

OF WISE MEN AND FOOLS

1 Corinthians 1:18-30

INTRODUCTION

- A. Ancient Greek mythology told tall tales of brave men setting off on great quests in order to win the blessings of the gods.
 - 1. Perseus challenged to kill Medusa.
 - 2. Jason told to capture the Golden Fleece.
 - 3. Theseus trounced the Minotaur.
 - 4. More modern, Indiana Jones – ark of the covenant, holy grail.
- B. Risking their lives to win immortality, honor, wealth, and power.
 - 1. So enticing the carrots dangled before them by the gods, these ancient characters thought little of making trips lasting for years, leaving behind home and family.
 - 2. Putting themselves in great danger, and enduring incredible suffering and making terrible sacrifices.
- C. And we envy them! Not the sacrificing or suffering or danger parts:
 - 1. ...but the quests which gave their lives purpose and direction.
 - 2. ...the prizes which motivated them to attempt great things and to reach higher than they might otherwise;
- D. We live in modern times now, not ancient ones.
 - 1. There is the Age of Reality not the misty times in which myths are born.
 - 2. There are no quests for brave mortals to undertake today, no “Holy Grails” for modern man to pursue with the same abandon and daring as ancient heroes.
 - 3. There is no celestial hand to dangle that carrot before us that would entice us to live better, to live higher, to live heroically.
- E. Yes...we are modern, and we are realists...and we are quite empty inside.

I. THE QUEST FOR WISDOM.

- A. A Quest for Today.
 - 1. Proverbs 2:1-6.
 - 2. Solomon says there is a quest available for even modern men and women!
 - a. Instead of a search for the Gorgon or the Golden Fleece, we are urged here to seek wisdom and understanding.
 - b. And – yes – the quest will be a rigorous one: Solomon says we will need to “*apply*” ourselves (vs. 2), and “*cry aloud for understanding*” (vs. 3), and “*search for it as for hidden treasure*” (vs. 4). Later, he will say, “*Though it cost you all you have, get wisdom*” (4:7).
 - c. But like the quests of old, there is a God who stands ready to reward us if only we will accept His challenge...He will give us both wisdom and understanding and will bless us with all the bounty of heaven.
- B. A Quest Worth Undertaking.
 - 1. You don’t seek wisdom for wisdom’s sake.
 - a. Just as the ancients did their mighty deeds, not for the deeds themselves but for the rewards that accrued...
 - b. So we are encouraged to seek wisdom for the incredible riches that are rained upon those who find her.

2. The rewards of wisdom are great!
 - a. Wisdom will prolong your life many years, 3:2a.
 - b. Wisdom will bring you prosperity, 3:2b.
 - c. Wisdom will win you respect and a good name, 3:4.
 - d. Wisdom will cause you to be powerful and strong, 24:5.
 - e. Wisdom will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones, 3:8.
 - f. Wisdom will protect you and keep you safe, 3:23.
 - g. Wisdom will keep you from being afraid, 3:24.
 - h. Wisdom will keep you from the ways of wicked men, 2:12.
 - i. Wisdom will save you from the adulteress, 2:16.
 - j. As the Proverbs state repeatedly, “Whoever finds wisdom, finds life”, 8:35.
 3. Proverbs 3:13-18; 4:5-8.
- C. A Democratic Quest.
1. In at least one respect, the analogy of the Quest for Wisdom with the ancient quests breaks down. For *ours* is a democratic quest.
 - a. According to the Greeks, you had to be one of the “favored of the gods” to receive a divine challenge.
 - i. Quests were only parceled out to those of special distinction and ability.
 - ii. Not just anyone could try their hand.
 - b. But the quest for wisdom is open to all comers. No distinctions on the basis of birth or circumstance or native ability.
 2. Anyone can seek and find this holy grail.
 - a. Proverbs 1:1-4 – these proverbs are collected for that purpose.
 - b. Pr. 8:1-6, 17 – even the simple and foolish are eligible.
 - c. Pr. 9:1-6 – the banquet is prepared for all comers.
 - d. The only criterion: ***Do you love wisdom? She will love you.***

II. DIRECTIONS FOR THE QUEST.

Parameters which we must respect if we are to be successful in our search for wisdom. Each parameter, unfortunately, goes against the grain of popular culture.

A. Recognize the Reality of Wise Men and Fools.

1. We are uncomfortable with the idea that some people deserve to be called “fool”.
 - a. Mt. 5:22c – “*anyone who says ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*”
 - b. The wise man and foolish man, Matt. 7:24-27.
 - c. We live in the midst of a culture that doesn’t want to be judgmental or overly harsh. The only thing we are intolerant of is intolerance itself.
 - d. The notion that truth is “whatever is true for you,”
 - i. that people must be supported as they search out their own path,
 - ii. that conditional acceptance of others’ lifestyles must be our goal,
2. Because we have been unwilling to identify fools, we have been unable to identify and advocate wise living.
 - a. How can we know what is true if we will call nothing false?
 - b. How can we know what is right in a world where nothing is wrong?
 - c. And how in the world can we appreciate wisdom, when there is nothing in the world truly foolish?

3. We may hesitate to label folly, but the Bible does not.
 - a. God calls certain people “fools” and so does Jesus.
 - b. David, Solomon, and Paul did not hesitate to identify fools.
 - c. Proverbs is founded on the assumption that wisdom and folly are distinct and identifiable lifestyles – and that you should pursue one and flee from the other.
- B. Acknowledge the Sources of True Wisdom.
 1. The idea of “sources” runs counter to the popular culture.
 - a. We are told that wisdom consists of getting to know the “inner self,” of listening to the “true you” ... that the most available source of wisdom is the fount of wisdom bubbling inside each one of us.
 - b. The notion that we must go outside of ourselves to find wisdom is nothing less than cultural heresy. We find it hard to hear Solomon’s teaching that:
 - i. folly, not wisdom, is bound up in the heart of a child, 22:15.
 - ii. those who trust in themselves are fools, 28:26.
 - iii. we should not lean on our own understanding, 3:5.
 2. Yet the proverbs teach us that true wisdom comes only from outside sources:
 - a. The teachings of those wise people who have lived before us, 12:15; 13:20.
 - b. The teachings of your mother and father, 6:20.
 - c. Most importantly, the words and commands of our God, 30:5; 23:17.
 3. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is Understanding, 9:10.
- C. Apply Yourself to the Quest.
 1. We come into conflict with the teachings of our culture.
 - a. Since “wisdom” is whatever is wise for you...
 - b. And since the best source of that wisdom is from within yourself...
 - c. Becoming wise ought to be entirely natural, as easy as falling off a log.
 2. But Proverbs teaches – to the contrary – that wisdom is a hard-won trait.
 - a. You must devote yourself to the pursuit of wisdom.
 - b. You must make sacrifices to attain wisdom.
 - c. You must set priorities that differ from the world around you to find wisdom.
 - d. You have to work and listen and learn and obey and accept discipline and correction and forego surface pleasures and humble yourself in order to become wise.
 3. The Quest requires its own kind of dedication. There are dues to be paid if you want to be wise. Wisdom does not come easily...it is not our natural bent.

CLOSING

1. James 1:5
2. Col. 2:2-3
3. 1 Cor. 1:18-30