

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

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.”* JOHN 8:19

The ungodly do not comprehend God’s word

[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, ⁴⁰but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.* JOHN 5:39–40

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.

The ungodly are ignorant of and deceived about their sin

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.* PSALMS 36:1–2

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

The ungodly are largely oblivious of God’s pending punishment – which they will bear

[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.’* ZEPHANIAH 1:12 ESV

33. Wisdom

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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.

The Precedence of Godly Wisdom

“Godly Wisdom” is used here to denote the wisdom which the Bible advocates, wisdom which is based on the Bible’s teachings.

Godly wisdom is superior to anything else

Wisdom is supreme – so acquire wisdom, and whatever you acquire, acquire understanding! PROVERBS 4:7

[WISDOM:] *Grab hold of my instruction in lieu of money and knowledge instead of the finest gold, ¹⁹because wisdom is better than precious gems and nothing you desire can compare to it.* PROVERBS 8:10–11 ISV

Worldly wisdom is flawed and inferior to the wisdom of God

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”; ...* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18–19 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

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

those who eat too much meat, ²¹because drunkards and gluttons become impoverished, and drowsiness clothes them with rags.

PROVERBS 23:19–21

Indulging in pleasure is foolish and pointless

[A WISE TEACHER:] *I said of partying, “It is folly,” and of self-indulgent pleasure, “It accomplishes nothing!”* ECCLESIASTES 2:2

Further notably foolish practices

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

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

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

Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results

Spiritual ignorance is caused basically by sin

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

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.* EPHESIANS 4:18

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

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.

Foolishness

Fools spurn and lack wisdom

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

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

Foolishness involves disobedience to God . . .

Then Samuel said to Saul, “*You have acted foolishly. You haven’t obeyed the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you.*” 1 SAMUEL 13:13A ISV

. . . As such, foolishness encompasses doing wrong

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

Notably Foolish Practices

Being quick-tempered is foolish

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

Drunkenness and gluttony are unwise, causing one trouble

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Listen, my child, and be wise, and guide your heart on the right way.* ²⁰*Do not spend time among drunkards, among*

Wisdom through God

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom

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

[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.”* DEUTERONOMY 4:5–6

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

. . . Wisdom involves doing what is right – and avoiding evil

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

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

One should in fact ask God for wisdom . . .

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. JAMES 1:5

. . . For it is God who gives wisdom

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. DANIEL 2:21B ISV

Wisdom through Others

Pay attention to instruction

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

Heed discipline and correction

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. PROVERBS 15:5, 32

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

Wise Speech

Be quick to listen and slow to speak

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

Use few words

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

Speak graciously

The words spoken by the wise are gracious ... ECCLESIASTES 10:12A ISV

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

Remember that our words are determined by our "heart"

The mouth speaks the things that are in the heart. ³⁵Good people have good things in their hearts, and so they say good things. But evil people have evil in their hearts, so they say evil things. MATTHEW 12:34B-35 NCV™

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

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

Do not act in haste

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

Work hard

[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. 2 THESSALONIANS 3:7B-8 CEV

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. PROVERBS 31:13-19

Enjoy life and be happy

[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. ECCLESIASTES 8:15

[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, ... ECCLESIASTES 3:12