

Following Christ: Wisdom – The Mind of Christ



Slice F6

Wisdom – The Mind of Christ

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1 Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 1:18-20 (NIV)

18 'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.'

2 Wisdom - The Mind of Jesus

1 Corinthians 2:4-7 (ESV):

4 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on **human wisdom (man's philosophies)**, but on **God's power. God's Wisdom** revealed by the Spirit. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but **not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing**. No, we declare **God's wisdom**, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.'

In our efforts to become more like Jesus, we need to focus on what it means to have a mind like Jesus. True Christianity owes nothing to human wisdom, the Word of God is sufficient for all things. In fact, man's wisdom taints and corrupts God's wisdom. God's wisdom is like a river that starts its journey in the mountains, crystal clear and pure. As the river makes its way past human settlements, man takes from the river and puts into the river. Eventually, the river becomes contaminated and polluted and no longer fit for consumption. Which stream would *you* want to drink from?



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2.1 Developing a Mind Like Christ's Involves: Knowing God's Word

The Hebrew word for knowledge '*da'at*', connotes an intimate relationship, not merely head knowledge, or information. The more one gets to know a person through his word and communication, the deeper one's relationship becomes. Jesus is the Living Word. The Torah Incarnate, therefore, the more we study His teachings and hide them in our hearts, the more we will come to know Him (and to be known by Him) and be empowered to do as He does.

An example of the importance of God's Word is seen in that the first song in God's worship hymnal, Psalm 1, is a wisdom psalm, more suited one would think for the book of Proverbs. The book of hymns of worship does not begin with words of worship like Psalm 145: 'I will exalt you, my God and King,' but with a blessing on those who are obedient to God's Word. The study of God's Word is worship!

2.2 The Mind of Christ is Foolishness to the World

The word 'philosophy' means love of wisdom. *Philo* means 'love' and *ology* means 'a field of study,' and has been around since the 6th century BC. What is important for Christians to understand is that man's wisdom is foolishness to God and that the wisdom of God is often totally contrary to the wisdom of man as Paul states clearly in:

1 Corinthians 2:12–14 (NIV)

12 What we have received is not the **spirit of the world**, but the **Spirit who is from God**, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. **13** This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. **14** The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Notice that Paul identifies wisdom that comes from the 'spirit of the world,' which is separate and apart from the Spirit of wisdom that is from God. Paul then goes on to explain that the natural man, who is influenced by the wisdom of the world, cannot accept the wisdom of God and will consider it to be foolish. Man's natural reason and understanding are contrary to the wisdom of God.

A classic example of the failures of man's wisdom would be the great German philosopher Nietzsche, who was the first philosopher to say 'God is dead.' He rejected the Christian idea of self-sacrifice and that everything in this world is less important than the Kingdom of God, saying that this belief was foolish and that it undermined the potential of man. He, therefore, rejected belief in an all-powerful God and taught that the only hope for man is a 'superman'; mankind needed to surpass his potential and become a superhuman

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race. Years later, Hitler read his works and formulated the idea that the Aryan people would be that superhuman race and would fulfil the potential of mankind. Nietzsche's influence on Hitler resulted in the Second World War and the extermination of six million Jews, who Hitler considered to be inferior people.

God is not impressed by the wisdom of this world, as Paul explains in:

1 Corinthians 1:18–20 (NIV)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." **20** Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

The crucifixion of Jesus is foolishness to the understanding of mankind; only when the Holy Spirit interprets it to our hearts are we able to understand the great wisdom of God. Through the cross, God makes the wisdom of the world to be foolishness. Paul underlines this point later in his letter to the Corinthians, saying:

1 Corinthians 3:18–20 (NIV)

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. **19** For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; **20** and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

Note that the process of recognising the wisdom of the cross requires that we humble ourselves and accept that our wisdom cannot match the wisdom of God; each person has to go through a process of self-humbling before we can accept God's truth. The cross is the doorway through which we must all pass before we can understand the wisdom of God.



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3 Humility and Servitude

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, encourages all believers to have the mind of Christ, for it is through humility and servitude that each person will attain the fullness that God has for them.

Philippians 2:1–11 (ESV)

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by **being of the same mind**, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in **humility** count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to **the interests of others**. **5** **Have this mind among yourselves**, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a **servant**, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he **humbled** himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



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In his letter to the Philippians, Paul calls on the church to be like Christ and to follow His example. So, to fully comply with this instruction, we also need to have the mind of Christ and to think like Him. This understanding is confirmed in the third verse of chapter two where Paul is exhorting the Philippians to be of the same mind and purpose as Christ. After establishing this foundation for his argument, Paul goes on to emphasise the humility of Christ. The mind of Yeshua is based on a foundation of service and humility – obeying God’s commandment of Love. The end result of obedience to selfless service is that God will, as He did with Jesus, exalt those humble servants when they stand before His throne at the *Bema* judgement seat (rewards for service).

