

WHAT DOES GODLY WISDOM REQUIRE?

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Living in any given culture and time requires that we have the wisdom and will to be what we ought to be for the Lord. Serving the Lord is not just about obeying a few commandments. Rather, it is a lifelong commitment to be faithful, loyal, and true to the end (cf. Rev 2:10). Developing a heart for wisdom cannot be stressed enough (Prov 2:2), and this begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov 9:10). This wisdom of which we speak is not just any wisdom, but that which is from above (James 3:17), given by God and curated by those who seek for peace and righteousness from Him.

Scripture contains far more wisdom than can be summarized. However, here are a few matters to consider as we all strive to better understand and develop the wisdom from God.

Godly wisdom requires, at the least, the following:

An understanding of the times in which we live so that we can know what we should do. 1 Chronicles 12:32 contains this golden statement about certain men of the tribe of Issachar: they were “men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” Each time has its unique features, and living with an understanding of our culture and times is critical so that we may know how we ought to respond. We are not to bury our heads in the proverbial sand but should keep an eye on culture so we may address the issues of our day and make the wisest decisions in response to it. In a similar vein, Paul wrote, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col 4:5-6).

Discernment, the ability to judge between right and wrong. Discernment is a key feature of godly wisdom. “The wise of heart is called discerning” (Prov 16:21). This is the ability to judge between good and bad, right and wrong. Without it, we will be awash in a sea of decisions without a rudder. This is so particularly in matters that are not specifically stated. We are told, for example, that the listed works of the flesh include “things like these” (Gal 5:21). Knowing what these are requires this ability to discern and weed out the wrong from the right. The Hebrews writers said that the mature “have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14, ESV). This is why learning principles is so vital to godly decision-making as they undergird other choices we make throughout life.

The desire to make decisions that glorify God (1 Cor 10:31). Wisdom connects to our motivations. Why do we do what we do? Are we acting out of desire to glorify and please self, or do we seek to glorify God? If we are to glorify God even in our eating and drinking, then all else that we do ought to be done to His glory as well. If we can't say we are doing what we do to glorify God, then we should rethink the choices. “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).

The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10). The fear of God is that reverence and respect for Him that should lead us to submit to His will. Respecting God is foundational in everything else we do. To fear Him and keep His commandments is what this is all about (Eccl 12:13-14). Without this respect, there is no wisdom, and without this wisdom, there can be no rock-solid foundation for life (cf. Matt 7:24-27).

The willingness to listen and learn (Prov 1:5). Fools hate knowledge and wisdom. They think they already know it all, so they don't need to listen to anyone else, especially if it runs contrary to what they want. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Prov 12:15). "Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor" (Prov 15:32-33).

We should see that these points are interconnected. Godly wisdom entails them all together, and more. In our search for doing the Lord's will, never overlook the importance of the role of wisdom. This goes beyond a legalistic, "Can I do this?" to a more pragmatic, "Should I do this?" The latter plays a much larger role in our decision-making than we might recognize. "Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:15-17). May God help us as we seek the wisdom from above (James 1:5).