

The Wisdom Which Is From Above

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the contrast between heavenly wisdom and worldly wisdom, emphasizing the spiritual state produced by true understanding of Christ's work.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1

Topics: "Heavenly Wisdom", "Spiritual State"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the issue of Corinthian believers reducing Christianity to mere philosophy, emphasizing that true wisdom from above is not about intellectual understanding but about a spiritual state that reflects Christ. He warns against the dangers of worldly wisdom infiltrating the church, leading to divisions and carnality among believers. The sermon highlights that true wisdom is characterized by purity, peace, and mercy, contrasting sharply with the sensuality and strife present in Corinth. Ultimately, Sparks points to Christ as the embodiment of divine wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, urging believers to embrace a living relationship with Him rather than mere doctrinal knowledge. He concludes by calling for a complete surrender to Christ, allowing Him to eclipse our own desires and ambitions.

Transcript

Reading: 1 Cor. 2:1-16; 3:1-4, 18-23.

The real trouble at Corinth was that the habit of looking at everything as a philosophy, which had reached such a height of development amongst the Greeks, had been carried into the realm of Christianity, and Christianity was being considered by them in the light of philosophy, was in fact being reduced to a new philosophy. In practice, therefore, at Corinth, Christianity was set forth as a philosophical teaching, as opposed to a spiritual state.

There is always that peril lurking amongst God's people. It is not a thing peculiar to the Greeks, nor to the Corinthians, nor to a bygone age. Somewhere not far off from any assembly of God's people there lurks the same danger of Christianity becoming a matter of teaching, wisdom of words. From the reverse side the danger is seen as something which merely gratifies the mind. The natural man loves to be in the know. Knowledge to the natural man gives a sense of strength, of power, of importance, and that peril of the natural man creeps into the realm of Christian teaching. Thus to have good teaching, clear teaching, systematic teaching, the presentation of Christian truth in a manner in which the mind can grasp it, become informed and enriched, has always this peril associated with it.

That is why a great many people do not like reiteration. They like something fresh. To such the novel preacher is the attractive preacher, the one who is "original", that is, who is not saying things well known, but something quite fresh, something unique, something that is not so familiar. There is an attractiveness about them which makes its appeal to this appetite. But should anyone get up and emphasize, and re-emphasize, and constantly hammer home one point people get upset. They get tired of it. They want something fresh for the mind. Very often they have not recognized the importance of that truth to the heart. All this belongs to the same dangerous realm of Christian truth and teaching becoming something for the mind. The peril is never far away from the place where much truth is given, or a teaching ministry fulfilled.

The Greeks were experts in that realm. That was their make-up, and they had brought that over into Christianity, and were reducing Christianity to a human philosophy, a system of worldly wisdom. The consequences were very very serious indeed.

Wisdom's Fruits

The point we want to emphasize is that you can always tell whether truth possessed is possessed as a teaching, a doctrine, a philosophy, or possessed as a living thing in relation to Christ, by the results that issue from it, by its effects. In Corinth they had the Christian truth in a very great fullness and richness, but they had it in the natural mind as teaching, as truth, as doctrine, as a philosophy, and the terrible consequences were that there was that which was sensual, earthly, and even devilish; so much so that the apostle had in one case to hand over a certain individual to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of Christ, so devilish was that thing in the assembly.

It is terrible to contemplate that such could be the case in a Christian assembly, where the Holy Ghost is, where Christ is, and yet here is not only the awful possibility but the actuality. The apostle puts his finger upon the cause when he says: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). What is carnality? It is the bringing over of the natural tendencies, the dispositions of mind and heart, into the things of the Lord, and that is a very dangerous thing to do, and has very pernicious consequences.

When the apostle introduces the heavenly wisdom he shows that it is pre-eminently marked, not by words, but by a state. Of his own visit to them he declares: "I... when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5). It is a spiritual state. The wisdom which is from above produces a state which is altogether the opposite of that produced by the wisdom of this world, even though the wisdom of this world operate in the realm of Christian truth.

Paul wrote, "I hear that divisions exist among you..." (1 Cor. 11:18). Whence do they come? They come from the intrusion of human wisdom into the realm of Christian truth. Let us put that in another way. We find believers divided because they get teaching apart from a living state: yes, Christian teaching, the doctrine of Christ, resulting in schism amongst believers, because they only have it as a teaching and not as a living state.

