

A.W. Tozer:

â€œThe Hebrew Doctrine of Wisdomâ€•

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In the Book of Proverbs, the eighth chapter, verse 12 says, I wisdom, I wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions. Verse 17, I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Still wisdom is talking, and says, the Lord Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of His way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was, I brought forth. While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there. When he established the clouds above: When He gave to the sea His decree, verse 30, then I was by Him as was one brought up with Him. And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.

You cannot in the reading of this, if youâ€™re a student of the Bible, you cannot miss the similarity with the first chapter of John here. Hear instruction and be wise and refuse not, O ye children. For blessed are they that keep my ways. Blessed is the man that heareth me watching daily at my gates and waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso find me findeth life, and shall obtain the favor of Jehovah. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death. Thatâ€™s an Old Testament passage.

In the New Testament, we find this, 1 Corinthians 1:22 and 24, For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks, foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Colossians 2:2,3, That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Thereâ€™s love, understanding, mystery, wisdom and knowledge all wrapped together there.

Well, I will quote more Scripture, and I will read a little passage from the Old Testament apocryphal book, the Wisdom of Solomon after a while. Not that it is inspired, in the sense that canon of Scripture is inspired, but that it does represent the beliefs of men who lived before the time of Christ, Hebrews, students of the Word.

Now I am to deal with the Hebrew doctrine of eternal wisdom particularly as it relates to Jesus Christ our Lord. The Hebrews believe, and you can take only what Iâ€™ve read already here tonight and thereâ€™s much more. Because you will find this taught in Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the prophets. The Hebrews believed that there was an ancient, uncreated afflatus, a breath, and that it was variously thought of. Sometimes it was thought of apart from God. Sometimes it was thought of as being God. Sometimes it was thought of as being brought into being and other times it was thought of as bringing all things into being. And in this, it is very close to John 1 where it says, strangely says; Have you ever thought how strange this is? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. There, John thinks of the Word as being with God in one breath, and being God in the next breath. So, itâ€™s the same with this doctrine of wisdom as found in the Scriptures. It is considered to be the womb out of which all created things were born.

Let me read a little of what they thought about this doctrine back in the days about the time of our Lord, a little before and a little after; oh, 130 years before Ecclesiastes was written. And it was a translation from something that had been written two generations before. So, that would take us back maybe 200 or 250 years before Christ, but this is a little later. It says this about this wisdom. Now, Solomon didnâ€™t write this, but it represents the teachings, the beliefs of the Jewish teachers.

And it says, wisdom is the worker of all things; for in her is an understanding spirit, holy, one only, manifold subtil, not subtle, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subjected to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be hindered, ready to do good, kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, a pure and most subtil spirit. For wisdom is more moving than any motion, and she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness, for she is the breadth of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. Therefore, can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the Everlasting Light, the Unspotted Mirror of the power of God, and the Image of His goodness. And being one, she can do all things and maketh all things new. And in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and Prophet, God and prophets; for she is more

beautiful than the sun and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night, but vice cannot prevail against wisdom.

Now, I don't quote this because I think that it's inspired even in the sense that the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are inspired. I quoted as I might quote Spurgeon, or Ironside, or Augustine, or anybody, who while they were not Bible writers, nevertheless, were keen students of what the Bible wrote, and therefore can be trustworthy teachers of what the Bible teaches.

Now, that is the belief that the ancients had about this. And here's a strange thing. It is this wisdom, this I, wisdom dwell with prudence. I was with God. I was brought up before Him. And when He laid the foundations, I was there. And John says, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. And He is in the bosom of the Father and He's revealed unto us. The language is the same you see. You'll find that Old Testament and the New Testament staying close together there. And then the Scriptures teach, and the fathers believed, that this Spirit that they talk about here, this, this, this Spirit which is called the breath of the power of God, the pure influence, flowing from the glory of the Almighty. This that is the brightness of the Everlasting Light. The Unspotted Mirror of the power of God and the Image of His goodness, that this is Christ; that Christ is the wisdom of the Old Testament. Sophia, they called Him in mystical days.

