

Wisdom and Grace; Or, Within and Without

by H.J. Vine

The sermon explores the vital companionship of wisdom and grace in the life of believers, emphasizing their role in both personal growth and outreach to others.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:7, Proverbs 21:30, John 1:17, John 14:9, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Ephesians 5:1, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 4:5

Topics: "Divine Wisdom", "Christian Living"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the importance of cultivating the friendship between wisdom and grace as believers, as they are both attributes of God. Believers are encouraged to walk with wisdom and grace, benefiting not only themselves but also others they encounter. The sermon emphasizes the need to understand and appreciate the privileges of fellowship with God within, before learning how to walk without in wisdom and grace. It highlights the divine wisdom and unselfish grace that believers are called to exhibit towards those outside, reflecting God's heart for all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Transcript

Wisdom and grace are choice companions, and their friendship should be constantly cultivated by the believer. They are both of God, for He is "the only wise," and "the God of all grace," who has not only called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, but has also told us to be imitators of Him, as beloved children (Eph. 5:1).

Wisdom and grace are to be the companions of the believer, especially when he walks without. In their company he will not only be cheered, elevated, and made glad himself, but he will most surely benefit others who may be honoured to meet him in such superior society; and the benefit so ministered may not simply be passing; it may be eternal.

Because of this, God has instructed us how to walk and talk when we move about in the world without; as we read, "Walk in wisdom towards those without, redeeming opportunities. Let your word be always with grace, seasoned with salt, so as to know how ye ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:5-6, N.Tr.). Wisdom and grace thus shed their refreshment and fragrance upon our ways and words; and the seasoning of salt will preserve us from the corruption of the world, and give a lasting character to all our testimony.

There is no legality in this, for it is grace. Nevertheless, those who are instructed by the Holy Spirit, to show demeanour, bearing these divine characteristics towards "those without," are themselves first taught to appreciate their holy privileges, in intimate fellowship and love, along with those within; for it would be impossible to rightly carry ourselves without, if that which is ours within were not first understood.

Let us see what is said as to those within in the former part of the Colossian Letter, before they are told how to walk without.

In chapter 1 they have been delivered from the authority of darkness. It has no more authority over them. They have been translated into another kingdom, where the authority is in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, so blessedly called here "the Son of the Father's love" (vv. 13-14). Those who have been thus "delivered" and "translated," were once "enemies in mind by wicked works," yet now reconciled to the fullness dwelling in the Son, "in the body of His flesh through death" (vv. 19-22).

In chapter 2 there is expressed the deeply-felt desire that those whom the Father has brought into the circle of grace within should be united together in love, having their hearts encouraged and cheered, "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God;" for in that mystery, which was hidden from the past ages and generations but is now made known, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (vv. 1-3). The divine treasury of these riches is in this mystery. In other circles outside, such as creation, and Israel, and the nations, very, wonderful riches are to be seen as the works of God; but it is here pre-eminently that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found; yea, "all" of them. The riches of the glory of this mystery, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory, are so vast, that there is no need to go outside for anything; it is said, "Ye are complete in Him" (v. 10).

In chapter 3 believers are risen with Christ. In verse 20 of chapter 2 they are instructed that they "have died with Christ" from the elements of the world without. Had that been all, they would have been left in a negative position only; but with Christ they have also been RAISED, and now the things which are above, where He is, are to engage their minds (vv. 1-2). For their "life is hid with Christ in God." How completely they are identified "with Christ"--in death, in resurrection, in hidden life now--as belonging to the circle of those within. But it must be remembered that this circle embraces all those who have "received Christ Jesus the Lord" (2:6), although it must be admitted that all of them do not rightly understand it. And this is to their present loss. Those who are zealous for sects, or parties or schools of opinion, would do well to heed the word: "Walk in HIM, rooted and built up in HIM, and assured, in THE FAITH, even as ye have been taught, abounding in it WITH THANKSGIVING" (2:6-7). When our Lord Jesus Christ comes in glory not one of this circle will be missing. For if they are dead with Him, as we have seen, and are risen with Him, and their life is now hid with Him, when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall they also "appear with Him in glory" (3:4).

