

Solomon's Choice.

by Edward Payson

God invites us to ask for wisdom and understanding, and promises to grant it to those who sincerely pray for it.

Topics: "Seeking Wisdom", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of seeking wisdom and understanding from God, drawing inspiration from Solomon's request for a wise heart. He emphasizes that God invites each person, especially the young, to ask for guidance and discernment, highlighting the choice between worldly desires and spiritual wisdom. Payson encourages parents to seek wisdom in raising their children and believers to pray for grace to honor God in their lives. He explains that God is pleased with those who humbly seek wisdom, as it reflects a desire for His glory and the well-being of others.

Transcript

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing."

1 Kings 3:10

the context we are informed that, soon after Solomon's coronation, the Lord appeared to him by night, and said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father, and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in; and thy servant is in the midst of a great people that cannot be numbered for multitude. Give thy servant, therefore, a wise and understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge so great a people?

And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches, nor the lives of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold I have done according to thy word; I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there shall be none like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

My friends, though our situation differs in many respects from that of Solomon, yet from this passage we may learn many interesting and important truths. We may learn from it, indeed, almost everything that is necessary to render us prosperous and happy, both with respect to this world and to that which is to come.

To illustrate and enforce some of the principal truths which it teaches, is our present design. I. The address which God made to Solomon when he said, ask what I shall give thee, he does in effect make to each of us, especially to the young.

It is true, the age of visions and revelations is past; God does not now speak to us with an audible voice, nor is it necessary that he should. The revelation which he has given us in his word, renders it needless. But the language in which he addresses us in his word is precisely similar to that in which he spoke to Solomon. By erecting a throne of grace in heaven, opening the way to it, inviting us to come to him with our requests, and promising to grant our petitions when they are agreeable to his will, he does in effect say to each of us, Ask what I shall give thee.

I have set before thee the blessing and the curse, the way of life and the way of death. On the one hand, I set before thee Christ and holiness and everlasting life; on the other, sin and the world and eternal death. Choose then which thou wilt have. Wilt thou have the pleasures of sin, or the pleasures of religion? Wilt thou have treasures on earth, or treasures in heaven. Wilt thou have the praise of men or the praise of God? Wilt thou have Christ, or wilt thou have the world?

To these questions of his Creator every man by his conduct returns a direct, unequivocal answer. If he pursues religion as the one thing needful, he practically replies, Lord, I choose religion; I choose thee for my portion, and Christ for my Saviour, and heaven for my rest. Give me but these, and I am satisfied. If, on the contrary, he devotes himself supremely to sinful or worldly pursuits, he no less directly replies, Lord I choose the world. I choose its pleasures as my happiness, its riches as my portion, its applause as my honor.

Give me them and I ask nothing more. I shall not trouble myself as to the consequences of this choice hereafter. Let me but be happy in this world. Others, if they please, may have the other world to themselves. II. Though we are not, like Solomon, kings; and therefore need not, as he did, qualifications requisite for that office; yet we all need spiritual wisdom and understanding, and may therefore all imitate his example in making our choice. For instance, the young may do this.

Every one may say, Lord thou hast given me an immortal soul, a soul which thou hast made, and for the loss of which thou hast taught me, that the gain of the whole world would be no compensation. But I know not what to do with it. I know not how to keep it, nor where it will be safe, but am in danger of losing it continually. I find myself in the midst of a sinful, seducing world, exposed to innumerable snares and temptations, surrounded by artful and insidious enemies who often assume the garb of friends, with many paths opening before me, each of which appears to be the path to happiness.

I am told that in this world scarcely any object appears in its true colors; but that good is often put for evil, and evil for good, darkness for light, and light for darkness. I am also told, and I begin already to find with truth, that I have a most deceitful heart, ever watching to betray me; that my understanding is blinded by sin, that I am inclined to evil, not to good; that my appetites and passions will unceasingly strive to lead me astray. Already have they begun to do it; already have I been guilty of many errors and mistakes.

I fear that I shall be guilty of more. O then, thou Father of spirits, thou Father of lights, give me, I beseech thee, a wise and understanding heart, that I may discern between good and evil, and have strength to avoid the one and pursue the other. O condescend to be my shepherd, the guide of my youth; lead me in the way that is everlasting. Every parent, also, has reason to adopt the prayer of Solomon. Everyone, who sustains this relation, may say, Lord, in addition to my own soul, thou hast confided to my care the souls of

my children, with an injunction to educate them for thee, and teach them the good and the right way.