The world places a focus on self, on becoming the best that you can be, finding your inner self, attaining success, and similar goals. There is nothing wrong with becoming a better person, but the world focuses on the self at the expense of others. This is why the doctrine of Prosperity Theology has become so popular, it plays to the base nature of man. The ‘faith’ the peddlers of the Prosperity Gospel preach is a mystical personal force from within that has the power to transform reality to the desires of the individual. It is a faith manufactured to meet the selfishness of mankind. There is none of the selfless behaviour that Yeshua requires, such as agape love, self-sacrifice, humility, purity, brokenness, and repentance. Those that follow Prosperity Theology do not want the ‘gold tried in the fire’ of God’s trial and testing; they just want the worldly gold.

4 Wilderness Experience

Mankind knows that to develop character a person must experience hard times. Any military combat unit will have a period of training during which the recruits mental, emotional, and physical endurance are tested. This is both to prepare the trainees for the rigours of confronting an enemy and to determine which recruits are not suited for combat duty. The apostle Paul uses the analogy of believers being in God’s army in his epistles. He knew that all those who lived in the Roman Empire would be familiar with the Roman army’s arduous training, and strict discipline, which made it the dominant force in the known world at that time:

- 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: ‘Are we not in a spiritual fight? Do we not face an adversary that wants to destroy us?’
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-4: ‘The truth is that, although we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not human but powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds’.
- Ephesians 6:10-13: ‘In conclusion, be strong—not in yourselves but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless strength. Put on God's complete armour so that you can successfully resist all the devil's craftiness. For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organizations and powers that are spiritual’.

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- 2 Timothy 2:1-4: 'You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus... Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him'.

All those who are called by God to serve Him will first be required to go through a wilderness experience, to be trained as a soldier of God. We see that before Yeshua commenced His ministry in Galilee, He was required to go through His wilderness experience where he was tested by Satan three times. Many believe that this was the only testing Yeshua experienced in His ministry, but they are wrong. A careful analysis of the Gospels will show that He was continually being tested, even up to His very last day. When Yeshua was in the Garden of Gethsemane, the evening before His crucifixion, He was less than two kilometers away from the safety of the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in Bethany. Yet His prayer was, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; **nevertheless**, not My will, but Yours, be done.' Then, when Yeshua was arrested, He calmed the combative Peter, saying that He could call on His Father to send twelve legions of angels (6 000 x 12 = 72 000 angels) to aid Him. Even on the cross, it was His love for us that kept Him there. No power of man could hold the Son of God on the cross; in all things, Yeshua deferred to His Father's will. The trials and testing experiences in a person's life force them to draw closer to God, seeking His hand of guidance and deliverance.

The narrative of 'the potter and clay' in Jeremiah 18, helps the believer come to a clear understanding of God's use of trial and testing. Jeremiah observed a potter working at his wheel but the pot he was working on was marred, so the potter squashed the pot down and started again. This time the potter was able to shape a pot that he was pleased with. God then spoke to Jeremiah saying, 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done' (Jeremiah 18:6). In His revelation to Jeremiah, God demonstrates that He is sovereign over all His creation (Psalm 135:6; 155:3; Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 46:9–11). God has a plan and purpose for each of us and He knows how we are to fit into His grand design, the restoration of mankind in relationship with Him.

All of mankind is created with free will but for many reasons related to our pride, our will is often antagonistic towards God's plan for us. God, therefore, has to commence the work of the potter, reshaping the clay to make us into vessels of honour that can best be used by Him. The mature believer can understand that our life's circumstances are being controlled by the hand of God and that there is a purpose behind all that happens to us. They can 'rejoice in (their) sufferings, because (they) know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint (them), because God has poured out His love into (their) hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given (them)...

Romans 5:3–5 (ESV)

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and

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hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

There are two narratives in scripture that, when compared, will give us clarity, and understanding of the need to develop the ability to praise God in times of suffering:

- The first example is recorded in Acts 12:1-19, when the apostle Peter is arrested by King Herod Agrippa and thrown in prison with four squads of soldiers guarding him. Peter knew that Herod had recently killed James, the brother of John. Because the Jews were pleased with the slaying of James, Peter was now well aware that he was next on Herod's hit list. He, therefore, resigned himself to his fate, and Luke records that he had no trouble falling asleep between two of his guards. Luke goes on to write that 'an angel of the Lord stood by (Peter) and struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, 'Arise quickly!' And the chains fell off his hands.' A few translations say that the angel 'tapped' Peter on the side but the more accurate translation is that the angel 'smote,' or 'struck' Peter. Now the angel most probably did not bend down to punch Peter in the side, but rather, gave him a good kick in the side as he was standing over him. This may seem to be an ungracious way to wake a man who the angel had been sent to rescue, but it shows the disgust that the angel has for Peter's attitude. God still had plans for Peter, there was much still work for him to do but he did not pray into his situation. He instead accepted the authority of Herod and did not look to the authority of God. The Holy Spirit moved to have the church pray fervently for Peter and it was because of these prayers that the angel was sent to rescue Peter.