Much energy and exercise is still necessary on the part of those who belong to this circle, where "CHRIST is everything, and in all" (v. 11). For even to such it has to be said: "Do not lie one to another, having put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new" (v. 9). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering," etc., Rich and rare graces are thus to abound among those who are Christ's.

"Brought to rest within the circle,

Where love's treasures are displayed,

There we drink the living waters,

Taste the joys that never fade."

Finally, the home and business spheres, in which they have to move, feel the benefit of this grace. Wives, husbands, and children; servants and masters (3:18; 4:1), are all to show the heavenly colour in these relationships. The excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His wonderful light are thus set forth; not themselves, but Himself. They are thus free from self-occupation. A beautiful type of this is given in Numbers 15:37-41: The ribband or lace of blue--the heavenly colour--was to be the flower-like fringe of their garments where they touched the ground, throughout all the generations. This was to bring to their remembrance the commandments of the Lord their God, who had redeemed them. The blue was to be always with them, even in those walks of life where they touched earthly things.

Having pointed out in verses 2 and 3 the great importance of persevering prayer, the Holy Spirit then brings us to consider our walk toward "those without."

The abundant blessing which is ours within is not intended to make us "at ease in Zion." We are to consider others for whom nothing is prepared. Again, we are reminded of the Old Testament types: Israel, when blessed with abundance themselves in the land, were to leave the corners of their rich harvest fields and the gleanings of their fruits, and even a sheaf of corn when forgotten. The poor and the stranger were to have these. When this divine wisdom and unselfish grace marked God's people, He blessed them greatly in all the work of their hands (Lev. 16:12; 19:9; Deut. 24:19); for they did but express His own gracious and considerate heart in so doing? He has told us that He "desires that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." He "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." We are therefore to redeem opportunities, as we walk without, in the unfailing companionship of Wisdom and Grace. We are to be like Him, imitators of God as dear children.

The sun was beginning to shed its gladdening rays over the land one Lord's Day morning as a preacher of the gospel started to the place of his day's labour for the Lord. Along the road he met a very, dejected-looking man. The preacher spoke a gracious word to him, and added, "It's a good morning, Sir!" There was no reply; but as that man slowly wended his way home, after his night's debauchery, and turned into bed to try to obtain sleep, he kept thinking: Yes, it's a good morning for him;--a very good morning! He is away to preach the Word of God, and to help others; here am I, and it is a miserable morning enough for me! "At last," he said, when telling the story, "I came to this: I will have a good morning too! And that night I went to hear the gospel, and trusted the Saviour! It has been a good morning with me ever since! Redeem opportunities. Let your word be always with grace. A Word fitly spoken, how good it is. Who shall tell the present and eternal results? He that winneth souls is wise.

The better we know these two worthies--Wisdom and Grace--the more highly we shall esteem them; and their most excellent counsel will be increasingly prized and valued by us. No material wealth or knowledge approximates to their worth. The gold and the silver; the treasures of the earth, the rubies and sapphires are not to be compared with them. Nor can the sciences, exact or otherwise, be placed beside them. Materialism, at its very best, does not give us the true knowledge of the blessed God; wisdom and grace do; and they enable us to make Him known to others.

In the sacred Scriptures the Holy Spirit has told us a great deal about them. "Wisdom," we are told, "is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7). "She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a

crown of glory shall she deliver to thee" (v. 9). "Grace," we know, "came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), and truth both subsist through Him. Therefore it can be said of those who have received Christ Jesus the Lord, "Of His fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace" (v. 16).