But we have no wisdom nor skill, nor strength to do this. Our children have derived from us a corrupt nature which we know not how to subdue. They are exposed to the influence of bad examples, and many other evils, against which we know not how to guard them. Even we ourselves shall set before them a bad example, unless thy grace prevent. We are in danger of ruining them by too much indulgence, on the one hand, or too much strictness and severity on the other. When we look around us we find but few, even among the wise and good, who succeed in educating their children aright; how then can we hope to succeed, we who are like little children ourselves, and need every moment to be taught, and guided, and upheld by thee.

Give us then, O our heavenly Father, give us a wise and understanding heart, that we may know how to perform this great duty, and be preserved from the guilt of ruining the immortal souls committed to our care, and compelling thee to require their blood at our hands. Again, Professors of religion have reason to imitate the example of Solomon. By admitting us into thy church, O Lord, they may say, thou hast in a measure committed to our care the honor of thy religion, the success of thy cause.

If we display a wrong spirit, or conduct in a sinful or imprudent manner, thy religion will be despised, and thy great name blasphemed by many around us; we shall be as stumbling blocks in the path of life to occasion the destruction of our fellow creatures, perhaps of our nearest friends. This, O Lord, we are in continual danger of doing. We are exposed to dangers from within and from without, on the right hand and on the left. While we avoid one extreme, we are in danger of running into another.

When we aim to recommend religion by cheerfulness, we are in danger of falling into levity and vain conversation, and when we endeavor to avoid levity, we are liable to prejudice our friends against religion by gloominess and melancholy. Against these and innumerable other dangers, to which we are exposed, we have no skill or wisdom to guard. We know neither how to go out nor how to come in. Give thy servants therefore, O Lord, a wise and understanding heart, that we may adorn thy religion, and honor thy great name.

Give us that wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, full of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Make us what thou requirest us to be, wise as serpents and harmless as doves. I might proceed to show that ministers, magistrates, and indeed persons in every situation and relation of life, have abundant cause to pray frequently for a wise and understanding heart, that they may know how to perform the duties of their respective stations. As an encouragement for all to do this, I observe, III.

That God is pleased with those who make the choice and sincerely offer up the prayer of Solomon. Our text informs us that God was pleased with his conduct on this occasion, and since he is, yesterday, today, and forever, the same, he is pleased with all who imitate his example. He is pleased with their conduct, 1. Because it is the effect of his grace. We are told that the Lord rejoices in his works, and with reason does he rejoice in them; for they are all very good. If he rejoices in them he must, of course, be pleased with them.

But to induce persons to make the choice and offer up the prayer of Solomon, is always his work, the effect of his grace. It is one of those good and perfect gifts which come down from the Father of lights; for no man, who is not taught and influenced by the Spirit of God, will ever make this choice or sincerely utter this prayer. Men naturally choose and ask very different objects. Should God say to an impenitent sinner, Ask what I shall give thee, he would reply, --Lord, give me temporal prosperity, give me pleasures or

riches or honor; for these are the great objects which every sinner loves and desires, and in the acquisition of which his happiness consists.

When the Lord looketh down from heaven upon the children of men, he seeth that there are none that understand, none that even seek after God. Before a man can sincerely choose God for his portion, and prefer spiritual wisdom to all earthly objects, his natural views must therefore be changed; he must be taught to love and value the objects which he naturally despised, and to despise the objects which he supremely loved and pursued. In a word, he must become a new creature, and to create him anew is the work of God.

Since then God is pleased with all his works, and since this is his work, he must be pleased with the choice and with the prayer mentioned in our text. 2. He is pleased with it, because it indicates opinions and feelings similar to his own. In the opinion of Jehovah, spiritual wisdom, that wisdom of which the fear of God is the beginning, is the principal thing, the one thing needful to creatures situated as we are. In comparison with this he considers all temporal objects as worthless.

His language to us is, above all things get wisdom and with all thy gettings get understanding. Now those, who make the choice which Solomon made, estimate objects according to their real value; that is, according to their value in the estimation of God. Their opinions and feelings in this respect correspond with his; and since all beings are necessarily pleased with those who resemble them, God cannot but be pleased with those who resemble him in this respect. These opinions and feelings are a part of his own image, and he must love his own image and be pleased with it wherever it is seen. 3.

