

Are We Wise Yet?

We've been studying what is called the wisdom literature of the Bible: the books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Solomon*. So its appropriate to ask, "Are We Wise Yet?" biblically wise that is. What does it mean to be wise? The word wisdom comes from a German word that means to see, or the way to proceed. Well that's pretty much what wisdom is all about isn't it? Being able to see our way on how to proceed in life. And that is the purpose of the wisdom books of the Bible, to show us how we should see this world and the way to live in it. We sometimes use the term worldview when talking about how people understand or make sense of this world we live in. So, what is the worldview of the wisdom literature of the Bible?

The wisdom books of the Bible do not present this world in exactly the same way. There emphases are different. In the book of Proverbs we have a more optimistic view of the world with much practical wisdom for how to make good decisions that will bless our lives and how to avoid a foolishness that leads to all kinds of problems and ultimately death. At the same time the books of Job and Ecclesiastes remind us that making good decisions doesn't always lead to blessing, at least not immediately. These books remind us that the world is much more complicated than that

and, more importantly, God is more complicated than that. Sometimes this world doesn't seem to make any sense to us at all. Evil seems to go unpunished, goodness unrewarded. At times, at least from our point of view, things just seem, as Ecclesiastes says, meaningless, all is vanity.

Yet, in spite of our inability to totally explain everything, all these books lay a foundation of faith and hope. They all teach that God is a good God. This world is given to us for our delight and joy, and though at times we cry out with the psalmist "How long O Lord will you forget me?" and "My God why have you forsaken me?" scripture always leads us back to faith that God is in control, that he is good and that he loves us. We take this worldview for granted, but it is in fact a radical worldview, profoundly different from the majority of people throughout the world and down through history. In the 8th Psalm, we find the basic elements of a biblical worldview. It provides a biblical mirror that reflects the truth about God, man and this world.

Whenever I go to a fair or a carnival, one of my favorite stops is the House of Mirrors. I think its fun to walk through the halls with everything distorted; big people become small, small become big. Its fun, that is its fun as long as you can get out! Imagine being trapped in a house of mirrors and being unable to get out! But that's how I feel

sometimes in this world. I feel I'm living in a house of mirrors, especially when I look through the mirrors of our world - the media. Television shows, newspapers and magazines, news reports, talk radio, media are all mirrors that shape and distort the reality of our world into what someone wants us to see. Like the carnival fun houses, they often make things that are small appear to be big and things that are big appear to be small. In the mirrors of our culture the foolish behavior of the famous is big and gets prime time coverage, while virtuous behavior is hardly noticed, rarely celebrated. Indeed, our culture isn't really certain what virtue is.

Everything gets distorted because people look through different mirrors and have different worldviews, different wisdom. My friend Robert Lee ministers in Denver and told me about a trio of visitors to his city one year. Denver hosted the national atheistic convention with guest speaker, Madalyn Murray O'Hair who told her audience there was no God. Later New Age enthusiast and film star Shirley MacLean came and said she was God, all of us were God. Then evangelist Billy Graham preached the good news that Jesus was God. Three different mirrors, three different ways to see world.

In Madelyn O’Hair’s atheistic mirror this world and all of us in it is a cosmic accident. The wisdom of atheism explains the vastness of the universe, the marvelous complexity of life with theories that refuse to acknowledge a Creator. Looking through Ms McLean’s New Age Mirror we see a very different picture. This vast universe is no accident, it is God. Man is only a part of the great oneness of all things. New Age wisdom tells us to not see ourselves as individual persons but instead to become one with the universe. How different is the wisdom of the word of God. Listen to the opening of Psalm 8. *O Lord Our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens.*

The wisdom of Psalm 8 helps us escape the house of mirrors around us. It proclaims some basic truths about God himself. The most basic truth about God is that there is a God. Further, God is a person and most importantly He is not us! I am a big fan of the Star Wars films. But with all due respect to my weird little friend Yoda, the force God is not.

Without biblical wisdom, seeing things through the biblical mirror, life gets terribly distorted. Like mirrors in a funhouse, things that should be small become too big; things that should be big are made entirely too small. In a world where there is no God, the world becomes

too big, too important. In a world with no God man becomes too big, too importance; in a world with no Word of God to guide us, the words of men become too big, too important.

At the same time, things that should be big become entirely too small. The wisdom of a world with no God teaches us that the “least of these” around us are too small to worry about: the poor, the weak, the elderly, the stranger, the unborn. Those who are no longer useful to society lose their value. In a world with no God people lose the value of having been “created in the image of God.” The only value left for them is: are they useful; are they beautiful; are they funny; are they smart; are they rich; etc.

Before we are too critical of such wisdom we should admit that if there is no God, such wisdom makes sense! And history is filled with philosophers who have made this very case. If we’re not created by God, then who is to say who should live or die? If there is no word from God then who is to say how we should live? If God is not Lord of these questions who will be, those who are in the majority?, who have the power?, who are the strongest?... yes! There’s no shortage in history of the horrors that plague godless societies.

Psalm 8 goes on to give us wisdom about the nature of our Universe, our World in verse 3. *When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have set in place.* If the atheist's mirror is right, that nature is the random, irrational product of blind chance, then there can be no true meaning, no rationality. Nature cannot be understood, so there is no reason to study it. But biblical wisdom shows us a world that is the rational creation of a personal God and encourages is to study it, explore it and understand it.