What is true of divisions is true of all these other unhappy things at Corinth. Why such things? How do sensuality and the very mark of the devil come to be found in a Christian assembly? This has been the sad history of the Church again and again, that right in the midst of a Christian assembly something perfectly devilish has sprung up, as well as these other things -- which are, of course, from no other source than the devil -- divisions, rivalries, jealousies, factions. This, I repeat, has been an unhappy history in the Church

at large. Why? Because of Christian teaching being handled merely as a philosophy instead of both proceeding from, and producing, a spiritual state.

We cannot be too emphatic about this matter. We do not want to run the danger of anything so horrible and so gross, and if not, we must face it. We do not want to get into a position like that. We want everything in our relationship with the Lord to become a living and outworking reality.

Now the wisdom from above, of which the apostle speaks, produces a state just the opposite of that state produced by this wisdom which is from below. James 3:17 gives the definition of the wisdom which is from above: -- "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubtfulness, without hypocrisy." (R.V.M.)

There we have seven things marking the wisdom which is from above. And do you see how closely this passage in James runs parallel, though in striking contrast, to things at Corinth. We will not at this time dwell on these seven features, but only in the briefest manner touch on one or two.

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure..." At Corinth there was a state the very reverse of this, because worldly wisdom had come in. There was sensuality, uncleanness, and oh, strong word, "It is actually reported that there is fornication among you..." (1 Cor. 5:1).

"...Then peaceable..." The wisdom which is from above is peaceable. But of the Corinthians the apostle has to write: "...I hear that divisions exist among you..." (1 Cor. 11:18).

So we might follow the comparison and the contrast right through, but what we are seeking to say is this, that it is a state which is produced by heavenly wisdom, a spiritual state. That is the ground of the apostle's use of the words in the second chapter, "he that is spiritual" (verse 15). This state is here said to be Christ.

Wisdom Solving the Supreme Problem

We want to get closer to this wisdom which is from above. What is the object of wisdom? For what is wisdom required? It is to solve problems, to see your way through, to get through your difficulties. Sin has set up the greatest problems that this universe has ever known, and sin in man set God His greatest problem. If we may speak, and I think we can rightly speak, of God having a problem, then sin in man confronted God with the greatest problem He has ever met with. What was the problem with which God Himself became confronted when sin entered into the very nature of man, and man became, not only a being with sin in him, but himself sin? God's problem was as to how He could overcome Himself. The position is that sin must be destroyed if God is uncompromisingly holy. If God cannot recognize, let alone condone, sin; if God in His very being, is in absolute antagonism to sin, and it is war to the death if God has made man and man has become sinful in his nature, God, by reason of what He is, is compelled to destroy man utterly as a sinful thing. God has either to do that, and destroy man completely, destroy His creation, or He has to find a way of overcoming Himself, of overcoming His own nature, and the demands of His own nature and being. To destroy man utterly, and to wipe out the whole sinful creation, would spell defeat for God, and give occasion for Satan to rise up and say: I have won. I have destroyed the work of God beyond repair.

That is one side of the problem for God. For God to spare sinful man is to violate His own nature. How is a problem like that going to be solved? There is wisdom wanted: on the one hand, wisdom to know how to

do it, and, on the other hand, power to accomplish it.

This is where glorying in the Lord comes in. You can see the answer. You are living in the enjoyment of it. Christ is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, Christ crucified. God has solved His problem by Himself becoming Man, and in a great representative and all inclusive Manhood taking the full and final consequences of sin so that the very nature of God is satisfied in an inclusive Representative. What mighty power there was in destroying the dominion of sin. There was wisdom in finding the way, and there was the power in executing the work, and it was all in Christ crucified. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

How can God save sinful man and be true to Himself? CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. This is a heavenly wisdom, and Christ is made unto us of God wisdom. What is that wisdom? Righteousness, sanctification, redemption. How is there righteousness from God to us in Christ? Because Christ has fulfilled all righteousness; because in His death He has carried the judgment upon all unrighteousness, and therefore satisfied the highest standard of divine righteousness. Sanctification is something more. Redemption is something more still.