God is pleased with those who thus pray for a wise and understanding heart, because such prayers are indicative of humility. When Solomon said, I am as a little child, I know not how to go out, or how to come in, give thy servant therefore a wise and understanding heart, it evidently indicated a low or humble opinion of his own qualifications, and a deep conviction of his need of divine illumination. Similar language indicates similar feelings in all who adopt it. It indicates that they are not too proud to be taught, that they possess what our Saviour calls the temper of a little child.

Now no temper so well becomes such creatures as we are; no temper is so pleasing to God to no temper does he make so many precious promises as this. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

These promises are sufficient proofs that God is pleased with humility, and since the language of our text indicates humility, God cannot but be pleased with all who sincerely adopt it. 4. God is pleased with such characters, because their conduct evinces that they are actuated by a benevolent concern for his glory and for the happiness of their fellow creatures. It is evident that Solomon in our text was actuated by such a temper, and not by a selfish regard to his own interests.

He does not say, give me wisdom and understanding that I may have the praise of it, that my fame may be extended, but that I may discern between good and evil, and know how to rule this thy great people. He knew, as he observes in the context, that God had placed him on the throne. He therefore feared that if he should prove incompetent to the duties of this station, God who called him to it would be dishonored. He feared that the mistakes and faults of the servant would reflect disgrace upon the master who employed

him.

He also knew that the happiness of his people depended much upon his own qualifications for government. It was a regard for the honor of God, and for the happiness of his people, therefore, rather than for his own sake, that he wished for wisdom and understanding. A similar disposition actuates those who sincerely imitate the conduct of Solomon at the present day. When the young pray for wisdom to guide them in the journey of life, the parent for assistance in educating his children, the professor for grace to adorn his profession, and the magistrate or minister for necessary qualifications, it is not so much for their own sakes as for the sake of others.

It is that they may be enabled to honor God and do good to their fellow creatures by a faithful performance of their respective duties. It is true that many selfish, unhallowed desires may, and often do, intrude on such occasions; but still the prevailing governing disposition is such as has been described. Now this is a disposition exceedingly pleasing to God, whose name and whose nature is love, and who requires us to exercise that charity which seeketh not her own. Once more; God is pleased with those who imitate the example of Solomon, because it actually and greatly tends to promote his glory.

This it does in two ways. In the first place, by praying to him for wisdom, we do in effect profess a belief that he exists, that he is a prayer hearing God; and, especially, that he is the only wise God, the Father of lights, the author and giver of every good and perfect gift. As we honor a man, when we apply to him for counsel and advice in difficult cases, so we honor God, when we apply to him for wisdom and grace. In the second place, by confessing that we are as little children, --ignorant, blind, and helpless, and praying for a wise and understanding heart, we do in effect give God the glory of all that we are enabled to do in his service, or for the happiness of our fellow creatures.

Our language is, not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, who are foolish and ignorant, but unto thee, who art the author of all wisdom and goodness, be the glory of everything which we are enabled to perform. When we read of the wisdom of Solomon in connection with our text, we are led to admire not Solomon, but him who first taught him to pray for wisdom, and then gave him all that he possessed. When St. Paul says, by the grace of God I am what I am, he evidently turns away the attention of his admirers from himself to God, and refers to his grace the glory of all he did and suffered in the cause of Christ.

So when persons at the present day confess that they have no wisdom or goodness of their own, and pray that God would give them a wise and understanding heart, they give him the whole glory of all the wisdom and understanding which they afterwards exhibit through life. Now since God's glory is exceedingly dear to him, and since this conduct thus tends to promote his glory, he must evidently be pleased with those who imitate it. As a farther inducement to imitate the example of Solomon; I observe, IV.

That all who make his choice, and adopt his prayer, shall certainly be favored with a wise and understanding heart. That Solomon received this gift you need not be told. Equally certain is it that all who imitate him shall receive it in such a degree, as their situation and circumstances require. This is evident, in the first place, from the fact already adverted to, that it is God who by his grace inclines them to make this choice. It is he alone who convinces us of our natural blindness and ignorance, and of our need of divine illumination.

