

## Christian Wisdom

2Corinthians 1:12-14

Proverbs 20:29 says, “The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.”

That is a proverb that I think many people in our culture would fail to appreciate.

For the most part I believe our culture values being young over being old.

How many make up ads to you see advertising the ability to give you more wrinkles?

I have never seen an ad for a vitamin or supplement that says it will make you feel more aches and have less energy.

What do they promise?

They promise to make you look and feel younger.

For fun I googled how much money is spent on anti-aging products and more than one website put the amount at more than 60 Billion dollars with that expected to go beyond 100 Billion by 2030.

Generally speaking our society sees old as bad and young as good.

It is easy to see why that is the case.

There is no way to get past the fact that aging comes with some down sides.

It is no fun to drop something on the ground and wonder if it is worth picking up.

To become hard of hearing or to have your vision get blurry can be frustrating.

There are a number of advantages physically to being on the younger side of things.

Why then does the proverb say “...gray hair is the splendor of the old.”

It makes it sound like having gray hair is like a badge of honour.

It makes it sound like getting older is a good thing.

Why does it say that?

Given the broader context of the book of proverbs and the value it places on wisdom, I believe the common connection between age and wisdom is one of the reason it says “gray hair is the splendor of the old.”

Typically speaking as we get older we tend to also get wiser.

That doesn't mean all old people are wise and all young people are foolish.

It just means that most of us, at least to some degree, learn from our life experience.

Biblical wisdom is about much more than our brain's ability to process and retain information.

It is wonderful to have the gift of brain power for sure, but it is also possible to be incredibly intelligent and be an absolute fool at the same time.

Wisdom, according to God's Word has much more to do with the practical application of knowledge to everyday life.

Primarily it has to do with applying what God has revealed to us to everyday life for the purpose of living a life pleasing to the LORD.

The bible places a high value on gaining this kind of wisdom.

Being wise, according to the scriptures, is better than having physical strength and a youthful appearance.

I wonder, do we see it that way?

[In our text this morning **1Corinthians 1:12-14** the apostle Paul shares a bit about his own life and conduct towards the Corinthian believers. It is a display of Christian wisdom and wisdom is something that every believer needs to be growing up in as we walk with the LORD. These verses give us three practical lessons about some of the qualities of Christian wisdom. These are all things that all of us should have in our lives in increasing measure. Lesson number one is this...]

### **Point #1 – Wise Christians rest in the power and grace of God. (Verse 12)**

Instead of using worldly means to advance self-centered desires, believers are called to a genuine desire to please the LORD in all that we say and do while trusting Him with the outcomes.

*The first few words of verse 12 on the surface may seem strange to us.*

It says, "*For our boast is this...*"

When we hear the word 'boast' some of us might pause and ask, "Isn't that a bad thing to do?"

When someone goes around talking about how great they are it rubs most of us the wrong way and rightly so.

The reason Paul brings up this phrase, according to commentator Mark Seifrid, is to deal with some opponents who had worked their way into the church at Corinth claiming apostolic authority by boasting greatly in themselves.

Paul uses the word, but does something totally different than that.

Notice the word 'For' here which connects what he is writing to the previous couple of verses.

In those verses Paul speaks of God's deliverance and how people will 'give thanks' to the Lord on account of His responding to the prayers of His people.

So the ground of Paul's boast is in the Lord  
(Verse 12).

*His boast is that he and his co-workers in the gospel have clear consciences, meaning they are fully confident, that they have acted rightly towards the church.*

Our society's misguided priority on the inner self could very easily cause us the misread what is being said here.

Paul's understanding of the conscience is something far more substantial than an inner voice or feeling that we should always listen to.

The apostle is well acquainted with our sinful condition and the capacity of our inner self to lead us into evil.

John MacArthur sheds some light on a biblical understanding of the conscience. He says, "*In order to work as God designed, the conscience must be informed to the highest moral and spiritual level and best standard which means submitting it to the Holy Spirit through God's Word.*"

If that is correct, and I believe it is, then Paul is talking here about the testimony of the Holy Spirit based on the written Word of God confirming his godly conduct toward the Corinthians.

*He says that conduct was that of 'simplicity and godly sincerity'.*

Nothing flashy and nothing hidden just straight forward truth.

He specifically contrasts his conduct with what the ESV translates as 'earthly wisdom'.

The NAS goes with the more literal "fleshly wisdom".

That is conduct governed by the sin nature.

