

THE
WISDOM
of
GOD

LETTING HIS TRUTH AND GOODNESS
DIRECT YOUR STEPS

A.W. TOZER

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Introduction

There are known knowns—things we know we know,” Donald Rumsfeld once famously said. And there are known unknowns—things we do not know. “But there are also unknown unknowns,” the former U.S. Secretary of Defense added, “the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

Dr. Tozer would have said Amen to that most enthusiastically. As soon as a person admits he does not know everything, he is in a position to learn something.

What many people do not understand is that the unknown unknowns *can* and *do* sabotage lives. It is the arrogance of a fool who believes he knows everything and therefore qualifies him for making all the decisions in his life and that of others around him. This is especially true of the spiritual life.

Dr. Tozer presents in this book a question that needs serious pondering: “Why is it that man, with drastically limited wisdom, insists on making all the decisions in his life while a good portion of the time he is wrong?”

Tozer exhorts us to “go to God first.” God’s wisdom is the only absolute and unlimited wisdom. Tapping into His

divine, eternal wisdom will change your life. How often do we make decisions based on human wisdom we have at the time only later to find out something that counters our decision?

We need to seek an *afflatus*, literally a breath, an inspiration of divine wisdom to invade our lives, Tozer says. Everything holy and good in this world has flowed from this wisdom. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, making God's wisdom a reality in their life.

There is no question that human wisdom has accomplished much good in this world, but man's knowledge and wisdom can only go so far. It is limited. There is a ceiling that cannot be penetrated. A major concern of Tozer was for Christian leaders who tried to use human wisdom for what only can be accomplished through God's wisdom. Human talent, scholarship, experience, and entertainment run the church today. All these things are a substitute for God's wisdom, which cannot be earned. Rather, it is a gift of God that comes upon the believer as he yields himself to Jesus Christ.

To know Christ is to know God's wisdom. The more we understand this, the more we will be able to see the hand of God in our life moving us in the direction He wants us to go.

The amazing thing to me is that all the sermons that make up this book were preached in the early 1960s, but the message is relevant to Christianity today. What was true then is true today, if not more so.

This book outlines the progress of man's knowledge of divine wisdom, which has its roots in Hebrew doctrine. An interesting aspect is Dr. Tozer's use of two apocryphal books: *Wisdom of Solomon* and *Ecclesiasticus*. Although not inspired as are the sixty-six books of the Bible, they present the Hebrew doctrine of wisdom.

Introduction

Tozer emphasizes the Pilgrim Way of our lives as a perilous way. Everything in this world is contradictory to the man or woman who is walking with God. In order to live the victorious Christian life, we must live in the power of God's wisdom.

Rev. James L. Snyder, DLit

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The Hebrew Doctrine of Wisdom

O God, Thou who art Eternal Wisdom, speak into my heart today that wisdom that will glorify Thee. I joyfully turn away from my human reasoning and trust Thy wisdom to guide me and direct me throughout my day.

Let me not succumb to the limitations of my own reasoning and knowledge but leap beyond that and step into the reality of Thy holy presence. Amen.

For a long time I have been thinking about the subject of this book: wisdom. A better writer than I should write this book, but in the meantime, I will do my best to unburden my heart. I hope my work will inspire someone to take it a step further.

The wisdom that entralls me is not human wisdom, but rather eternal wisdom as it relates to Jesus Christ our Lord. I have studied human wisdom and secular psychology and know their weaknesses, or rather their conspicuous limitations.

In every culture, wisdom is shared specific to the people of that culture. Along with that are the limitations associated with the wisdom of a given culture. The wisdom of the human mind and imagination in any culture is limited.

However, when it comes to the doctrine of what I call *eternal wisdom*, it refers to the wisdom revealed through the Hebrew people, and that is the focus of this book: the Hebrew doctrine of wisdom. The Scriptures are full of this teaching in both the Old and the New Testaments. You cannot read the Psalms or Proverbs or Ecclesiastes without encountering the eternal wisdom of God. The Hebrews defined it supremely well from the very beginning, and that is what I want to examine in this book.

The Hebrew Understanding

The Hebrews believed there was an ancient, uncreated *af-flatus*, or divine breath. It was variously thought of as apart from God, as being God himself, as being brought into being by God, or the gods, and other times it was thought of as bringing all things into being. The Old Testament is filled with this doctrine, and I want to look at it from the Hebrew understanding, but particularly as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This is not only an Old Testament doctrine. It comes very close to what John writes, “In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John in his writings is reflecting this Hebrew doctrine of eternal wisdom.

I want to include in this chapter what the Hebrews thought about this doctrine of eternal wisdom years before the book of Ecclesiastes was written. This would take us back approximately one thousand years before Christ. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, one of fifteen books of the Apocrypha, a collection probably not well-known in most evangelical circles, has an important application to what the Hebrews believed about wisdom.

For wisdom, which is the worker of all things, taught me: for in her is an understanding spirit: holy, one only, manifold, subtle, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, pure, and most subtle spirits. For wisdom is more moving than any motion: she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore, can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before

it. For after this cometh night, but vice shall not prevail against wisdom.

Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–30

I do not include this passage because I think it is inspired by God in the sense that Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are inspired. Rather, I include it as I might quote Charles Spurgeon, St. Augustine, or anyone who, though not Bible writers in the same sense, nevertheless, were students of the Bible, and therefore we can trust them as teachers of the Bible. Only the sixty-six books of the Bible are divinely inspired by God. The *Wisdom of Solomon* is not one of them, but rather is an important insight into the Hebrew doctrine of wisdom. It is important because it reveals the belief the ancients had about this subject.

Application of Hebrew Doctrine

I suggest you carefully read the *Wisdom of Solomon* passage again and notice how the language is similar to passages found in the Old and New Testaments, particularly in verses 25 and 26:

For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore, can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness.

The Scriptures teach and church fathers believed that the spirit described in the above passage is Christ, the wisdom of the Old Testament. *Sophia* was and is the Greek word used

in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as well as in Jesus' day for "wisdom." The church fathers echoed this.

Carried into the New Testament, it is seen, for example, when John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word." John was not identifying Christianity with the Greek thought of his day. Rather, he was using a Greek word to explain what God had to say. The word *logos* is the Greek word for "word" or "reason." Many theological liberals claim John wrote his gospel under the influence of Plato. Early Christianity, they argue, was strongly influenced by the Greek doctrine of the *logos*, the thought and expression of God, for one word will not define it. Therefore, they tried to tie Christianity in with Greek thought and said such things that implied we cannot trust Paul. We can only trust those writers who identify Christianity with Greek thought. We must take the Gospels, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, and go back to the simple teachings of Jesus.

This, however, is absolutely false. When John wrote his gospel, he was not identifying Christianity with Greek thought. Not one line in the New Testament gives even a hint that John knew anything about Greek thought, despite having lived in a Roman-controlled, Hellenized (Greek) culture. John, you remember, and his brother James, were simple fishermen and did not know or study anything about Greek thought.

In John's lifetime, Palestine was an occupied country. John was not a scholar, had not gone to Athens to study, as the apostle Paul had, under Gamaliel. John was simply identifying the doctrine of the Word with Old Testament doctrine—the Hebrew doctrine, if you please. He was identifying Jesus Christ with the Old Testament doctrine of the creating

Word. That is not Greek thought, but rather antedates Greek thought by thousands of years.

In the book of Genesis, for example, we read,

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

1:1–5

Here we have from the beginning the voice of eternal wisdom, the creating voice of God. He commanded, and it came forth. He spoke, and it was done. It was the commanding voice of God that brought things into being, as it is written, He “[upheld] all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). Everything in creation is built upon the foundation of this creating voice.

Along with this, we have the speaking voice.

When we come to the speaking voice of God in His universe, it is this that continually holds all things together. It is in Him all things are held together and not by anything adhesive or by law, but held together by the voice of God.

The apostle John was identifying Jesus Christ with the old Hebrew doctrine of creating wisdom, the spoken word into the creating voice that created all things, and he was not associating it at all with Greek thought, though he had every intention that the Greeks would comprehend what he wrote.

In reading the church fathers, you will see that they believed this. They saw in Jesus Christ the incarnation of this ancient afflatus, this brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, an image of His goodness entering into souls, making them prophets and friends of God.

What was it that entered into those souls, making them prophets? It is written that it was the Spirit of Christ speaking. The book of Psalms testifies that the Spirit speaking through David makes him sometimes sound like the Messiah: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me?” (Psalm 22:1). David was writing, of course, but it was the Messiah, the Spirit of the Messiah, the ancient wisdom of God that was speaking through the man David.

I am reminded of the passage that says, “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). The darkness cannot prevail against the light, and so we identify the Hebrew doctrine of the ancient and eternal wisdom with the New Testament.

The apostle Paul taught that this distinguished Greek thought from Hebrew doctrine. Other apostles may not have known how to do that, but Paul could because he was well educated, having studied the Hebrew Scriptures as well as Greek philosophy. The others were forced to stay by the text while Paul could speak about Greek thought. He said, “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22–24).

In that same chapter, Paul writes, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). He distinguished sharply in those first two chapters Greek thought from the Hebrew doctrine of the Messiah and said,

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

The apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthians. At the time, their city, Corinth, was known as an academic city with many philosophers, intellectuals, and scholars who wrote with an understanding of how they were thinking and how to challenge their Greek thought with the Hebrew doctrine of wisdom.

Always remember that whenever we begin to equate Christianity with any current philosophy, however ancient and honorable its roots, Christianity loses its power immediately. The apostle Paul steadfastly refused to do that.

Paul distinguished the doctrine of Christ, the wisdom of God, from the mere Greek use of *logos* as “word,” but saw what the apostle John saw: that the doctrine of the divine Logos, the Word, was none other than the wisdom of God.

I would say that some of those old Greeks got pretty close to it sometimes, but they were limited by their own human reason and logic. The wisdom taught by the Hebrews was larger than any culture and could never be contained or explained.

❧ SHALL WISDOM CRY ALOUD? ❧

Shall Wisdom cry aloud,
And not her speech be heard?
The voice of God's eternal Word,
Deserves it no regard?

Isaac Watts