Paul and Silas in prison

- We can compare Peter's attitude and actions with a similar incident that happened to Paul and Silas, recorded in Acts 16:16–24. While in Philippi, Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and put in prison for their preaching. Luke records

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their attitude to being thrown in prison as being very different to that of Peter. With their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas started singing hymns of praise to God. Then at midnight, an earthquake broke open the prison doors, setting all the prisoners free. The jailer, believing that he would be held accountable for the jailbreak, decided to commit suicide, rather than face the consequences. Paul stopped the man, convincing him that there was no need for such a rash action as no one had escaped. Paul and Silas then used the opportunity to witness to the jailer and he and his whole household were saved.

After having read the narrative of Paul and Silas, one can only wonder what God could have achieved in Peter's circumstances if he had he displayed the correct attitude to his suffering. The reaction of the angel to being sent to rescue Peter implies that Peter missed out on a mighty move of God. May all who read this section on wilderness experience learn the valuable lesson that we have a God who, when we show faith in Him in times of hardship, can move in power (Daniel 3:17).

5 Eternal Rewards

Paul explains the importance of service to the Lord by making it abundantly clear to the worldly Corinthians that their works for the Lord were going to be tested. One day they would find themselves standing before the '*Bema*' judgement seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 (ESV)

11 'For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done. If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.'



'Gold silver and precious stones', or...

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'Wood, hay or straw.'

Both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 speak of the 'judgement seat.' This is a translation of one Greek word, Bema. In the Gospels and Acts, Bema is used to refer to a raised platform where a Roman magistrate or ruler sat to make decisions and pass sentence. Paul, on the other hand, uses Bema in his epistle more in keeping with its original use among the Greeks, because of his many allusions to the Greek athletic contests.

The word 'Bema' was taken from the Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize, under the careful scrutiny of judges who would ensure that every rule of the contest was obeyed. The victor of a given event, who had participated according to the rules, was led by the judge to the platform called the Bema. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory.

Romans 5:3–5 (NIV)

3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4** perseverance, character; and character, hope. **5** And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (NIV)

24 'Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.'

At the Bema judgement seat, all believers will be required to give an account of themselves, to determine if their lives were dedicated to the service of God or self. The judgement seat of Christ is also to be seen as where God rewards our service to Him. It seems evident that the rewards labelled as 'gold, silver, precious stones,' by Paul, relate to an individual's status in the Kingdom. Just as there is a hierarchy of angels, so too, will there be a hierarchy in service to Jesus in the Kingdom. The repeated reference in

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scripture to crowns for faithful service reinforces this belief (2 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4, and Revelation 2:10). There is also the promise in scripture that God will exalt those who provided humble service to Him (Philippians 2:9).

The 'wood, hay, or straw, defines the worldly believers whose lives are contaminated by humanism and who are focused on self-gratification. When their works are tested by fire, they are left with ash! They do not lose salvation as they are saved by faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8), but they will enter the Kingdom at the lower echelons of the hierarchy. The rewards are ultimately eternal rewards, so the position attained in the Kingdom will be continued into the New Earth. James warns that our lives are very short, comparing them to the vapour of our breath on a cold morning; here one moment gone the next (James 4:14). Our time on this earth is brief, therefore we need to maximise our efforts to earn our eternal rewards. This requires that we develop an eternal mindset, the mind of Christ.

6 Practically

To develop the mind of Christ you need to:

- Humbly seek to serve the Lord wherever and whenever you can, which will see you attain the fullness that God has for you.
- When faced with a wilderness experience, learn to praise God in all circumstances.
- Spend time studying His teachings.
- Fulfil the commission to disciple others.
- 'Dress' in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

7 Proclamation

'I declare that as a disciple of Jesus, I can attain the mind of Christ by understanding the work of the cross. I am determined to follow the example of my Saviour and work to humbly serve in this world, so that I may be exalted before His throne.

8 Prayer

'Lord Jesus, thank you for Your great sacrifice on the cross, which not only opened the door to my salvation but also opened the way to attain the wisdom of God. I understand that your wisdom is foolishness to mankind, yet it is higher and greater than any wisdom mankind can attain. Thank you that you give wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding and that I may look to you to lead me on a path of maturity and wisdom. Show me the way you have planned for me so that I may fulfil my duty as your humble servant'.