Let us think for a moment of each of these. The three are an exegesis of the one. That is to say, wisdom is defined in the other three. Heavenly wisdom is righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

Righteousness

What is righteousness here? God's laws are judgments. They carry with them the absolute demands of God, which if violated result in the judgment of God. There is no escape. Every man and woman entering into this creation comes by birth under the rule of God's judgments through God's laws, and becomes responsible for the laws of God. But every man and every woman coming into this creation is totally incapable of meeting those demands, answering to those laws, and escaping those judgments. There has come one Man into this world, Who also was made under the law, Who came under the laws and judgments of the infinitely holy God, but who was ABLE to stand up to them, to fulfil them, to satisfy God. Not only did He do that as for Himself, but there was a point in His career here on this earth where He stepped right into the place of other men, accepting all the weakness of all the race of men, and was then made sin, and tasted death in the behalf of every man. But because of that sinlessness which was inherent in Him, He could survive and not be engulfed in the condition which He had voluntarily accepted for other men, and through the eternal Spirit, the indestructible Spirit, the timeless Spirit, and therefore the deathless Spirit of God, He overcame that condition which He accepted in a voluntary way, swallowed it up in all its power, its awfulness, its blackness, and its consequences of judgment, and overcame, not only in an isolated way for Himself in what He was, but in a related way for all men. God having taken that One into His presence, and made Him the Head, faith in the Lord Jesus, we are taught, means that the righteousness which is true of that Man is put to the account of those who believe, and thus He is made from God righteousness to us. That is a state in Christ for us.

Righteousness goes beyond justification. Justification brings us into a standing, but righteousness in Christ means that that standing could be eternally maintained. Justification means that we stand acquitted. But what is our hope that we shall not again go back onto the old ground and lose that position? It is the righteousness of Christ which is eternal, indestructible, deathless, incorruptible. The case, then, is not one of faith only for a standing, but faith in a righteousness which abides, abiding righteousness to keep us there in that position with God. It is one thing to be brought to a position. It is another thing to have put to

our account that which can keep us there eternally. Righteousness is that which establishes justification as an eternal thing. It is ours through faith. He is made unto us righteousness from God.

Sanctification

He is made unto us sanctification from God. Notice the direction of this. Where does sanctification originate? From whence does it come? Does it come from our effort, from our struggle, from our endeavour? Does it come from our consecration? No, it does not! Sanctification comes from God: in this sense, that before ever we could be for God, God Himself singled us out for Himself. God singled Israel out from the nations for Himself. That was their sanctification. It came from God -- "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Sanctification originates with the initiative of God, and all that we shall ever be or do in a sanctified life will be because God started it, God initiated it, God singled us out, chose us to be His own.

The foundations of sanctification are not in our efforts to be holy, nor in our decision to be holy. The foundation of sanctification is in God's laying hold of us to be all for Himself. All our efforts would be in vain if God had never made us His own. But to be the Lord's carries with it the fact that we are wholly separated. Separation is not unto sanctification; it is because of sanctification.

Let your reason for not having anything to do with what is not of the Lord be that you are the Lord's. Do not break off this and that so as to be the Lord's, but recognize that you are His, that He has chosen you, and you have then the basis and the dynamic for a holy life. It is in Christ. To be in Christ means that we are the Lord's, and carries with it the truth that we are wholly the Lord's. There must be no violation of that: and this implies the recognition of a position which carries with it a state. The recognition of that, and the acceptance of it by faith, is the power of a holy life. We are sanctified by faith, even as we are justified by faith. How are we sanctified by faith? By believing that in Christ we are holy, that God has purposed we should be holy through our being in Him. Anything unholy is a contradiction, and God is against it. God is for holiness, and would have us recognize the fact, and receive that holiness in His Son Whom He has given.

Redemption

Redemption is more than justification, more than righteousness, more than sanctification. Why does it come last? Surely, we might say, Paul has made a slip! He ought to have said, Now Christ is made unto us redemption, righteousness, sanctification! Surely that is the order of doctrine! No! there is no mistake. The order is correct, and the statement accurate as it stands. We so often think of redemption in the limited sense of the ransom paid at the beginning by which we are set free. But that is a mere fragment of redemption. Look at 1 Corinthians 15 and see to what point redemption leads. It leads right out of this body of humiliation, right out of the last remnant and vestige of corruptibility, into a spirit glorified in a glorified body. Go back to Romans 8:23, where you have that stated emphatically -- "...waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Redemption is the full and final consummation of the whole work of new creation in spirit, soul and body, and in the whole creation outside: for "...the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption..." (verse 21). That is redemption. Redemption carries you right on to the end, and that is why it comes last here.

Redemption is an immense thing. And Christ is made redemption unto us. In Christ that is secured to us. It is beautiful to know that we are justified and stand before God. It is good to know that that righteousness, unimpeachable, incorruptible, is put to our credit. It is good to know that in Christ we are sanctified. But,

oh, see to what that is leading. It is leading to glorification in every part of our being, and in every part of this creation, this universe. That is redemption in Christ Jesus. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

The Lord brings all this and gathers it up into one word "grace." While the word itself is not used, you can never have a more beautiful exposition of grace than you have here. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom..." God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the despised, and the things which are not, and brought them through to that. God chose! That is repeatedly stated. It is of Him that we are in Christ. Is that not grace? Foolish, weak, despised nothings in this world brought through to that in Christ: and it is all of God -- "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God (out from God unto us), and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." It is all the divine work. All comes from God. All is grace.

