCV™

Do not act in haste

PROV 19:2 It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge, and *the one who acts hastily makes poor choices*.

Work hard . . .

2THES 3:7B–9 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] *We didn't waste our time loafing, ⁸and we didn't accept food from anyone without paying for it. We didn't want to be a burden to any of you, so night and day we worked as hard as we could. ⁹We had the right not to work, but we wanted to set an example for you*. CEV

PROV 31:13–19 *She [a wife of noble character] obtains wool and flax, and she is pleased to work with her hands. ¹⁴She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. ¹⁵She also gets up while it is still night, and provides food for her household and a portion to her female servants. ¹⁶She considers a field and buys it; from her own income she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷She begins her work vigorously, and*

she strengthens her arms. ¹⁸She knows that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out in the night. ¹⁹Her hands take hold of the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.

. . . and ensure adequate provisions

PROV 6:6–8 *Go to the ant, you sluggard; observe its ways and be wise! ⁷It has no commander, overseer, or ruler, ⁸yet it prepares its food in the summer; it gathers at the harvest what it will eat.*

The ant is a great example of producing adequate provisions.

Enjoy life and be happy

Eccl 8:15 [A WISE TEACHER:] *So I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.*

Eccl 3:12 [A WISE TEACHER:] *I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, . . .*

Think of a common situation in which you need to show more self-control. What could you do to enable yourself to be more self-controlled in such a situation?

What attitudes and/or other factors enable some people to generally remain calm in situations where others get agitated?

What is one piece of advice you would give to someone on how to enjoy life and be happy?

II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

Foolishness and spiritual ignorance are the antitheses of godly wisdom and knowledge. Moreover, foolishness and spiritual ignorance are very closely related to ungodliness; for ungodliness is the prime cause of them and further ungodliness results from them. Foolishness and spiritual ignorance with their consequences, stand in stark contrast to wisdom and her blessings.

a) Foolishness

Fools spurn and lack wisdom

PROV 1:7 Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but *fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

PROV 24:7 *Wisdom is unattainable for a fool; in court he does not open his mouth.*

Foolishness is characterized by failure to comprehend God and his ways . . .

Ps 14:1A *Fools say to themselves, “There is no God.”*

JER 5:4 [JEREMIAH:] I thought, “Surely it is only the ignorant poor who act this way. *They act like fools because they do not know what the LORD demands. They do not know what their God requires of them.*

. . . Foolishness is also characterized by failure to comprehend other spiritual truths

LUKE 24:25 Then Jesus said to them, “*How foolish you are! You’re so slow to believe everything the prophets said!* GW

JAMES 2:20 *You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing?* NCV™

Foolishness involves acting contrary to God

1SAM 13:13 Then Samuel said to Saul, “*You have acted foolishly. You haven’t obeyed the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you.* For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, . . . ISV

Ps 74:22 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Rise up, O God! Defend your honor! Remember how *fools insult you all day long!*

As such, foolishness encompasses doing wrong . . .

PROV 10:23 *A foolish person enjoys doing wrong, but a person with understanding enjoys doing what is wise.* NCV™

. . . and so foolishness encompasses sin

NUM 12:11 So Aaron said to Moses, “O my lord, please do not hold this sin against us, in which *we have acted foolishly and have sinned!*

Results of foolishness . . .

PROV 3:35 The wise inherit honor, but *he* [God] *holds fools up to public contempt.*

PROV 18:6 *The lips of a fool enter into strife, and his mouth invites a flogging.*

. . . Ultimately, foolishness results in ruin – even death

PROV 19:3 *People’s own foolishness ruins their lives, but in their minds they blame the LORD.* NCV™

ECCL 7:17 Do not excel at wickedness, *nor be a fool. Why die before your time?* ISV

Explain the connection between foolishness and ungodliness.

What results of foolishness (not necessarily your own) have you witnessed?

What can we do to avoid being foolish?

b) Foolish and Ungodly Practices

Being quick-tempered is foolish and ungodly

PROV 14:17 *A person who has a quick temper does foolish things, and a person with crafty schemes is hated.*

PROV 29:22 *A person with a quick temper stirs up arguments and commits a lot of sins.* CEV

Indulging in pleasure is foolish and pointless . . .

ECCL 2:1–2 [A WISE TEACHER:] *Come now, I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it is worthwhile.” But I found that it also is futile. ²I said of partying, “It is folly,” and of self-indulgent pleasure, “It accomplishes nothing!”*

In v. 1 the writer’s thought is addressed to himself. He has in view trying out pleasure or having fun (cf. CEV, NCV).

. . . and indulging in pleasure is ungodly

LUKE 8:14 [JESUS, EXPLAINING A PARABLE:] *The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like those who hear God’s teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life keep them from growing and producing good fruit.* NCV™

Pleasure can choke our responsiveness to God’s word (the “seed”) as pleasure can involve practices that either: are opposed to God’s word; or crowd out God’s word, leaving little or no room for it in our lives.

Drunkenness and gluttony are unwise, causing one trouble . . .