In fact, many students of the history of science have shown that modern science and technology developed first and flourished most in those cultures shaped by a biblical wisdom, a worldview that saw this world as God's creation. Almost without exception, the pioneers of modern science had biblical worldviews, biblical wisdom; scientists like Copernicus, Kepler, Gallileo, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Michael Faraday, all led to study and explore this world because they believed the truth of Psalm 8 about this world, that it was created by a good and rational God.

Galileo wrote "the world is the work and the Scriptures are the word of the same God." Francis Bacon, often called the father of modern science, echoed Galileo when he instructed his students to study

the Book of God's Word and the Book of God's Works. Kepler said, "The tongue of God and the finger of God cannot clash." Some 30 scientists, all considered the founders of major fields in science, were believers in God. Alfred Lord Whitehead, considered among history's greatest philosophers, stated it succinctly. "Christianity is the mother of science because of its insistence on the rationality of God."

On the other hand, the wisdom that comes by looking through a New Age mirror sees Nature as divine. Nature becomes the object of worship. Forests become more important than families, endangered species more important than unborn babies. At times this kind of wisdom can be just silly. Some time ago a lawsuit was brought to a California court suing the state on behalf of the trees that were being cut down in the state forests. The lawyer believed the trees deserved his legal representation. One can only imagine the class action potential for the grass in all the yards of California homes. Muggs Johnson, Clark's brother who lived in California, confirmed this story. But he added, the lawyer was from Texas!

The biblical wisdom of the Psalms sees this universe as the handiwork of God. *The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim his handiwork.* When we look at nature we see a reflection of the nature of God himself. Our response to nature is not unlike how we

should respond to God. When we experience “awe and wonder” before the vastness of this universe it instructs us of the awe and wonder we should have at the vastness of God. When we “tremble” before the devastating power of a mighty tornado, we learn something of how to tremble before the power of Almighty God. When we “delight” in a field of flowers or the brilliance of a rainbow, we see something of how we should delight in the beauty and splendor of God. When we are refreshed by cool breezes and summer rains we learn of the refreshment God’s presence is meant to give us.

Finally biblical wisdom gives us a vision of humanity. Psalm 8 says *What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.*

The psalmist exalts man and declares us responsible for the care of God’s creation. All things are placed under our feet not to rule as tyrants, or to exploit as opportunists, but to care for as stewards. God created the mysterious forces of nature but Man has been given the

responsibility to harness those forces for the good of others. God created the cycle of the seasons but man is responsible to plant, harvest and feed others. God created the principles of math and logic but man is responsible to discover those principles and apply them to help others. God filled his creation with beauty and man is given the blessing to recreate that beauty over and over in art and music for the joy of others. God created in all of us a sense of humor and man has the responsibility to laugh and to make others laugh too.

In the atheists' mirror, man is an animal governed by instincts. No appeal can be made to our spiritual nature because in the atheist world there is no spirit, only matter. In a world with no spirit man is no more than an animal. And in a world where humans are no more than animals, we soon lower standards for human behavior to the level of brute beasts. Experts today tell us it's unreasonable to expect young people to abstain from sex. Schools hand out condoms because they believe kids are governed more by their animal instincts than any spiritual standards. Indeed, they say advocating abstinence is irresponsible because everyone knows everyone is going to be sexually active. You can't expect anything different.

How much greater to look at humanity through the mirror of the Psalmist and see us as higher than the beasts, as glorious partners with God, created to reflect the character of our Creator. Wisdom that sees man as God's creation understands there are ultimately consequences for our behavior. Wisdom that believes there is a God to whom we must answer one day, instructs us to live more righteously now; wisdom that believes in a God who knows our every action and thought, makes us more aware of how we act and think; wisdom that believes in a God who created us and our world, leads us to live in our world not as godless animals or as little gods, but as children of God.

So, are we wise yet? I hope so. But as much as we try to be, we live in a house of mirrors, daily exposed to grossly distorted images of God, of our world, of us. And because of that, sometimes, too many times, our wisdom, our way of seeing things is not biblical. We start seeing things God tells us are small as BIG, we see things God tells us are BIG as small. How can we become wise? How can we develop and nurture the wisdom, the worldview of the Psalmist? We become wise when we view the world more through the mirror of God's Word, having our vision corrected by daily meditation upon it. As the Scripture says, "The Law of the Lord is perfect, making wise the simple."

Perhaps we should do more what the Psalmist did so often, meditate on the beauty of God's world. Enjoy it, give thanks to God for it; for its beauty and splendor. West Texans are especially gifted to do this. That may be the reason God created West Texans. No one appreciates a world filled with mountains, rivers, oceans and trees like those whose world has none of those things. And when we see God and our world and ourselves through the mirror of God's Word, then we will be wiser, we will honor God more, and we will more often praise God in the same way as the psalmist did saying:

O lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You have set your glory above the heavens

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers

The moon and stars which you have set in place

What is man that you are mindful of him?

Or the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

And crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hand

and put everything under his feet

All the flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,

all that swim the paths of the sea

O lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.