

THE WISDOM OF HIS TEACHINGS

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LONG before the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten and beloved Son of God, came into the world as a little baby and lived here as a little child, the prophet Isaiah had written of Him, "He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." Isa. 53:2.

Nazareth, the city where Mary and Joseph lived when Jesus was a boy, was a place with such a bad reputation, and so many wicked people lived there, that when Nathanael heard first of Jesus of Nazareth, he said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" John 1:46. He could hardly believe that Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God, the Seed so long promised and expected.

Growing in such a soil, in the midst of such surroundings, Jesus was indeed as a "root out of a dry ground." But the power of God's own holy life was in this Seed, and nothing but purity and beauty could spring from Him. In the midst of sinners, He lived, even as a child, a life of perfect purity, "holy, harmless, and undefiled."

"From His earliest years Christ lived a life of toil. In His youth He worked with His father at the carpenter's trade, and thus showed that there is nothing of which to be ashamed in work. Though He was the King of Heaven, yet He worked at a humble trade, and thus rebuked all idleness in human beings. All work done as Christ did His work is noble and honorable. Those who are idle do not follow the example that Christ has given; for from His childhood He was a pattern of obedience and industry.

"He was as a pleasant sunbeam in the home circle. Faithfully cheerfully He acted His part, doing the humble duties that He was called to do in His lowly life, Christ became one with us in order that He might do us good. He lived such a life of poverty and labor as would help the poor to understand that He could sympathize with them."

"He did not choose to be the son of a rich man, or to be in a position where men would praise and flatter Him. He passed through the hardships of those who toil for a living, and He could comfort all those, who have to work at some humble trade. Those who know the

kind of life Christ lived can never feel that the poor are to be despised, and that those who are rich are better than the humble.”¹

All the beauty of this “tender plant” was just the unfolding of the precious Seed of which we have already learned, just as the flower is the unfolding and opening out of the seed that we sow in the ground. So when Jesus the Seed comes into your hearts, (and He has promised to do this if you ask Him,) this same life will unfold in you just as it did in Him when He dwelt in Nazareth. So as you read of the child life of Jesus, how He was obedient to His parents, and anxious to learn the Word of God from those whom He had appointed to teach it how He “waxed strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him;” how He helped His father in the carpenter’s shop, and “increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man;” in all this God is teaching you what you too will be if this precious Seed is allowed to spring up in your heart. Like Jesus you will “grow up before Him as a tender plant,” and no matter what your outward surroundings may be, like Him you will be “holy, harmless and undefiled,” kept from the evil that is around you.

The Wisdom of Jesus.—“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. . . . And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” Luke 2:40-47.

Of one thing each reader of this narrative should rest assured from the very beginning, and that is that Jesus was not as we sometimes see it stated, “disputing with the doctors.” He was not doing anything that would be unbecoming in a child of twelve years. He was not putting himself forward, nor “showing off.” He was not presuming to teach those learned doctors of the law, nor showing the least disrespect to them. He was listening to their instruction, and asking them questions on what they were teaching, just as every listener

¹ Ellen G. White, “Child Life of Jesus,” *Youth Instructor* (November 21, 1895), par. 4.

was expected to do. He was seeking knowledge; more wisdom may sometimes be revealed in the questions of a learner than in the instruction of a teacher. The questions of the child Jesus, asked for the purpose of gaining information, showed that he already had a marvelous perception and grasp of truth, greater perhaps than had the doctors.

Later in life, when he was engaged in public labor, “the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.” Matt. 7:28, 29, R. V. “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagog, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” Matt. 13:54.

The true answer to this question is scarcely understood even by the followers of Jesus. If it were, there would be more of the same wisdom among them; for just as truly as Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7, R. V.), so then “it behooved him be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17), so truly did he possess no advantages over his brethren, and had access to no sources of wisdom that are not open to all.

Made in all things like unto his brethren.—The common idea concerning Jesus is that he was born with special wisdom, and as an infant he possessed knowledge superior to that of most men, and that he did not need to learn as other folks do, but that his wisdom was inherited, so that he knew everything without any effort. Such an idea not only makes him a monstrosity, but it places a great gulf between him and us, so that we have nothing in common with him, and derive no help from him. All our hope and consolation in Jesus rest in the fact that, as partaker of flesh and blood, he was subject to the same infirmities that we are, as weak and helpless in himself as we are, yet without sin, and by the divine life dwelling in him made “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He came to earth to let men know what God can do in human flesh; and just to the extent that we imagine him to have “natural” abilities superior to ours, do we deprive ourselves of the grace that is brought to us in him.

The fact that Jesus was not born with greater knowledge than possessed by other infants, is indicated by the statement that he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” Luke 2:52. It would have been as incongruous for him to be born with perfect wisdom as to be born with full stature. He increased in

wisdom as he grew in age and stature, just as other children are expected to.

In the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah we have the Lord's own statement of how he obtained the wisdom that made him the greatest Teacher the world has ever seen. That this chapter contains the words of the Lord Jesus is shown by verse 6, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Now read verse 4 (R. V.): "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary; he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught," or "as disciples," Christ was himself a disciple, a learner from the Father, thus showing that only they who are learners can be apt teachers.