This is conduct that uses manipulation, self-promotion, self-justification, desires to keep things hidden, and may also include outright lying.

In the Roman world there was a whole class of education called rhetoric devoted to teaching people how to convince other people of something.

In this line of thinking the truth of what is argued is secondary to a person's ability to convince others that the argument is true.

Christian wisdom has that the other way around. The truth is far more important than a person's ability to convince others of the argument.

[This is one of the things I love about the Bible. If the authors of the Bible were primarily concerned about the presentation they never would have written it like they did. Just take the disciples for example. How many times do those guys fail to believe? How many times do they look bad? Who makes up a story that makes themselves look bad? Do you know why it's like that? Because it's true. They weren't concerned with how they looked, they were concerned with being truthful and honouring God.]

That is what Christian wisdom is!

Let's all ask ourselves a very important question. Are we more concerned about how we look and what people think of us than we are with what is true and God honouring?

'Earthly wisdom', thinking governed by the sinful nature, robs us of the freedom and joy of the gospel.

We end up being fake and eventually that will catch up with us.

The Good News of the gospel is that we can rest in the fact that Jesus has died in our place to make us right with God and through the same power that raised Jesus from the dead we too are raised to new life in Him.

We do not need to hide our sin, nor ought we to celebrate it, and neither do we stay in it.

Instead we rest in the power of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus.

[We don't need to worry about false accusations, we don't need to worry about things we cannot control, we do not need to try and manipulate people, put on a show, or any other tactic that people use for self-advancement. We need only be concerned about godly faithfulness and trust the Lord with the rest. True we may look foolish in the eyes of unbelievers, but we will be wise in the eyes of our Saviour. In addition to resting in the power and grace of God we also see in these verses that...]

## **Point #2 – Wise Christians want to help people understand truth. (Verse 13)**

The goal of the believer is not to confound people so that he/she may appear to be of high intelligence, the goal of the believer ought to be to speak in a way that avoids confusion as much as possible.

*In verse 13 the apostle gives some evidence to back up the witness of his conscience that he and his fellow workers have acted and are acting towards the Corinthians in 'simplicity and godly sincerity'. (Verse 13-14a)*

As Paul is writing this letter he wants to use words and phrases that his readers will get.

This is another amazing thing about the Bible.

By the time the New Testament is written the vast majority of the Mediterranean world could speak Greek.

Not classical Greek or Latin but Koine Greek.

Koine means common. In other words God in His kindness chose to give His written word in a language that most of the first hearers of the gospel could understand.

In addition to using accessible language Paul is also likely saying that he writes in a straightforward manner.

There is no hidden meaning.

The Bible is not written in some kind of code as some might say.

The plain meaning of the text is the meaning of the text.

When someone goes through complicated arguments to convince people that the text doesn't really mean what it says or that we don't have to listen to the text you can be sure that such a person is using worldly wisdom.

While we may gain deeper insight into biblical passages no interpretation can contradict the basic meaning of a passage because written so that people could understand it.

If you know the resume of the apostle then you know he was a highly educated man and he could have easily talked over everyone's head to portray himself as intellectually superior to everyone else.

Have you ever had that experience? Listening to someone who is so smart you have no idea what they are saying.

Something else that can happen is people can string together a bunch of fine sounding words and no one knows what they are talking about because what they said doesn't mean anything.

That is trendy these days among a number of Church leaders.

They want to say things in a way that makes them sound really deep and in a way that can be taken in all kinds of directions.

That is worldly wisdom, not Christian wisdom.

Paul's aim is not to sound smarter than everyone else, Paul's aim is to be understood rightly.

That is a glorious goal especially when we think about the subject matter.

Paul, like all the writers in the Scriptures is trying to tell people about how to know the infinite triune God of the universe who sent God the Son into the world to take on humanity and through His genuine humanity make human beings right with this incomprehensible God who is absolutely holy and just and does not leave a single mistake unpunished.

With that as his subject matter there is going to be some things that are difficult to understand, nevertheless he is striving to make these glorious things known to his readers.

That is a sign of tremendous wisdom.

[One of my favourite figures in church history is a man by the name of William Tyndale. He lived during a time where the Bible was not available in English and church leaders liked it that way. His goal was to translate the Bible into English so people could read it and understand it for themselves. Like the Apostle Paul, Tyndale gave his life towards that goal and while the world might look at that and think him a fool, he was incredibly wise according to a Christian worldview.]