PROV 23:19–21 [A WISE TEACHER:] *Listen, my child, and be wise, and guide your heart on the right way. ²⁰Do not spend time among drunkards, among those who eat too much meat, ²¹because drunkards and gluttons become impoverished, and drowsiness clothes them with rags.*

... As such, drunkenness should be avoided, particularly as it leads to ungodliness

PROV 31:4–5 It is not for kings, O [King] Lemuel, *it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to crave strong drink, ⁵lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and remove from all the poor their legal rights.*

EPH 5:18 *Stop getting drunk with wine, which leads to wild living, but keep on being filled with the Spirit.* ISV

Further ungodly practices that are notably foolish

PROV 6:32 *He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.* ESV

PROV 10:18 The one who conceals hatred utters lies, and *the one who spreads slander is certainly a fool.*

PROV 28:26 *Those who trust in themselves are foolish, but those who live wisely will be kept safe.* NCV™

If a person has a quick temper, what measures could they take to keep it in check? For example, what personal attributes could one seek to develop to counter it?

Do you agree that indulging in pleasure is foolish and pointless? If so, why do you think it is?

When do you find it difficult to refrain from either drinking or eating when you know you have had enough? What measure/s could you take – either before or during such situations – to help you refrain?

c) Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results

Spiritual ignorance is caused basically by sin and ungodliness

JOHN 3:19B–20 [JESUS:] The light has come into the world, but *people loved the darkness more than the light because their actions were evil.*²⁰ *Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his actions may not be exposed.* ISV

Due to people's evil deeds, they spurn the spiritual light that is Jesus Christ and his truth. For this light exposes their deeds for what they really are – evil. Spurning Christ's light means spiritual ignorance.

Spiritual ignorance is caused partly by the ungodly being closed-minded

EPH 4:18 They [godless people] are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of *the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts.*

This hardness of heart indicates that such people have “shut their minds” (NLT) – being stubborn (cf. CEV, GNT) and refusing to listen (NCV).

Moreover, God judicially blinds the ungodly

ISA 6:9–10 [GOD, TO ISAIAH:] And he said, “Go and *tell these people, ‘No matter how closely you listen, you’ll never understand. No matter how closely you look, you’ll never see.’*¹⁰ *Make these people close-minded. Plug their ears. Shut their eyes.* Otherwise, they may see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their minds, and return and be healed.” GW

Isaiah was to pronounce God's judicial blinding and hardening of the people (vv. 9–10a), making certain the judgment God had ordained (cf. vv. 11–12). For such had been the people's rebellion, that God chose to ensure that the people would not seek to avoid the judgment (v. 10b).

Thus, the ungodly lack spiritual wisdom . . .

DEUT 32:20B, 28 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE UNFAITHFUL ISRAELITES:] I will reject them, I will see what will happen to them; for *they are a perverse generation, children who show no loyalty. . . .*²⁸*They are a nation devoid of wisdom, and there is no understanding among them.*

. . . and the ungodly are in spiritual “darkness”

PROV 4:19 *The way of the wicked is like gloomy darkness; they do not know what causes them to stumble.*

Spiritual ignorance results in further sin

1PET 1:14 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Like obedient children, do not comply with *the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance, . . .*

This speaks of sin or evil actions as being a product of ignorance. While sin is the prime cause of spiritual ignorance (as discussed earlier), spiritual ignorance in turn leads to further sin, exacerbating the ungodliness of such people.

Spiritual ignorance and lack of spiritual perception result in unbelief

JOHN 12:37–40 *Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them [Jews], they still refused to believe in him,³⁸ so that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled. He said, “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because again Isaiah said,⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them.”*

Verses 39–40 speak of God’s judicial blinding of many of the Jews and their subsequent lack of spiritual perception as causing their unbelief (vv. 37–38).

Spiritual ignorance and lack of spiritual understanding culminate in dire consequences

HOS 4:6A, 14B [GOD:] *My people will be destroyed, because they have no knowledge. . . .*¹⁴ *. . . A foolish people will be ruined.* NCV™

How does sin lead to spiritual ignorance?

How can we try to ensure that we are not being closed-minded, particularly in regard to spiritual issues?

What can we do in countering the unbelief of people who are closed-minded and lack spiritual perception?

d) Spiritual Ignorance (II): Knowledge Lacked

The assertions contained in the subheadings in this section are typically true of ungodly people. Having said this, not all ungodly people and unbelievers are totally ignorant of all the things mentioned here.

The ungodly do not know God or Jesus Christ

JOHN 8:19 Then they [the Pharisees] began asking him, “Who is your father?” *Jesus answered, “You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too.”*

The ungodly do not comprehend God’s word

JOHN 5:39–40 [JESUS, TO THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS:] *You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me,⁴⁰ but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.*

Although they diligently studied the Scriptures, the Jewish leaders – who had in fact become in many ways ungodly – did not comprehend that the Scriptures spoke about Jesus, the way to life.

Thus, the ungodly do not know how God wants them to live . . .

