

AM I LOOKING FOR THE GREATEST VALUE?

Job 28:1-4, 12-16, 20-28

My mother was a negotiator when she needed to buy anything. She would look for the best price and then do her best to get an even lower price. This behavior was likely a result of having little or almost no discretionary income in our family and having a sense that she needed to do the best she could and get the most from her resources. We expect people to be diligent and try to find the best value in whatever they do. That usually works out pretty well in general in that it drives excellence in those who are competing for business. This practice also helps to keep prices reasonable for goods and services that are offered for sale.

This same idea (free market system) also provides motivation for people to go to extremes to find and acquire items that are considered valuable to people.

What would cause a person to not work to get the best value for what he or she is buying or spending available resources? Think of a five-year-old child who received a five-dollar bill for his birthday. If he is shopping and is attracted to a really inexpensive toy, he will likely be willing to give the entire five dollars for something worth less than one dollar. The problem is that the child doesn't know the value of the money or resources he has. Another situation that comes to mind is the kind of craziness of the nation's military paying \$150 for a hammer and \$500 for a toilet seat. The problem there was that it was not the buyer's money. He did not have a sense of ownership for the resources entrusted to him nor did he have any sense of accountability for the decisions he made.

This raises a question of how do we deal with the resources we have and what are we trying to accomplish or acquire when we spend or invest these resources. In other words, what is really valuable to us?

Discovering Things of Physical Value - 28:1-4

¹“Surely there is a mine for silver And a place where they refine gold. ²“Iron is taken from the dust, And copper is smelted from rock. ³“Man puts an end to darkness, And to the farthest limit he searches out The rock in gloom and deep shadow. ⁴“He sinks a shaft far from habitation, Forgotten by the foot; They hang and swing to and fro far from men. Job 28:1-4 (NASB95)

In this chapter we find a comparison of human wisdom and godly wisdom. The speaker (probably Job, but some think this account was part of Zophar's speech) starts out with the abilities that people had developed to find physical items that were considered to be very valuable. The description he gave is clear evidence that deep-shaft mining was known and used to find precious metals and gems. When we consider the lack of mechanical equipment and the stage of technology development during this time, we should be amazed that such activity was going on.

Assuming Job was the speaker, he was giving credit where credit was due in that people could and did go to such great efforts and also were willing to expose themselves to such dangers to acquire things of physical value. This was a significant achievement and it makes you wonder just how smart these people were to make observations and to come to a conclusion that iron could be extracted from ore that looked very much like dirt or dust.

Of course, if we extend such observations from that time until now and consider all the things that have been discovered and developed and what people can do to find and use the physical resource of the earth, then what man has accomplished is very impressive. People have gone to the deepest trenches in the oceans and climbed to the highest mountain top on earth and walked on the moon. Those exploring for oil and gas drill holes several miles deep to extract the

valuable fuel from the depths of the earth.

These achievements show the vast capability of man's knowledge and his ability to apply it to do useful things. People of Job's time could not even imagine the depth of knowledge that has come about in understanding such things as DNA and RNA and discovering the existence of such things as viruses and germs and bacteria. It is truly remarkable; however, such human wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are not able to discover anything outside of the physical realm and see the hidden treasures that are part of the spiritual realm. This inability of man (by his own efforts) has led many to conclude that the spiritual realm simply does not exist. This conclusion is the epitome of prideful arrogance that says "if I can't see it, then it doesn't exist."

These introductory comments in the first eleven verses were setting the stage for the conclusion that Godly wisdom cannot be discovered by exclusive human endeavor. In other words, you can mine wisdom as you cannot mine gold and silver.

Acknowledge Wisdom's Greater Value - 28:12-16

¹²"But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? ¹³"Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living. ¹⁴"The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.' ¹⁵"Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price. ¹⁶"It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, In precious onyx, or sapphire. Job 28:12-16 (NASB95)

There are two issues or concerns regarding wisdom that are raised in these verses. The first has to do with "where" can wisdom be found. The second is related to the "worth" or value of wisdom. The simple answer to both questions is "no one knows."

I'm not sure that we should try to make a distinction between "wisdom" and "understanding" that we see in verse 12. This may be nothing more than parallelism that is used in Hebrew poetry that makes a statement or asks a question in two similar ways. There is certainly a distinction to be made between knowledge and wisdom. A quote from Charles Spurgeon is useful in this regard. "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as the knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom." We could logically substitute the word "understand" for "know" in the last sentence of that quote and better see a connection among knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

Regarding "where" wisdom can be found, the only thing we pick up here is "where wisdom cannot be found." The land of the living is a likely poetic name for the physical realm. It makes no difference if you look high or low on land or in the sea, you will not find or acquire Godly wisdom in the physical world. Although we cannot find this wisdom in the physical realm, we can see evidence of it all around us. Just as we cannot see the wind, there is plenty of evidence of it.