It is he who teaches us to estimate objects according to their real worth, and to choose spiritual wisdom in preference to all earthly objects. It is he who opens the way to the throne of grace, and gives us all the graces which are necessary to enable us to pray acceptably. Surely; then, he will not after all this refuse to

bear the prayers which he has himself taught us to make. He cannot but gratify the desires which he has himself inspired. We know not, says the apostle, what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God. That God will gratify the desires of those who thus pray for wisdom, is farther evident from his express promises. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. If thou cry after knowledge and lift up thy voice for understanding, if thou seek her as silver and search for her as for hid treasures then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, and find the knowledge of God.

In a word, If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Once more; as a farther inducement to make the choice of Solomon, I observe, that this is the surest way of obtaining a competent share of the good things of the present life. Because thou hast asked this thing, said God to Solomon, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches, nor the life of thine enemies, behold I have done according to thy words; and have also given thee what thou hast not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days.

In a similar manner Christ promises to reward similar conduct in his disciples. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. In this, as in other respects, it is true that he who loseth his life for Christ's sake shall save it; that is, he who from a principle of supreme love to Christ and his religion neither desires nor seeks for riches and honor, shall receive as large a portion of them, as an infinitely wise Father sees it best for him to possess. IMPROVEMENT.

Is it true, as we have asserted, that God does in effect say to every person present, or at least to every young person, Ask what I shall give thee? It becomes us all then to inquire what reply we are making to this address. Say then, my hearers, what are you asking God to give you? Some of you, I fear, do not ask anything of him. Prayer is a duty to which you are almost or altogether strangers. But still your conduct has a language, and what does it say? What is the object of your prevailing desire and pursuit?

What would you ask for, if you should pray and ask for that which you uniformly love and desire? If we may judge from the conduct of a large proportion of this assembly, they would be far from adopting the language of Solomon. Many of the young would say, Lord, let us be admired and beloved for wit, beauty, dress, accomplishments. Let our days be filled up with a round of diversions and amusements. Let us live a long life of ease, gaiety and worldly pleasure, and when old age comes, if there be any such thing as conversion, let us be converted, and taken to heaven.

Others would say, --Lord, give us wealth with all the blessings it bestows. Let us outstrip all our rivals in the acquisition of property, and excel them in the elegance of our habitations, our dress, our equipage; while the prayer of a third class would be, --Lord, grant us honor and distinction. Raise us to an elevated rank in society, and let those, who are now our equals, bow down to us. In short, if we may judge from the conduct of many of you, long life, pleasure, riches and honor, the very things which Solomon did not ask, would be the favors for which you would petition, and for the sake of which you would be willing to renounce the gift of a wise and understanding heart.

Now if this be the case, you can surely have no reason to wonder or complain, if God should take you at your word. He has put a price into your hands to get wisdom; but like the fool you have no heart to it. He

has told you that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come; but you will not believe him. You have, therefore, no promise for this life or the next; and if, in the other world, you should find yourselves in the wretched situation of the rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and, like him, beg for a drop of water to mitigate your anguish, God may justly say to you, as Abraham did to him, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.

Thou didst choose the world for thy portion, and thou hast had it. Christians, on the contrary, had all their evil things in the other world; but now they are comforted and ye are tormented. But if any of you are conscious that you have made the choice, and that you are daily uttering the prayer of Solomon, this subject is to you full of consolation and encouragement. God is pleased with your choice. He is pleased with those who have made it, he is pleased whenever you approach him in prayer with the language of Solomon on your lips.

You have not perhaps been aware how many graces you were exercising, how much you were honoring and pleasing God; while, lying in the dust, ashamed and broken hearted before him, you have said, --Lord, I am ignorant, weak and helpless, as a little child, entirely unfit for the situation in which thou hast placed me, and ignorant how to go out or come in as I ought. Give me therefore, O God, a wise and understanding heart, that I may know my duty and practice it by glorifying thee, and promoting the happiness of my fellow creatures.

You did not realize, perhaps, while saying this, as you have often done, to God, you were exercising faith, humility and benevolence, and promoting the glory of God. Yet all this you were doing; all this you will do, whenever you sincerely repeat this language. It will please the Lord whenever you ask this thing, and the more frequently and fervently you ask it, the more will he be pleased. Nor shall you ask in vain. Your prayer shall be answered by the bestowal of increasing measures of knowledge and grace; and the less you think of and desire temporal blessings, the more certainly will God bestow them upon you in such a degree as your present and future happiness requires. Pray then without ceasing, and be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

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