Jesus made no claims to be the possessor of special gifts. He said: "I can of mine own self do nothing." John 5:30. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do." Verse 19. These are not the expressions of false modesty, for Jesus spoke only truth, as he is the Truth; therefore as no man can be any weaker than not to be able to do anything of himself, or more ignorant than to know anything without being taught, even so there is no person in the world who does not possess the same advantages that Jesus did.

Hear him again: "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but *as my Father hath taught me*, I speak these things." John 8:28. To Moses God had said concerning Jesus, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

The Promises to All Believers.—All this is promised to all believers as well as to Jesus. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James 1:5. To "the captive exile" the Lord says, "I have put my words in thy mouth." Isa. 51:14-16, R. V. As "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," even so he has "placed in us the word of reconciliation," so that he beseeches by us. 2 Cor. 5:19, 20. If it is given to us to pray "in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," then of course the same grace, and the same gifts by grace, are bestowed upon us that were bestowed upon him. "Unto every one

of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Eph. 4:7.

All this knowledge of Jesus came solely from the Word of God, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. He asked wisdom and received it, just as we may. But we must not suppose that we are to ask for wisdom, and then go to sleep and wake up wise. We are to ask in faith, and that means according to God’s promise, which is this: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” “Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.” Prov. 2:1-6, 9.

To the simple, even to fools and scorers, God says, “Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” Prov. 1:23. Jesus needed no reproof, for he did not turn aside from the way. We have sinned, as he did not; but if we will turn at the reproof of the Lord, he will make known to us the same words of wisdom that he did to Christ; for Christ “*is made* unto us wisdom, as well as righteousness.” 1 Cor. 12:36.

How little we have realized the wonderful depths and heights and breadth of wisdom that is contained in the Word of God, to be freely bestowed on all who will humbly, patiently, and prayerfully study them. Both Solomon and he who is “greater than Solomon” derived all their wisdom from this source alone, as we have learned by the inspired testimony of Solomon. God, who through Solomon said, “My son, if thou wilt receive my words,” “then shalt thou understand,” was speaking to his Son Jesus, and also to us, whom he accepts as sons equally with Jesus. Jesus listened and learned. He says, “The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.” Isa. 30:3. He has said to us that if any man willeth to do his will, he shall also know. John 7:17.

This wonderful knowledge is not hidden from children. Nay, the things that are hidden from the worldly wise and prudent are revealed unto babes. “I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients,”—the old men,—“because I keep thy precepts.” Ps. 119:99,

100. This is not to the praise of the child, but of the Word, which any child, as well as Timothy and Jesus, may know.

One thing must not be forgotten, and that is that such wisdom accompanies only true humility. The simplicity of real childhood must be maintained. We must always, even with the knowledge which the Word gives, confess that we know nothing except as we are taught. Natural pride, stubbornness, unwillingness to acknowledge that we have nothing and are nothing, are the hindrances to the acquirement of true knowledge; but we have the assurance that the same God whose power bestows upon us the wisdom of Christ is able also to give us his meekness. Let us then be not rebellious, but submissive to the Word of wisdom.

“Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James 1:5. At first thought it would seem as though these two statements had no connection with each other; but when we consider another text, we shall find that the second depends on the first.

The wisdom here spoken of is the wisdom that comes from above, for it is wisdom that God gives. Now in James 3:7 we learn what the wisdom is that comes from above. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.” Patience, then, is the wisdom that God gives, and which may be had for the asking in faith. So that we might without violence to the text paraphrase it thus: “If any of you lacketh patience, let him ask of God, who will give to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

But does not this narrow the text very much? If it is only patience that we are to get by asking God, are we not deprived of very much comfort that we have been in the habit of taking, in the thought that we can get help in our understanding of the Scriptures, and of how to conduct our affairs? No; patience marks perfection. He who has patience in perfection is a perfect man, lacking in nothing. So we may further read the text, If any of you lack any good thing, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. For “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

In the Psalms we read, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do His commandments." Ps. 111:10. Again in Job, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Job 28:28. Patience is wisdom, and the keeping of the commandments of God is wisdom. Therefore patience is the keeping of the commandments of God. This also we are plainly told in other parts of the Scriptures. The apostle Paul writes, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of law." Rom. 13:10. But in 1 Cor. 13:4, 5 we read what love, or the fulfilment of law is: "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked." This is patience; it is the keeping of the commandments; it is the only true wisdom.

In Rev. 14:12 we read a brief description of those who are prepared for the Lord when He comes. "Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." This shows plainly that patience is the keeping of the commandments of God. But patience is perfection; when it has been allowed to complete its work, it makes one ready for the coming of the Lord. And this only shows that the keeping of the commandments of God is perfection. It is that which makes one ready for the coming of the Lord.