But this is what the fathers believed, many of them believed, and I think it was pretty generally believed. And so when John wrote, in the beginning was the Word, he was not identifying Christianity with Greek thought. You see, because the word *elogious* is Greek. The liberals claim that when John wrote the Gospel of John, he was under the influence of Plato, that he was being, and early Christianity was being strongly influenced by the Greek doctrine of the Logos, the thought and expression of God, for one word will not take it, thought and expression of God. And therefore, they've tried to tie Christianity in with Greek thought. And they said, you cannot trust, you cannot trust Paul. You cannot trust those writers that identify Christianity with Greek thought. You've got to go to the Gospels. Take the gospel, Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Jesus and go back to Jesus. That was the cry a generation ago, back to Jesus, which meant back to the simple teachings of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, the simple fact is, when John wrote this, John was not identifying Christianity with Greek thought, for there isn't one line anywhere in the New Testament that would allow us even to hint that John knew anything about Greek thought. John was a brother of James and a simple workman. And he didn't know about Greek thought. Palestine was an occupied country. And John was not a scholar. And he had not gone to Athens or studied somewhere as Paul had studied under Gamaliel. But he was identifying the doctrine of the Word with Old Testament doctrine. He was identifying Jesus Christ with Old Testament doctrine, the doctrine of the Creating Word, for that is not a Greek thought; that antedates Greek thought by hundreds of years.

You take the Book of Genesis for instance, in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God called the light, day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the heavens and it was so. And God called the firmament, heaven. And God said, that the waters under the heaven be gathered together, and it was so. And God called the dry land, earth, and it was good. And God said, let the earth bring forth, and it was so. And all through this, it was the Creating Voice of God. It was that Greek *elogious*, pronounce it as you please. I was taught to pronounce it *logos*. They call it *logos* I think now.

But this ancient Word that said, let there be light and there was light. Let the earth bring forth and it brought forth. And the Scripture says that it is through the Word He commanded and it stood forth. He spoke and it was done. It was the commanding voice of God that brought things into being. And it is written again that He upholds all things by the Word of His power. It is the speaking voice of God in His universe that holds things together, my friends. It is in Him all things are held together, not by adhesive, or by law, but they're held together by the voice of God.

Is this awful dull? No? To me, this is just wonderful, but I don't know. I guess you have to preach about Sputnik to get anybody to hear. Maybe after I'm through with this series I'll preach about what the Bible teaches about Sputniks. And when I do that, I'll just be as dumb as all the other preachers that are preaching about Sputnik. They don't know anything about it either, only they know that's the way to get people interested. And I'm so naive and stupid that I think God's people ought to be interested in what I'm preaching now. I hope they, a few of them will be anyhow.

Well, I say that John was identifying the, Jesus Christ with the old Hebrew doctrine of the Creating Wisdom; the

Spoken Word, the Creating Voice created all things; and not with Greek thoughts at all. Now, the church fathers believed this. And they saw in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of this ancient afflatus, this brightness of the Everlasting Light, this unspotted mirror of power of God, this image of His goodness, this that maketh all things. And in all ages entering into holy souls, she makes the friends of God and prophets.

Now what was it that entered into holy souls and made them prophets? Itâ€™s written that it was the Spirit that did it. It was the Spirit and the Spirit of Christ speaking in the book of Psalms, testifies, and Davidâ€™s, the Spirit is speaking in David. He makes David sometimes sound like the Messiah, so that itâ€™s the voice of the Messiah speaking. My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me? Well, that was David writing, but it was the Messiah, the Spirit of the Messiah, the Ancient Wisdom of God, the Word, that was speaking in the man David.

And so, it says that entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. Then you come to this, for after this cometh night, says the Holy Ghost, says this man, but vice shall not prevail against wisdom. Doesnâ€™t that remind you of that passage that says that the light dwelleth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. And if youâ€™re a student of other versions you know, that what he said there was the darkness lays not hold of it, or the darkness does not rise up and prevail against it. The darkness cannot prevail against the light. And so we identify the Hebrew doctrine of the ancient and eternal wisdom with the New Testament.

Now Paul taught this. And Paul distinguished it sharply. He distinguished Greek thought from Hebrew doctrine. The other apostles wouldnâ€™t have known how to do that. But St. Paul did because he was a learned man and he had studied Greek philosophy, but the other gentleman hadnâ€™t. And so, they were forced just to stay by the text. But Paul could talk about Greek thoughts. So, Paul said this, for the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks, foolishness, but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. And he said, a little further down in that same chapter, first chapter of 1 Corinthians, that Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And he distinguished sharply in those first two chapters, Greek thought from the Hebrew doctrine of the Messiah. And he said, when I came unto you, I came not with words of manâ€™s wisdom. You will remember that in the second chapter of 1 Corinthians. He said, I didnâ€™t come preaching unto you the speech of wisdom, excellence of speech. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ. And I was among you in weakness and fear and much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of manâ€™s wisdom.