If we are going to be wise as believers, and we should all desire that, then one of the things we need to aim for is clarity.

We should not confuse this with being anti-intellectual. This does not mean we never use big words, it means we explain them.

This does not mean we never think big thoughts or that our minds are never stretched beyond what they can handle.

It means that we strive to make the greatness of Who God is and What He has done known by speaking in way that people understand.

I can think of few greater things as a preacher then to say something of the truth of God's word that causes us to marvel at the majesty of the King of the Universe in a way that a small child can understand.

While I believe Paul primarily has talking about the things of God in mind here, this measure of Christian wisdom should extend to all of life.

If we are truly wise we will be people who strive to say what we mean and mean what we say.

If you find yourself upset with your husband, wife, children, family, co-workers or anything else because they took you at your word and you thought they should know better because you really meant the opposite, then you are being unwise.

This does not mean being unnecessarily rude, cold hearted, or mean.

What does the Bible say? It says we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

[It is not the way of the Christian to talk in mysterious ways. False religion and philosophy does that. It all sounds very spiritual and proponents of such views will be quick to point out their credentials and tell you how smart they are, but it is foolishness. Christianity is not like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall, no it is truth founded on the immovable foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. That brings us to one more lesson concerning Christian wisdom. Wise believers rest in the power and grace of God, wise believers want to help people understand truth, and thirdly...]

**Point #3 – Wise Christians look to the future glory of Jesus. (Verse 14)**

Believers ought to act and speak in such a way that what we say and do now will be a reason to praise the LORD when He comes.

*The apostle returns to boasting in the last part of verse 14 and just like in verse 12 his ground for boasting is in the LORD. (Verse 14).*

When we are bragging about ourselves that is always bad, but when we are bragging about the Lord that is always good.

In fact, if we are truly saved we will spend eternity doing that.

Why has Paul behaved towards these believers in ‘simplicity and godly sincerity’?

Why does he strive to write to them in a way that they will understand?

So that there will be boasting on the ‘day of our Lord Jesus’.

Generally speaking when we see the phrase ‘Day of the Lord’ in the Bible it refers to the big picture concerning the end of all things.

It includes Jesus coming, the bodily resurrection of every Christian throughout every age, the defeat of every power and authority opposed to God, the judgement of unbelievers, the passing away of this current creation, and the remaking of the heavens and the earth free from sin with the Triune God visibly dwelling on the earth with His people forever.

*Paul is saying that he and his fellow gospel workers act the way they do towards the Corinthians so that on that day they will boast of him and he will boast of them.*

Why? Well, let’s think about this for a second.

Why did Paul end up in Corinth preaching the gospel?

Because Jesus saved him and appointed him to preach the gospel and directed his steps to that city.

That’s a miracle. That is the work of Christ and the Corinthian believers will be able to praise Jesus for doing that forever.

No let’s ask, why were the simple ways and plain speech of the apostle effective?

Because the Holy Spirit for the sake of bringing Jesus glory opened the hearts and minds of the people to believe.

Another miracle.

*On the day of Jesus the Corinthian’s boast will be, ‘Praise the Lord for the work He has done through the apostle. That’s why we are in heaven instead of hell.’*

On the day of Jesus the apostle's boast will be, "Praise the Lord for saving these people according to His power and grace."

That is where Paul has fixed his attention, on the future Praise of Jesus for all that He has done.

Why is that wise? Because that is something that will last forever and it will make every believer eternally happy.

[Remember Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a man finding a treasure in a field in Mark 13. Anyone remember what the man did? He went and sold all that he had to buy the field. From the outside looking in that seems like a foolish choice but that is only so if you do not see the treasure. If you see the treasure then it makes all the sense in the world.]

Worldly wisdom tells us to stay focused on the here and now, but the Christian knows better.

The Christian knows that true wisdom looks forward to the day when all that God is doing in and for His people today will be celebrated in the light of His glory forever.

How great will that be?

To praise God for you free from every ounce of pride and selfishness for the grace He has poured out on us all.

Nothing can compare to that and we would be wise to turn our attention to that glorious future.

### *How wise are we this morning?*

Are we people who are resting in the power and grace of God?

Are we people who want to help others understand the truth?

Are we people who are looking to the future glory of Jesus?

That is what Christian wisdom looks like.

May God in His mercy grant this kind of wisdom to us all and all the more as the Day of the LORD approaches.

Let's pray.