

a Bible Lesson from I CORINTHIANS 1:18-24:

ARE WE ETERNALLY WISE OR ETERNALLY FOOLISH?

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## I. INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS THE MEASURE OF BEING WISE?

Are we eternally wise or eternally foolish? Is to be wise the same thing by the world's standards as it means by GOD's Standards? Are we storing up in this life our everlasting future for Heaven or for Hell?

The prophet Isaiah declares in ISAIAH 5:21, "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!"<sup>1</sup> But The Apostle Paul declares in I CORINTHIANS 1:18-19, "For the preaching of The Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of GOD. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent!"<sup>2</sup>

Saint Cyprian says, "We have put on CHRIST, The Wisdom of GOD The Father?"<sup>3</sup> The fool answers in his darkened heart, because he is corrupted in abominable works, as in PSALM 14:1, "...There is no GOD...!"<sup>4</sup> But The Apostle Paul answers as in I CORINTHIANS 1:23-24, "But we preach CHRIST crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, 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!"<sup>5</sup>

## II. TO BE "FOOLISH" VERSUS TO BE "WISE"

To be "foolish," as Noah Webster says, is to be "void of understanding or sound judgment... Unwise; imprudent; acting without judgment or discretion in particular things. Proceeding from folly, or marked with folly; silly; vain; trifling." By GOD's Standards, "In Scripture, wicked; sinful; acting without regard to The Divine Law and Glory, or to one's own eternal happiness."<sup>6</sup>

But to be "wise" is to possess "knowledge; hence, having the power of discerning and judging correctly, or of discriminating between what is true and what is false; between what is fit and proper, and what is improper... Discrete and judicious in the use or applicatrion of knowledge; choosing laudable ends, and the best means to accomplish them... Godly; pious..."<sup>7</sup>

So as to being "foolish," Paul chastises The Church in GALATIANS 3:1 for departing from The Faith, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey The Truth, before whose eyes JESUS CHRIST hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"<sup>8</sup> But as to being "wise," The Apostle points men to The Word of

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<sup>1</sup> 1, KJV, ISAIAH 5:21.

<sup>2</sup> 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 1:18-19.

<sup>3</sup> 2, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, "Wisdom," p 688, 12<sup>th</sup> entry. "Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.421."

<sup>4</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 14:1.

<sup>5</sup> 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 1:23-24.

<sup>6</sup> 3, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary, entry "foolish," adjective, p FOO-FOO, # 1,2,3,5.

<sup>7</sup> 3, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary, entry "wise," adjective, p WIN-WIS to WIS-WIT, # 1,2,6.

<sup>8</sup> 1, KJV, GALATIANS 3:1.

GOD, and specifically to The Word of GOD Incarnate, in II TIMOTHY 3:15, “And that from a child thou hast known The Holy Scriptures, Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in CHRIST JESUS.”<sup>9</sup>

To be “foolish” is to turn away from and close our eyes to The Truth and Grace of GOD at The Cross of JESUS CHRIST. But to be “wise” is to embrace and cling to The truth and Grace of GOD in The Lord! For as Saint John declares in JOHN 1:14, having beheld Him with his own eyes, JESUS CHRIST is “...The Word [Who] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His Glory, The Glory as of The only Begotten of The Father,) full of Grace and Truth!”<sup>10</sup>

### III. A WISE WIDOW WHO KNEW SECURITY IS IN HEAVENLY THINGS

Recall the day when our Lord was sitting in The Jerusalem Temple with His Apostles, observing the people as they came to give to GOD’s House in MARK 12:41-44. Men and women of The Covenant came and went, giving their coins. But then there came a poor widow, who placed a mere two coins in the collection, which was all the money that she had in the world:

#### MARK 12:41-44

<sup>41</sup> And JESUS sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

<sup>42</sup> And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

<sup>43</sup> And he called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

<sup>44</sup> For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.<sup>11</sup>

Others cast in their tithes and free will offering gifts into The Temple treasury from their abundance. And so their gifts above their tithes were of little sacrifice to them. They gave up little from their abundance, and their was little they had to give up to place GOD and others in need ahead of themselves. But the widow gave a freewill offering for the work of The Kingdom of GOD to care for others from her need, giving all that she had out of her love for GOD and others!

As B. W. Johnson observes, here is “the exceedingly depressed and dependent condition of a poor man's widow... The expression is almost proverbial for one very badly off, and most unlikely to contribute anything to a charitable purpose.” The widow’s “two mites” were but “The smallest of Jewish coins, about the value of one-fifth of a cent....,” a mere “fourth part” of an English penny.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 1, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:15, “And that from a child thou hast known The Holy Scriptures, Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in CHRIST JESUS.”

<sup>10</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 1:14.

<sup>11</sup> 1, KJV, MARK 12:41-44.

<sup>12</sup> 4, B. W. Johnson’s People’s New Testament Commentary, Chapter XII, Verse 42, p 164.