The keeping of the commandments of the Lord can be found only in the life of Christ. He alone, of all those who have trod this earth, fully kept the law. But He gave Himself for us, so that we may also have the perfect keeping of the law in ourselves if we can only say in truth, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2:20. So in Christ is found patience and perfection, and fullness of wisdom; for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Moreover, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. That is the reason why the keeping of the commandments of God constitutes perfect wisdom. The keeping of the commandments of God is the possession of the life of God; and since He is the source of all wisdom, whoever has that life is in connection with the source of wisdom. "For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light shall we see light." Ps. 36:9.

The encouraging thought in all this is that if any lack wisdom, they may ask of God and receive it freely, without being upbraided for their lack. If any lack patience, if they lack righteousness, they may receive it from the Lord. They do not need to fear to come to Him and ask, even though their failures have been many. He does not upbraid. He has given us blessings and opportunities, and we have not used them. He has made known to us the way of righteousness, and we have not walked in it. He has given us blessings, and we have not learned them. He has given us talents, and we have buried them in the earth, or squandered them. And now we are sensible of our need, and want that which before we despised or neglected. What shall we do?—Come and ask for more. Shall we come fearful that we shall meet with a repulse? Shall we expect that He will say, “What have you done with that which I gave you before? If you had made a proper use of that, you would not need to be begging for more.” That is the way that man would do; but God is not a man. No; He tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Come boldly, not fearfully. And He will not upbraid. We are not to come as to one who holds a rod in his hand, cringing as if in fear of a blow. He will not reproach us with our past failures, and make us feel as if we had no right to ask for anything since we have been so idle and ungrateful. He “giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not.” Then come and “taste and see that the Lord is good; there is no want to them that fear Him.”

WHEN JESUS CHOSE THE CROSS

By the time a child reaches the age of twelve, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. The latter mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God’s servants and offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth’s inquiring “Why?” no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is

it possible, wondered Jesus, for the “blood of bulls and goats” to take away sin?

Even as a child, Jesus must walk alone. He turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as he came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed the same heart commitment He had made in heaven:

“For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: ‘You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, ‘Here I am, to *do Your* will, O God.’” Hebrews 10:5-7, REV.

It was as He prayed, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts’ blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! *I* have blood that I can shed. Here *I* am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! *I will die for the sins of the world. My* blood will be the atonement! *I* will be that “suffering servant” of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let Me be wounded for man’s transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, *I* come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

“So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all.” Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV.

No memory of his preexistence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when “the counsel of peace” was “between them both” (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices “cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9), and that “the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” Hebrews 10:1.

This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice. This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord’s body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the unresisted power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself*. The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” Isaiah 59:15, 16. “Christ . . . through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” Hebrews 9:14.

It is more fruitful to pursue Paul’s line of thought in 2 Cor. 5:21, as taking place at the Incarnation. At the age of twelve Jesus went to the Passover at Jerusalem with his parents. There as he wondered at the meaning of the sacrifices of animals and inquired of the priests and teachers, who could not give Him an answer, His pure, holy mind grasped the truth expressed in the words of the Apostle: “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.” Heb. 10:5. Then it was that Jesus chose the cross. He realized that the blood of animals could never purify the conscience from sin. God had given him a body which had not been defiled by sin, which could be the Lamb without spot or wrinkle.

This body had been prepared for Jesus by God at His Incarnation. It was at the Incarnation that God “made Him to be sin for us.” That was when “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Gal. 4:4. Being born of a woman, Jesus was “made under the

law”—i.e., under the condemnation of the law and thus subject to death.

Paul says that Christ at His death on the cross stripped off the flesh (Col. 2:15),—*ἀπεκδυσάμενος*, “having put off”, or “unclothed,” putting off the flesh by death; and thus gave the death blow to Satan, and the powers of evil. By this act “in the body of his flesh through death” (Col. 1:22), He reconciled us.² It was at the cross when He so finally and utterly condemned sin in the flesh and proved that sin had no reason to exist even in sinful flesh. Romans 8:3.

At the Incarnation He was “made to be sin for us.” The word “sin” is a reference to His flesh, His body. Christ assumed “fallen nature.” Christ did not assume a sinning nature, for He “knew no sin” and He was “the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Cor. 5:21. Paul is not self-contradictory. Had Christ taken a sinning nature at the Incarnation, it could not be said of Him that He “knew no sin.” Paul makes it absolutely clear what he means by “sin” with these qualifying words. “He who had no personal acquaintance with sin ‘was made to be sin for us’—yet He never became a sinner; He never allowed the sin to have sway over him.”³ The “sin” principle which Christ took was never activated in Him by thought or action. The sinful nature which Christ took never became for Him a sinning nature. Therefore it cannot be said of Christ that He *had* a sinful nature.

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. *He chooses to go to the cross.*

When the love of God (*agape*) is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages ago, and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of

² “. . . The powers of evil had entrenched themselves in Christ’s fleshly nature. ‘He that knew no sin was made sin for us’ and in his death he threw off this contaminated nature which he had assumed for our sakes, thus breaking free from his enemies.” E. F. Scott, *MNTC*, “Colossians”, p. 48.

³ Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 103.

the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: “He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal.” John 12:25.

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief.

There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, *and perished*.

Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. “My yoke is easy,” the crucified One tells us. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My riches gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.
Isaac Watts