Ps 95:10 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE ISRAELITES:] For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “*They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.*” ESV

. . . and they do not know or understand many other spiritual truths

ROM 10:3 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE JEWS IN GENERAL:] *They have not known the way in which God puts people right with himself, and instead, they have tried to set up their own way; and so they did not submit themselves to God’s way of putting people right.* GNT

1COR 2:14 *A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are*

foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit. NCV™

The ungodly are ignorant of and deceived about their sin

Ps 36:1–2 An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God, ²for *he is too proud to recognize and give up his sin.*

PROV 30:20 *This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, “I have not done wrong.”*

The ungodly are misguided about their standing with God and Jesus Christ

MATT 7:21–23 [JESUS:] *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²²On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?’ ²³Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’*

The ungodly are skeptical of God knowing their deeds and of his judgment . . .

Ps 10:11, 13B *The wicked think, “God has forgotten us. He doesn’t see what is happening.” . . . ¹³... They say to themselves, “God won’t punish us.”* NCV™

. . . and so the ungodly are largely oblivious of God’s pending punishment – which they will bear

ZEPH 1:12 [GOD:] *At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’* GW

How can a person study the Scriptures yet fail to grasp key things that they say (cf. John 5:39-40)?

In what ways are ungodly people deceived about sin? What should believers bear in mind in regard to themselves being deceived about sin?

What lessons can we learn from Matthew 7:21–23 (in *The ungodly are misguided about their standing with God and Jesus Christ*)?

e) Epilogue: Blessings of Wisdom

Understanding . . .

DAN 12:10B None of the wicked will understand, though *the wise will understand*.

Understanding and discernment (the topic of the following subsection) are key components of wisdom. As such, having wisdom means that one possesses these characteristics, which are great blessings.

. . . and discernment

PROV 16:21 *The one who is wise in heart is called discerning, and kind speech increases persuasiveness.*

Knowledge

PROV 8:12 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED:] *I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.*

Righteousness and justice

PROV 2:9–10, 20 *Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity – every good way. ¹⁰For wisdom will enter your heart, and moral knowledge will be attractive to you. . . . ²⁰So you will walk in the way of good people, and will keep on the paths of the righteous.*

Protection . . .

PROV 4:6 *Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will guard you.*

. . . and life

PROV 8:35 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED:] *For the one who finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD.*

Strength

ECCLESIASTICUS 7:19 *Wisdom makes a person stronger than ten leaders in a city.* NCV™

Prosperity

PROVERBS 21:20 *Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.* ESV

Honor

PROVERBS 4:8–9 [A WISE TEACHER, SPEAKING OF WISDOM:] *Esteem her highly and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹She will place a fair garland on your head; she will bestow a beautiful crown on you.*

Note: Living without wisdom has harmful consequences

PROVERBS 1:24–27 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED, TO THOSE WHO DISREGARD HER:] *However, because I called but you refused to listen, because I stretched out my hand but no one paid attention, ²⁵because you neglected all my advice, and did not comply with my rebuke, ²⁶so I myself will laugh when disaster strikes you, I will mock when what you dread comes, ²⁷when what you dread comes like a whirlwind, and disaster strikes you like a devastating storm, when distressing trouble comes on you.*

What is the relationship between wisdom and knowledge?

How does wisdom lead to “life” (Prov 8:35)?

What is one of the blessings of wisdom that you particularly appreciate?
Why do you?

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

- I. Basics
- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

- I. Angels
- II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

- I. Basics
- II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

- I. The Messiah's Identity
- II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

- I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
- II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

- I. Salvation from Sin
- II. Salvation for the World

14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
- II. Key Elements of the New Order

15. 'The Last Things'

- I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
- II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

- I. Belonging to God
- II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

- I. Basics
- II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. Being Right with God

- I. Getting Right with God
- II. Staying Right with God

22. Having Faith in God

- I. Faith and Hope
- II. What Not to Do

23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

- I. Loving and Fearing God
- II. Obeying God

24. Connecting with God

- I. Being Close to God
- II. Praying to God

25. Exalting God

- I. Instructions
- II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. Being One Body

- I. General
- II. Caring for the Body

27. Worshiping God

- I. General
- II. Offerings

28. Serving God

- I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
- II. Doing God's Work

29. Significant Practices

- I. Symbolic Rites
- II. Other Significant Practices

30. Church Leadership

- I. General
- II. Teaching in the Church

Part G. Relating to People

31. Love

- I. Loving Qualities
- II. Antitheses of Love

32. Justice

- I. Justice in Action
- II. Being True

33. Wisdom

- I. Being Wise
- II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

34. Common Relationships

- I. Family Relationships
- II. Civil Relationships

35. Spreading the Gospel

- I. Instructions
- II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Warfare

37. Rejecting Sin

- I. Encountering Sin
- II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

38. Major Pitfalls

- I. Pride
- II. Riches and Sex

39. Hard Times


- I. General
- II. Praying in Hard Times


40. Persecution


- I. The Persecution of God's People
- II. What to Do in Persecution

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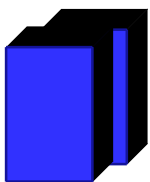
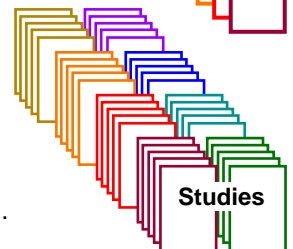
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Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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