But we learn here, that “The worth of a gift is to be determined, not by intrinsic value, but by what it costs the giver. The measure of that cost is what is left, not what is given. For the widow to give her mites was noble; for one well off to give “his mite” is contemptible. All that she had, all her living. Out of her want, out of her destitution, she has cast in all that (in cash) she possessed—her whole (present) means of subsistence. In love she devoted all of GOD, with strong Faith in His Providential Care!”<sup>13</sup>

Randy Alcorn observes here that “JESUS regarded the [poor widow] woman as wise. He set her up as a model for His disciples to follow. He enshrined her example in The Word of GOD so that future generations might emulate her faith and sacrificial generosity...”<sup>14</sup> This is exactly contrary to the false idols of our modern materialistic age, which cries out to us daily, “Get more things of the world to be happy now!” This poor woman, by GOD’s Standards, was eternally wise!

#### IV. A FOOLISH MAN WHO THOUGHT SECURITY WAS IN EARTHLY THINGS

Now compare our first example to the wealthy farmer who was so successful in his work that he saw he would need to build more storage space for his harvest in LUKE 12:15-21. And more than this, he said to himself, if I horde up for myself in new barns all that I can lay hands on from the fruit of the field, I shall be secure for years to come! But see what our Lord puts before us:

#### LUKE 12:15-21

<sup>15</sup> [JESUS said to His disciples,] ... Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

<sup>16</sup> And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

<sup>17</sup> And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

<sup>18</sup> And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

<sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

<sup>20</sup> But GOD said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

<sup>21</sup> So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward GOD.<sup>15</sup>

Now The Lord gives us this example of the prosperous farmer who was rich in possessions, yet poor in spiritual matters towards The LORD. He was eternally foolish! He took comfort in his earthly wealth, thinking he would live a comfortable life on earth for years and years. But The Almighty pronounces upon this man, because of his idolatrous presumption, “Thou fool, this very night I shall require your soul to stand

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<sup>13</sup> 4, B. W. Johnson’s People’s New Testament Commentary, Chapter XII, Verse 44 p 164.

<sup>14</sup> 5, Alcorn, “Money, Possessions and Eternity,” p 7, paragraph 4. “A Poor Woman and a Rich Man.”

<sup>15</sup> 1, KJV, LUKE 12:15-21.

before My Judgement Seat Above! And then where will all these worldly trinkets be that you have made such plans to store up?"

As Matthew Henry says, "Covetousness is a sin we need constantly to be warned against; for happiness and comfort do not depend on the wealth of this world. The things of the world will not satisfy the desires of a soul. Here is a parable, which shows the folly of carnal worldlings while they live, and their misery when they die. The character drawn is exactly that of a prudent, worldly man, who has no grateful regard to The Providence of GOD, nor any right thought of the uncertainty of human affairs, the worth of his soul, or the importance of eternity!"<sup>16</sup>

For when this foolish man beheld the exceedingly great harvest that he was blessed by from the hand of The LORD, he did not give thanks, but instead covetously made idols of his earthly gain! Neither did this foolish man think at all of how he might use his great earthly blessings from GOD's hand to be a blessing in turn to others, either by giving the tithe, much less by sacrificial giving to those in need!

He thought only "to indulge the flesh and gratify the sensual appetites, without any thought of doing good to others. Carnal worldliness are fools; and the day is coming when GOD will call them by their own name, and they will call themselves so," Fool! Therefore, "The death of such persons is miserable in itself, and terrible to them... It is the folly of most men, to mind and pursue that which is for the body and for time only, more than that for the soul and eternity!"<sup>17</sup>

Acorn observes further the contrasts between these two examples, the poor widow versus the wealthy farmer, "By our standards [of say the so-called "American Dream,"] both outside and inside The Church, the widow's actions seem unwise and the rich man's seem wise. But GOD, Who knows the hearts of both and sees from the vantage point of eternity, regards the poor woman as eternally wise and the rich man as eternally foolish."<sup>18</sup>

But while the foolish rich farmer receives the just eternal curse of serving his false idols in Hell for eternity, the wise poor widow receives the just eternal blessing of serving The LORD GOD in Heaven forever! Which then is the foolish, and which the wise, choice? The one that stores up everlasting treasures in Heaven!<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 6, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, LUKE, Chapter 12, Verses. 13-21, p

<sup>17</sup> 6, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, LUKE, Chapter 12, Verses. 13-21, p

<sup>18</sup> 5, Alcorn, "Money, Possessions and Eternity," p 8, paragraph 2. "A Poor Woman and a Rich Man."

<sup>19</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 6:20-21, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also!"

## V. THE RICH YOUNG RULER WHO LOVED MONEY MORE THAN GOD

Recall the encounter of the rich young man with our Lord in MATTHEW 19:16-26. He asks what he must do to attain eternal life with GOD in Heaven? Now what he did not realize was that he stood before GOD Incarnate, Who knew this young man's heart. The Lord knew that this young man in truth did not love GOD first, but loved his wealth first. Observe how The Lord surgically cuts directly to the core of the spiritual cancer growing in this young man's heart and prescribes the only cure that will save his soul – put away the false idol of your wealth and worship The LORD GOD only:

### MATTHEW 19:16-24

<sup>16</sup> And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

<sup>17</sup> And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but One, that is, GOD: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep The Commandments.