Wisdom must not be mistaken for knowledge; nor must it be confounded with understanding. Those who have knowledge, important as this is, are not always wise. It is desirable also to have understanding, along with that which we know; so that the right relation of one thing with another may intelligently be seen. But wisdom shows itself in the right use and application of the truth; also in the right way and occasion. The Holy Spirit desires for us, the full knowledge of God's will, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9).

Grace is usually spoken of in contrast to law; and this is right in so far as the justifying of the believing sinner is concerned. Law condemns him; grace justifies him. And then it is said, "Ye are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Rising higher than this, however, we learn that "grace reigns;" grace is enthroned. It is sometimes called unmerited favour; but the wonderful thing about it is, it is favour for those who merited the opposite. It gives character to the glad tidings now; for before "the gospel of the kingdom" is preached, and "the everlasting gospel," we, now have "the gospel of the grace of God."

Both Wisdom and grace are seen to be full of divine activities in the Scriptures of Truth. We read, "Wisdom has builded her house"; also, "Doth not Wisdom cry?" "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom." Of grace we read, "By grace are ye saved." "Being justified freely by His grace." "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Unlike the boasted wisdom of philosophy, divine wisdom is personified. I said to a follower of Taoism, "Even if the wisdom of these old sages were true wisdom, could you point me to a person in whom it is expressed?" He could not. I continued, "That is just where the glory of divine wisdom is displayed. It is seen expressed in a perfect Man, God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ He was murdered when a little over thirty; about the age when men are only beginning to be wise. Your teachers were old men with long experience, and yet their doctrines are full of flaws. Christ's words, works, and ways were all perfect. Nothing but the truth that he was the Word become flesh could account for all this in One so young in years." We learn divine wisdom in Him in perfection. "Christ Jesus has been made unto us wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30). He is truly that "hidden Wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory which none of the princes of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (chap. 2:7-8); The Lord possessed Him in the beginning of His ways before His works of old, He was set up from everlasting. Whoso findeth Him, findeth life. When here upon the earth, He spake of the wisdom of Solomon, but He said, "A greater than Solomon is here." Men refused Him, but God has set Him at His right hand. Believers are in Him; not as Israel, who found their national head in failing Solomon on earth; they are in Him, who is their living and unfailing Head in heaven. He is their wisdom, made so from God.

"In Him from everlasting, the wonderful I AM,

Found pleasures never wasting, and WISDOM IS HIS NAME."

Grace has also found its perfect expression in Him. How different are these blessed truths to the cold calculations of mere human philosophy; seen as they are personified in a Man who lived and loved, suffered and triumphed. Tried and trusted by those who knew Him, sinners and saints, ignorant and instructed, sick and strong, fathers, mothers, and children all tasted practically and experimentally the

grace that came by Jesus Christ. It did not live as an ideal among the books of the retired study, to be expressed in terms only from a philosopher's chair, or a well-supported pulpit. It was seen and heard amongst men and women and children, in the everyday circumstances and needs of life.

"He was the image in man's lowly guise,

Of the invisible to mortal eyes

Come to attract the wretched and the weak,

His joy the wand'ers and the lost to seek."

The Father, God in grace, has thus been made known by our Lord Jesus Christ. No man had seen God at any time; but the Son, who is ever in the Father's bosom, He has declared Him. We need not therefore go outside to find Him. Jesus could say, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9); and again, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father, but by Me."

The more deeply we dwell on these truths, the more profoundly intimate we shall become with our two divinely provided companions, wisdom and grace. Doubtless all believers know them, but we are to know them better; and that will mean we shall value them more and more. To know God is to know them in the truest sense. The world, in the arms of Satan, is opposed to Him, and these things cannot be found there. "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord" (Prov. 21:30) Therefore in liberty, and free from self-occupation, we need but to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be found answering to His Word, and thus to be agreeable to Him, walking in wisdom towards those without, redeeming opportunities, and our word always with grace, seasoned with salt, so as to know how to answer each one. There is a great and generous abundance provided by God for those within; we are to scatter wisely and freely to those without.

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