There he was writing to Corinthians and Corinth was a learned city and the city of a great many philosophers. And this man was deliberately inciting here he got in past their guard. He was giving it to them where it hurt. And he said, this is the demonstration of the Spirit and power that weâ€™re preaching. For in order that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men.

Always remember my friends, whenever we begin to equate Christianity with any current philosophy, or any ancient and honorable philosophy, it loses its power immediately. As soon as we begin to equate Christianity or show how that it can be made to fit into any of the doctrines of the fiery store of the Greeks and the Romans. Just as soon as we do that, we, it loses its power, Paul refused to do it. Paul distinguishes the doctrine of Christ, the wisdom of God, from the doctrine of the Greek doctrine of the Logos, the Word, the Wisdom of the Word, they got pretty close to it. Sometimes those old Greeks, and I saw in His magazine just this week, this came this last week, and I saw an article there about Hinduism. And the brother said, there whatâ€™s usually dangerous to say, these times, that the old Hindus sometimes managed to get awfully close to truth. And they said, some very noble and wonderful things. Iâ€™ve been saying that for a generation now, that not only the Hindus, but the Buddhists, and the you know, the men who wrote the laws of Manu and the Egyptian Hotep. And many of the others were very close to truth.

And Iâ€™ve been thinking about writing an article about Marcus Aurelius and show him how Mark Aurelius an unredeemed Roman was a better man than 99% of us Christians, and he had no redemption at all, and we have redemption. Thatâ€™s an amazing thing, Brethren. And it proves to me how completely down, how down our Christianity is, how weak it is, how meaningless it is, how, how undistinguished and insignificant it is. When the whole power of God, the whole wisdom of God as it came down and took incarnation and went to a cross, canâ€™t produce men as good as this stoic philosophy produced when it produced Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves before God Almighty and we ought to lie all night between the door and the altar, and repent and grieve before our God that weâ€™re so unlike Christ, and that thereâ€™s so little spirituality, and so little godliness in us. That wasnâ€™t part of the sermon, but I couldnâ€™t help but say it.

Now, Paul, I say, taught that, that the doctrine of Jesus Christ, incarnated idea, the incarnated Word, the incarnated Wisdom, was Hebrew and not Greek. And he said, I reject all your Greek ideas, and I give you Jesus Christ and Him crucified the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of the ancient Hebrew doctrine of the internal wisdom out of which, out of whose womb came all things and that is worth more than jewels and silver.

Now, I have read you some from the book of Proverbs. Now I want to read a little from the book of Proverbs again. This time from the ninth chapter. Wisdom has builded her house. She has hewn out her seven pillars. She has killed her beasts. She has mingled her wine. She also has furnished her table. She has sent forth her maiden. She crieth upon the highest places of the city. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither. As for him that wanteth understanding, she said to him, come eat of my bread and drink of my wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish and live and go in the way of understanding.

Now, I read you a passage in the New Testament. Jesus answered and spake unto them by parables and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and send forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding. Tell them which are bidden, behold, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings are killed and all things are ready. Come unto the marriage. Almost word for word from the book of Proverbs. So that the Lord Jesus Christ literally was the incarnation and the fulfillment of this voice of wisdom that cried out to the sons of men.

That my brethren is not only the Lord and Head of the church. He is that, but that's not all He is. He's not only the coming King of Israel and King of the world. He is that, but that's not all He is. He's also the Enlightener and the Illuminator and the Quickener and the Anointer. Somebody said that there is no better commentary on the Scriptures than a good hymn book. I think they're right. And I think that anybody will, that'll borrow them, you can't borrow them. You just can't. I'll try to find you one. But I won't lend you mine because my friends are good bookkeepers. And I've gotta have this, but I think that the man, was it Watts and Wesley just to mention two, were better commentators than the fundamentalist writers that have written over the last half century. And if you will get their hymns and read them and study them, you know. They didn't stick a lot of stuff in to fill space the way they do now, to make it rhyme. Everything was thought out carefully and set down and cut like jewels. At least, all that's been saved for us it is so, that it's commentary.