<sup>18</sup> He saith unto him, Which? JESUS said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

<sup>19</sup> Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

<sup>20</sup> The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

<sup>21</sup> JESUS said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come and follow Me.

<sup>22</sup> But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then said JESUS unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into The Kingdom of Heaven.

<sup>24</sup> And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into The Kingdom of GOD. <sup>20</sup>

The prescription for this rich young man was radical. But so was the danger to his soul, for his disease was potentially lethal covetous idolatry! He was worshipping at the false altar of money and possessions of the world, rather than at The Altar of The LORD, The Giver of all good things! Therefore CHRIST prescribes major surgery, to cut out the source of infection from the rich young ruler's life, that his soul might be saved and his life truly blessed! So JESUS commands him, "Go! Sell all your possessions, give the money to the needy, and come, follow Me!"

Now normally The Almighty does not direct the man seeking The Kingdom of GOD to give away all that he has in this life, that he may enter Heaven in the next. However, in this case, as Alcorn observes, "...JESUS knew that money was the rich young man's god. He also knew that none of us can enthrone The True GOD unless in the process we dethrone our other [false] gods. If CHRIST is not Lord over our money and possessions, then He is not our Lord."<sup>21</sup> Our Lord diagnosed this rich young ruler's condition immediately and offered the cure on the spot. But alas, the patient preferred to suffer and perish, rather than receive The Grace of GOD!

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<sup>20</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 19:16-24.

<sup>21</sup> 5, Alcorn, "Money, Possessions and Eternity," p 5, paragraph 4. "Money and Salvation."

As John Wesley observes, The Lord replies directly to the question, Good Master, What must I do to receive eternal life? First, JESUS confronts the young man, "...thou supposest [Me] to be only a man?" Well enough for now. "There is none good — Supremely, originally, essentially, but GOD." Second, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep The Commandments — From a principle of loving faith. Believe, and thence love and obey." For this is The Way. Walk ye in it! "Our Lord therefore does not answer ironically, which had been utterly beneath His character, but gives a plain, direct, serious answer to a serious question."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, there is no more important question than where shall a man's soul spend eternity! The young man had grasped all his adult life The Letter of The Law of GOD, but not The Spirit. So JESUS confronts him with Face to face directly with The First Great Commandment, as in DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our GOD is One LORD: And thou shalt love The LORD thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might!"<sup>23</sup>

Therefore JESUS commands the rich young ruler to part with his false idols of money and earthly possessions, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Him. For CHRIST, "...Who reads the heart saw [in] his bosom [the] sin... [of] love of the world; and knew he could not be saved from this, but by literally renouncing it. To him therefore He gave this particular Direction, [but] which he never designed for a general rule" for all men. But if we have other gods in our lives, we do not belong to The Lord. Yet, like many men today in this materialistic, money-adoring age of apostasy, "The young man went away — Not being willing to have salvation at so high a price!"<sup>24</sup>

But how sad that this rich young ruler! For like so many today in this nation, where the true gods of many are the consuming idols of wealth and worldly possessions, that young man preferred to be eternally foolish. Why? That he might retain his worldly false idols, even at the price of Hell!

## VI. ARE WE THEN ETERNALLY WISE OR ETERNALLY FOOLISH?

The Truth is, that if our hearts bow down in worship to money, material possessions or anything of this passing world, it shows clearly that The Almighty does not sit upon the throne of our lives. Alcorn says further, "...JESUS sees our hearts and souls and He knows us just as well as He knew... [this rich young man]. He will call us to take action that breaks our bondage to money and possessions and frees us to live under His exclusive lordship."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 7, John Wesley's Notes on The Bible, MATTHEW 19, Verse 17, p 87.

<sup>23</sup> 1, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5.

<sup>24</sup> 7, John Wesley's Notes on The Bible, MATTHEW 19, Verse 21, p 87-88.

<sup>25</sup> 5, Alcorn, "Money, Possessions and Eternity," p 5, paragraph 4. "Money and Salvation."



Let us take warning then from Joshua, as The LORD confronted His people Israel in JOSHUA 24:15, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve The LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve The LORD!”<sup>26</sup> Let us answer with the faithful Israelites as in JOSHUA 24:16, “...GOD forbid that we should forsake The LORD, to serve other gods!”<sup>27</sup>

Are we eternally foolish or eternally wise? Do we pretend to serve The Lord JESUS CHRIST, but in truth bow down to the false gods of this age, such as love of money and adoration of earthly possessions? Are we storing up for ourselves earthly treasures here in this life, forgetting that The Almighty Himself is The Giver of all treasures, both earthly and eternal?

And in the process, are we then forgetting The Giver Himself, The LORD? GOD forbid! As David declares in PSALM 34:9, “O fear The LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him!”<sup>28</sup> Let us cast away the utter foolishness of the world and instead choose The True Wisdom of GOD! In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

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<sup>26</sup> 1, KJV, JOSHUA 24:15.

<sup>27</sup> 1, KJV, JOSHUA 24:16.

<sup>28</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 34:9.

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