

## **Sermon on Ephesians 5:15-20: The Wisdom of God**

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Report cards, degree frames that hang on walls, pins, medals, chords, black square hats and tassels... books that sit on office shelves or in a study... gray hair, wrinkled and callused hands. These are tangible examples of wisdom in our American culture today. A “woman” and “sister (Proverbs 8:1; 7:3), a “master worker” (Proverbs 8:30), and a life giver (Proverbs 8:35): these are ways wisdom is personified in the book of Proverbs.

There are two warring wisdoms that exist in the life of every Christian, the wisdom of the world verses the wisdom of God. We gain wisdom about the world through our studies in school and our own experience. We gain wisdom about God through the Bible, our United Methodist tradition, reason, and experience. Why is it that so often we choose to believe the wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God?

The wisdom of the world attributes wisdom to book smarts and as a means to an end. Wisdom is valued because of what it brings us...success, money, and power. The wisdom that God bestows to us is not easy to understand or embody and it is not a means to an end, but a gift of grace. God teaches us that we can live out the wisdom of God by centering our identity in Jesus Christ and not the things of this world.

In college I had a friend named Jen who lived out the wisdom of God by actively seeking God. I met Jen when her church helped me move into my dorm my freshman year of college. Jen was an R.A. in my building and after that day she came to visit me frequently. At first I was annoyed and even embarrassed by her visits. I mean who was this girl anyway and why did she think it was ok to come by my room at her leisure? Did it appear that I needed friends that badly? Then, I got to know Jen, and I started going to a small group Bible study with her. Jen was very

unique because unlike most of us, she did not seem to care what other people thought about her. The thing she cared about the most was following the will of God and seeking to know God more. Over my four years at Tech I learned a lot from Jen and studied under her as she became the leader of our Bible study.

This friendship was so fruitful for me because it taught me that I should be more concerned about what God thinks than about what other people think. It taught me that I should be less concerned about the way I look, and the clothes that I wear and more concerned about seeing others the way God sees them as “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139). Jen taught me that the wisdom of God was more important than the wisdom of the world and that trying to understand the wisdom of God would lead to eternal life instead of the feelings of failure and emptiness that come from trying to understand the wisdom of the world .

The designation of wise and unwise goes back to the wisdom literature found in the Old Testament such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.<sup>1</sup> It also echoes the notions of darkness and light found throughout the New Testament and earlier in this letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 5 instructs us not to “live as unwise but as wise.” Here we see the same war of worldly wisdom versus the wisdom of God. So what does it mean to live as someone who is wise? Does this mean that the Bible is instructing all of us to go back to school and get a first, second, or third college education? No! Our Scripture for today explains that those who are wise seek after God and those who are unwise do not seek after God. This passage is not about book smarts; it is about actively seeking God.

What are the ways in your life that you are actively seeking God? (Pause) The easiest way to answer this question is by looking at how you spend your time. Do you take time out of

your hectic life for spiritual growth and renewal? Or do you give in to worldly temptations like that brand new HD Flatscreen TV that stares at you longingly when you get home from school or work?

How is God calling you to actively respond through ministry opportunities at Warwick Memorial or in the surrounding community? Has God whispered to you that you would be great at teaching a children's Sunday School class or helping with the youth group? Or has God challenged you to be a part of a committee?

Not only do we actively seek God through our God given spiritual gifts, but most of the time, we actively seek God by participating in Christian ministries or spiritual disciplines that are hard for us or that make us feel uncomfortable.

You know the feeling...this may be going to a Sunday School class where you don't know anyone, teaching a Sunday School class that you do not feel equipped to teach, or like visiting a family member in a nursing home who is not as excited to see you as you are to see them. Ephesians 5 shows us that we actively seek God when we order our time in ways that are pleasing to God by making the most of every opportunity that God put in front of us.

We must turn away from the worldly wisdom mindset that helps us make excuses to not help with ministries in the church. It is when we believe the lies of the world about power, money, and success that we lose our Christ centered identity. Our Scripture for today warns us against drunkenness and debauchery, and we should take heed to this warning for worldly knowledge encourages us to try the very things that take us away from God and lead us into spirals of self destruction. Living as those who are "wise" means having a Christian mindset that

is evidenced in our daily lives. We gain this Christian mindset by setting our identity in Jesus Christ and not the things of this world (Matthew 6:19,20).

The wisdom of the world tells us that we are consumers and can be best described with Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. Worldly wisdom tells women they must be pretty enough and thin enough. They must be able to hold down a full time job, take their kids to all their activities, whip up an amazing meal, and keep the house immaculate at all times.

For men, worldly wisdom emphasizes that they have a full time job that they excel in, that they are in peak physical condition and can save orphan children from a burning fire at any moment, and that they can sometimes wear shades of pink and purple to emphasize their softer side while still looking ruggedly manly.

The wisdom of American culture does not only have standards for adults, but for youth as well. Youth are under enormous pressure to excel in everything they attempt and to look like supermodels while they are doing it.

Overall, the wisdom of the world, especially in American culture, devalues the elderly, the homeless, the poor, and many other groups that are underrepresented in the media. Basically the wisdom of the world devalues any type of imperfection or weakness which is something we all possess. Therefore, worldly wisdom keeps us trying to attain the impossible and leaves us feeling empty because we are always striving for the unattainable.

The wisdom of God never leaves us empty. Ephesians 5 instructs us to be "filled with the Spirit." Before we can allow God to fill us with the Holy Spirit we must make room for God. We make room for God by making and taking time in our lives to actively seek God. We open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit by admitting that we are not in control and that we do not know

everything, no matter how old or young we are. We make room for God by knowing that we will never be able to fully understand the wisdom of God because God is not a rationale concept, but a triune entity that surpasses human understanding.

The good news is that the wisdom of God tells us that God is our creator, redeemer, and sustainer. God created us out of nothing, he gave his Son so that we could live in a kingdom that goes beyond worldly wisdom, and God continues to sustain us through His presence on earth, the Holy Spirit.

The wisdom of God makes no sense to us when we try to view it through the lens of worldly wisdom where nothing is given freely or without price. We center our identity in Christ when we accept the wisdom of God through our faith. Faith is a concept that worldly wisdom cannot explain. Faith happens when we actively make room for the Holy Spirit to work through our minds, hearts, and lives.

The way that we can continue to be rooted in our Christian identity is through reading the Bible, practicing spiritual disciplines, and being immersed in Christian community. As Christians and “imitators of God” (Ephesians 5) we must continue to build relationships with those in the body of Christ who can repeat back to us our Christ centered identity when we are experiencing amnesia caused by worldly wisdom.

So which wisdom will you choose to believe? The wisdom of the world that leaves you empty? Or the wisdom of God which fills you with the Holy Spirit? The choice is yours. One of

these warring wisdoms will bring you eternal life and the other may take you down a path of self destruction. Act out in faith and actively seek after the wisdom of God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *New Interpreters Biblical Commentary*,441.