I have at home a book sent me by Leonard Ravenhill from England. It's a book of I would suppose 300 pages, quite old, leather bound, and the leather is getting old and cracked, but it is this. It is Charles Wesley's commentary on the Scriptures done into hymns. Not the whole scriptures, but the salient passages of Scripture down from the beginning Genesis 1 on down through to Malachi. All the outstanding passages of Scriptures instead of preaching a sermon on them, he wrote a hymn on them. Why, you'll get more information and more light by reading it than you do in all of this so called commentary business.

And then He is, I say, our Enlightener. I got off onto those hymns by starting to say this, that when Isaac Watts said, the Lord pours eyesight on the blind. Incidentally, he didn't say that John Wesley added that and made him say it. The Lord pours eyesight on the blind. Now there's what I, can't you think of that wonderful thing? Can't you think of a man sitting over there blind from birth. And here comes someone with a vessel filled with a fine liquid, he just pours it on his temple and it runs down onto his eyes. He shakes his head twice and says, glory to God I can see. God pours eyesight on the blind.

My Brethren, that's true. He's a bringer of eyesight. The colored brethren say he's a mind regulator. And He's all that. He's a regulator of the human mind. He's an Enlightenment. So, that when the Scripture says that they that sat in darkness saw a great light, and they that sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned upon them, they're quoting from the old Hebrew doctrine of the Eternal Wisdom, the Wisdom that created all things, that which was God and that which was with God, and that out of which came all things that are. That which had all the attributes of Deity. Have you noticed how they make wisdom to have all the attributes of God, or I don't say all, but so many of them that you couldn't give them to anybody else? Listen, an understanding spirit, holy, one only, one only. There you have the famous Hebrew doctrine, hear O God, hear O Israel, the LORD thy God is one Lord, and which cannot be hindered. There's His sovereignty. And having all power, there is His omnipotence. Overseeing all things, there's His omniscience. And going through all understanding, there's His all knowledge. Pure, there's His holiness. And, it is the breadth of the power of God and influence, pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. For the brightness of the Everlasting Light, she is on the unspotted mirror of the power of God in the image of His goodness.

Who else can you talk about there? You can't put the Virgin Mary in there. You can't put Paul in there. You can't put David in there. They weren't describing David. They were describing none other than their Messiah, who was born of the Virgin Mary, to suffer under Pontius Pilate, and arise after His suffering from the dead and take His seat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He is an Illuminator it seems to me, like the Enlightener of the mind, he is an Illuminator of the heart. He is an Anointer that pours eyesight on the blind, and we don't know it.

Now, Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9, let's look at it a minute here. Paul prayed in Colossians, a little prayer and He prayed it for those Christians. And he said, for this cause we also since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Now, what would wisdom and spiritual understanding make out of a man? If a man was filled with wisdom and spiritual understanding, would he write poetry? I hope not. I hope not. There's too much of it now. Too much of it now. I get too much of it already. What does he do? What does he do? Walk around in a brown study and pull loose from the world and hide in a cloister or in an ivory tower? No, no, what's the purpose? What's the purpose of this baptism of the ancient wisdom of God into the heart of a man? Well, the old wisdom man said was to make a man a friend of God. But Paul said, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God and strengthened with all might according to His glorious power and to all patience and long suffering with joyfulness. It had this practical meaning.

This that I'm preaching to you tonight, is not something that once or twice a year you take out as you take out one of Mozart's little pieces of chamber music and play it for a friend. This is not something like that at all. It's as practical and hard and sound, and you can gear into it and it means something. It means something to the whole church of Christ. If we only saw this and understood it. And it says in Ecclesiastes, which is older than the wisdom book I read from. It says into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter. Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul. And he says that this is poured out. This is poured out upon men. And she's pure, and she won't come upon any of this, this wisdom won't come upon any other. But she will not dwell in the body that's subject to sin. The inner heart and the outer body have to be clean. We have to be right inwardly and outwardly before we can have this, this afflatus, this anointing that Paul prayed the Galatians might have.