What an argument that is against this wisdom of this world! It argues in these two ways. In the first place all this says that the wisdom of this world is intended to make something of man. Man wants to be something in himself. He wants to be wise, and by his wisdom he wants to have power, to be able to do because he knows, and it is all the bolstering up of man. Thus the Greeks came to worship the most perfect man that they could find. The best philosopher was worshipped. The best athlete was worshipped. The man of wisdom and strength was the object of worship amongst the Greeks. It was making something of man, and wisdom was all to make man something.

That rules Christ out, and it rules out everything being of God, if it is all of man. Which will you have? Are you going to have this inflation of humanity? Where will it end? To what will it lead? Perhaps a few years of fame? "Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown..." How true that is, "a corruptible crown"! So you come to the Pantheon, and you find that one wise man, one philosopher, and one athlete, succeeds another. Every year the one who was at the top is superseded, and that is how it goes on. Fame and influence may last for a year, but you will be very lucky if you get beyond that. That is the value of this world's wisdom and power, a transient thing, no more permanent than the laurel crown of its reward. But here is a wisdom established upon the weakness, the foolishness, the nothingness of the human element: fadeless, immortal, eternal, heavenly. That is the argument between the wisdom from above and the wisdom from beneath. And when these are compared, which is wisdom? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, seeing what the heavenly wisdom is? What does your heart say to that? When you see the heavenly wisdom, and its possibilities, and its fruit, do you not say that the wisdom of this world is foolishness compared with that? God HAS MADE foolish the wisdom of this world, and God HAS MADE weak the strength of this world, by a revelation of the heavenly wisdom, the heavenly power in Christ.

It all resolves itself into a matter of whether we are prepared to accept the working of the cross of Christ crucified. Of course, facing it like this you agree, you assent, you say: Yes, of course, there is no other choice to be made. Are you prepared to be regarded by the world every day that you live as utterly foolish, as nothing, as having no existence? That is literally what the words mean. You might say in an hour of enthusiasm, Oh, yes! Ah, but it is not so easy. Many a battle has to be fought against the proneness of this human nature to be something, against its desire to be able to hold its own, to make an equal show with others. How against this nature weakness is! How we cry out against weakness. It is, then, a question of whether we are prepared to have the working of Christ crucified in the whole constitution of nature, so that the result is the complete ruling out of ourselves and the utter ruling in of Christ.

Paul relates all this to the living person of Christ. As Chrysostom said in his own quaint way, "Paul always nails it with nails to Christ." He meant that Paul always brings it in in relation to the living Person: not

talking doctrine, not things, not sanctification, redemption, righteousness as doctrines, but the living Christ. It is, after all, the question of how far Christ is to eclipse us, totally eclipse us.

In the Greek world in these New Testament days a slave was regarded as having no existence apart from his master. He dare not have his own thoughts: he dare not have his own mind, his own will, his own ways, his own plans, his own workings. He was but the shadow of his master. He had completely to sink his own personality into that of his master. That is why Paul constantly calls himself the bondsman of Jesus Christ. In effect he means, I have sunk my own individuality, my own personality, into Christ -- "For me to live is Christ," the shadow of my Master! "We have the mind of Christ," His thoughts, His ways; and that implies the transcendence of Christ over ourselves at every point. Paul gloried in that He did not think it something of great cost and sacrifice to let himself go to Christ. He gloried in the fact that he was a bondsman of Jesus Christ, because he gloried in Christ. It is, once again, what Christ is from God to us, and this it is as much our glory to accept as our necessity.

We may talk much about the cross. It is necessary for us to speak about the working of the cross, because it is necessary for us to be reminded of the method. But what is far more than all is the utter and absolute Lordship and dominion of Jesus Christ. That carries with it the cross. You will never know that relationship apart from the cross. The cross is the way to that, but the object in view is not to be crucified. Do not live as though the one thing in life is to be constantly crucified, to have to die, die, die, and to be shut up with this as the only subject to which your thoughts are ever given. Let us be concerned with the positive side, which will include the former, with Christ all, and in all, the complete eclipsing of ourselves by Him. The eclipsing work will be by the cross, but the end will be Christ! And what a Christ! "Hallelujah, what a Saviour!" "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." The Lord put more glorying in Him into our hearts.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-wisdom-which-is-from-above/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net