Regarding the worth of wisdom, we sense a dilemma in that we just don't know how to put a value on it in an absolute sense although we know it is worth more than anything in the physical realm. We might even say that its value is incomparable (cannot be compared or measured by) to physical things.

Seek Wisdom's Guidance - 28:20-28

²⁰"Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? ²¹"Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living And concealed from the birds of the sky. ²²"Abaddon and Death say, 'With our ears we have heard a report of it.' ²³"God understands its way, And He knows its place. ²⁴"For He looks to the ends of the earth And sees everything under the heavens. ²⁵"When He imparted weight to the wind And meted out the waters by measure, ²⁶When He set a limit for the rain And a course for the thunderbolt, ²⁷Then He saw it and declared it; He established it and also searched it out. ²⁸"And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from

evil is understanding.’” Job 28:20-28 (NASB95)

In verse 20 we see the question of verse 12 repeated in a slightly different way. The first question was with regard to the location and the second was with regard to the source of wisdom. In the last section we concluded that wisdom cannot be found in the physical realm, so we might conclude that it can be found only in the spiritual realm. That fact explains why (see verse 21) that mankind that possesses only physical life cannot see it because the spiritual realm cannot be comprehended by that which is carnal or totally physically based. In a bit of poetic hyperbole, we are told that having the best physical sight known (such as that possessed by an eagle) is not adequate. Going beyond that, even some entities in the spiritual realm (death and destruction) cannot grasp Godly wisdom even though these may be aware that it exists. This is the implication of verse 22. The answer is finally revealed in the next verse and we find that God understands the origin of wisdom and knows where wisdom resides. This conclusion is logical since God knows and sees all things physical and spiritual.

It was by or through wisdom that God created everything. We see a reference to some of the parts of creation in the mention of the wind and its force, the nature of water and how it was designed to behave in a beneficial way to allow life on the earth, and even the interaction of static electricity in the water cycle of evaporation and rain.

In verse 27 Job tells us that God recognized the value of wisdom and that the evidence of God using wisdom is seen in all that has been created. Wisdom was incorporated (established) throughout all God has done and this was done because the results (works) of wisdom were examined by God and had been proven to be essential for the effective functioning of His creation.

Some commentators have suggested that Job was telling his friends that it is not possible for man to know all that God knows in His unhindered access to wisdom, but we are granted access to all the wisdom we need to live our life in this world as indicated in verse 28. This access is gained by an appropriate fear of the Lord and by acting on that quality by separating ourselves from evil.

The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom is the starting point for humanity to discover and benefit from appropriate application of the knowledge that is available. This quality or characteristic was in the description that God had of Job. According to Matthew Henry “the *fear of the Lord* is the spring and summary of all religion.”

We have heard that there the proper fear of God is simply “reverence.” Henry noted three types of fear. One is a “slavish” fear of God, springing from hard thoughts of God, which really shows a lack of wisdom. This is the kind of fear that the slothful servant had of his master in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:24-25. His excuse for not being diligent to faithfully invest what had been entrusted to him was that he knew that the master was a “hard man” and so he was **fearful** and hid the master’s talent in the ground. The second type is a “selfish” fear of God that arises from dreadful thoughts of him, which may be a good step toward religion. This was the emotion that Saul had on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:5. The correct kind of fear that leads to wisdom is described by both Matthew Henry and John Gill as a “filial” (related to family) fear of God, that comes about from great and high thoughts of God, which is the life and soul of all religion. It is not a fear that paralyzes, but one that energizes. When we have this attitude toward God, then we will be careful to depart from evil as is stated in Proverbs 16:6.

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”

The conclusion that Matthew Henry comes to is this: “To be truly religious is to be truly wise. As the wisdom of God appears in the institution of religion, so the wisdom of man appears in the practice and observance of it. It is understanding, for it is the best knowledge of truth; it is

wisdom, for it is the best management of our affairs. Nothing more surely guides our way and gains our end than being religious.” A similar observation was made by C. H. Spurgeon: “True religion is sanctified common sense. Attention to the things of heaven does not necessitate the neglect of the affairs of earth; on the contrary, he who has learned how to transact business with God ought to be best able to do business with men.”

We have an excellent resource to which we can go that is readily available and that is the written word of God. Warren Wiersbe noted that Job described how men work hard and face great danger to find material wealth. They tunnel through hard rock and risk their lives to get rich. Why will men and women not put that much effort into gaining God’s wisdom? The Word of God is like a deep mine, filled with precious treasures; but the believer must put forth effort to discover its riches. It takes careful reading and study, prayer, meditation, and obedience to mine the treasures of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit of God is an absolute necessity in the process. Why are we so negligent when this great wealth lies so near at hand?

The real problem is that most people do not comprehend the value or the price of wisdom and think they can get it cheaply.