Now, there's this little poem, I'm just about finished for tonight. So, really, this is introductory. And this is the hard, this was the grubbing out, the laying the foundation. But we're going on next week. But here's a little poem and I don't know where I got it. It's got only four lines, which is in its favor, three better and two still better. But there are four here. It says this, wisdom and goodness are twin born, one heart must hold both sisters never seen apart, never seen apart. Wisdom and goodness are Siamese twin sisters and you'll never see them apart. And if you're going to have wisdom in your heart, you've got to take the other sister along. And the other sister is goodness. Wisdom and goodness are twin-born. One heart must hold both sisters and they're never seen apart. I don't know who wrote it. It's not very good poetry, but it's wonderful theology, that when the Lord redeems man and saves him, He takes him out and not only that he might go to heaven at last and escape hell. This frightful effort to get across that bridge and escape hell, it would be funny if it wasn't so tragic. But that isn't the purpose of God in redemption, to save us from hell. The purpose of God in redemption is to save us unto heaven. It is to save us unto something not from something; although to save us unto, He's got to save us from.

And so we are saved. We're saved from sin, but that's the negative side. We're saved unto holiness. We're saved from hell, but we're saved unto Heaven. We're saved from the devil, but we're saved unto Christ. And that's the teaching of the Scriptures that we Christians, we Christians are followers of One who came to the world and claimed to be the fulfillment of all the ancient teachings of prophet and sage and seer, and men who walked with God. And we are followers of One who claimed that He was with the Father in the beginning, and that out from His bosom there flowed all things, that He was the fountain out of which came all wisdom, all knowledge, all light. He had no hesitation in saying I'm the Light of the world. He has no hesitation in saying Wisdom said when you meant some prophet had spoken. He said wisdom said. Do you remember that? Jesus used that word, wisdom said so and so. And he quoted it from, He had no hesitation in saying you that look on me, you're seeing that ancient afflatus, that ancient Breath of God, that Ancient Word. In the beginning was the Word.

I don't know what this does to you. But this is wonderful for me. If any of you are students in colleges where the professors don't believe in Jesus Christ and you're ashamed to speak up for Him, you ought to be

deeply ashamed of yourself. Because that poor man is ignorant. He may be a PhD, but he's ignorant. He doesn't know that Ancient Wisdom, which was with the Father, and which stood up before the world was, he doesn't know Him. But you know Him and you've been introduced to Him by incarnation, by atonement, by resurrection, by the new birth you know that Ancient Wisdom.

And as Spurgeon said, let a man, let a man build himself a house on the hillside under the shadow of Calvary and he would be wiser than the Seven Sages of Antiquity. He's perfectly right. And yet some of you are ashamed. You hide away and you try to try to keep covered up that you're an evangelical. Brother, I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not going to stand up before Karl Barth and Albert Schweitzer and all that gang and say, now I'm a poor little dumb evangelical. Please forgive me. I won't say it at all, because there's no reason for apology. The only thing we have to apologize for is our sin.

When we've got rid of our sin and the Lord has taken our sin away, we are as wise as the angels, and as discreet and as knowing as the seraphs before the throne; for we have an afflatus of that wisdom. It won't teach you mathematics. It won't teach science. It won't teach you chemistry. It won't teach you English literature. But it will teach you something vaster and wider and deeper and grander and more wonderful. It will baptize you into that Light, that wonderful Light.

I just can't get enough of this what the old man said. He said this is the breath of the power of God, that pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. She is the brightness of the Everlasting Light, the Unspotted Mirror of the power of God, and the Image of His goodness. And in all ages entering into holy souls, she makes them friends of God and prophets. And I'd rather have a baptism of this in my spirit than to have the biggest church in the world and to be known widely around the world. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you? Yes, yes, yes. Seek not fame, seek not popularity, seek not publicity. Seek only to know Him, to know Him.

That's why Paul said, that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, that I might know Him. That's why Paul said that. That's why he pressed on and pressed on to know Him better and better. That's why because in doing it he was going back to the fountain of everything.

Do you know this Savior? Do you know Him tonight? Do you know Him? Remember this and I will read this passage and quit for the night. Do you know this? You don't find this out in school. In fact, I don't suppose anybody mentions it in school, anywhere, from kindergarten on up to the PhD, but here's what it says. Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father. Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son. And he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. Babes, children, humble people, meek people, they know! And the wise and the prudent and the learned and the proud and the arrogant think they know. Let's pray.