

Wisdom: Only Through The Grace of God

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Over the last few months Nancy and I have had a couple of changes in our household that I would like to share with you today as a roundabout introduction to the topic of this sermon.

Over the last 31 years, as long as we have lived in our present home, we have always had a dog, up until about a month or so before the Feast. At that time our 14 year-old dog died. She was a lovable, but stupid, part Labrador and part Golden Retriever, and although she was a big dog she was great with the kids and did not cause too much of a fuss in the house except for shedding.

She knew where in the house she was allowed and where she was not, what she could do, and what she could not, and was pretty responsive to what she was told and was an enjoyable and pleasant part of our household. When she died of old age, she did it as quietly and peacefully as she lived.

Because we have had three dogs over the last 31 years, when she died it certainly seemed strange in the house without her. So Nancy and I decided we needed to get another dog.

So we went to the animal shelters looking for a similar dog, a female mutt but mostly Labrador; one who would have an even, playful temperament and would be good with our grandkids.

One day, about a week into the process, Nancy took our daughter Treacy, along with Treacy's three children, to one of the shelters that had a dog that pretty much fell within our parameters of what we wanted. Although she was pretty big, she was very quiet and gentle with the kids.

Nancy and the kids brought the dog home and although the surroundings were new and there were a number of people around, because a number of our children and grandchildren had come over to welcome the new addition, she seemed to settle in nicely.

Now the dog had been a stray that was picked up by the police and delivered to the shelter, but they knew how old she was and some of her vital statistics because it had a chip implanted, which apparently is the case with most pets today. However they did not exactly know her temperament or even her name, so they had named her Bella and during the short period of time they had her, someone had noted on her card that she seemed to be a jumper, although because those who had been caring for her for the last week or so observed her docile character and saw how good she was with the kids, they told Nancy it must have been a mistake.

So Nancy brought this medium large, one year old dog home. She was really fine and gentle with all who were there and then one of the kids let her out in the back yard.

Within minutes our daughter-in-law looked out the window and said, "Is that not Bella over in the back yard of the people behind us?"

By the time the rest of us looked she was hurdling over each 4' fence in the yards behind us like a gazelle. Suddenly our house was like a fire drill. Our grandchildren were screaming with delight as they witnessed the event! The adults were up and screaming a multitude of directions about who needed to go where to try to catch the hurdler! Within minutes I was left in the house with my daughter Treacy, who had stayed behind to manage the kids, and four tiny children squealing over the great race.

The chase was on and to make a long story short, it lasted from about six o'clock in the evening until about nine-thirty that night. In that time Nancy, one of our sons, our son-in-law, and our 7 month pregnant daughter-in-law, all of whom were in the house at the time, were joined by another of our sons, who drove over from his house, and a number of neighbors, for the new neighborhood circus event.

There were many sightings and near catches but each time, when Bella was almost within grasp she would dart away, once hurdling over a row of hedges, while another time hurdling over a 6' 8" neighbor who had lunged for her. At one point I looked out and saw her in the post sunset twilight in our back yard again. By the time Treacy looked she saw nothing and thought I was seeing things until her daughter Gabbi yelled, "Look Mom, there she is," as we watched Bella's back end going over the fence two (neighbor's) yards down (the street) again!

By the end of the evening the police had been notified but the fugitive was nowhere to be seen and we presumed she was well on her way back to parts unknown. However, the next day, following a thunderstorm, Nancy received a call that a dog matching our description, was hunkered down in a garage two blocks from our house, having run into the open garage from fear of the weather. So Nancy and our son Mark went to the house and collected Bella.

We had decided, as nice as this dog seemed, we could not take care of a dog that was more suited to the wide open spaces of a farm or as fugitive on the run, so we brought her back to the shelter and told them it would be best if they found the dog a home more suited to the temperament of a gazelle!

We had chosen by first appearances without greater care for the facts. We, and the dog, paid the consequences of our action too.

So we decided the wise thing to do was to wait until after the Feast and select a dog more carefully, when we had more time.

Following the Feast, we did take more time and carefully tried to gather as many facts as possible so we could make a wise, informed decision.

We had always had female dogs and were always under the impression that male dogs were more likely than females to have wanderlust and try to run away. Well that whole theory got shot to pieces with our last pre Feast adventure, so the dog we settled on was a medium size, 6 month old, part Lab, part Pointer male with a gentle and playful temperament! One of our grandchildren named him Owen.

But in order to make sure we would be ahead of the curve to head off another jumper we asked the people at PAWS if they could recommend a trainer, so we could make sure the dog was trained to stay where he belongs. So they recommended someone who they thought was an

excellent trainer and they gave us her card that gave her name and title, "Dogologist."

Okay, fancy name for someone who is good at training animals...right?

The dogologist came to our house and immediately started to demonstrate her technique by letting the dog jump up on her. As the dog did this I said, "No Owen, get down!" I was immediately corrected by the dogologist who said, "We never say the 'n' 'o' word. We just spin around and ignore his behavior and then treat him when he lies down." Well sure enough after about 10 minutes of circle spinning and dropping treats on the floor, Owen was not jumping up on her anymore.

The next thing was he picked up a doorstopper wedge, with his mouth and Nancy took it away from him. The Dogologist corrected Nancy and told her you never take anything away from the dog without replacing it with something else; one of his chew toys.

Okay, so Nancy went to put the stopper back under the door and she was told she could not do that because that would mean we were just setting the dog up for failure.

She told us for \$250.00 she would come once a week for the next 4 weeks to train us on how to train him with only positive reinforcement.

So now we had a dog that was jumping up on people, which he never did before, but would stop if we would spin around give him the treats that he extorted from us. And, he was constantly demanding! We also could not tell him n-o without causing him not to like us, and we could not put our things back where they belonged because we were setting him up for failure.

Now she wanted us to give her \$250.00 so she could train *us* how to train *him so he could train us!*

Brethren, as with so much foolishness that is bound up in this world, we had a graphic example in a few minutes of what the nature of this world will do if gratification is the only stimulus to behavior modification. The nature of this world will just demand more gratification.

If Proverbs 22: 15 is proper instruction from God for removing the tendencies of the nature of this world from children—"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him"—why would it not be correct for animal training?

When I was preparing the message I gave at the Feast this year, about all the small choices we make in life, I already knew I would be speaking again just a little over 5 weeks after the Feast and I decided I would do something in conjunction with the Feast message citing practical examples of wisdom in daily decision making from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. And, this dog-training episode just cinched it for me. Practical examples of the broad principles of wisdom as viewed in the small circumstances of daily life are very valuable!

However, even before the Feast, as I looked at the practical applications of wisdom in life's circumstances as described by Solomon, I was constantly questioning how could a man who had been gifted with such close contact with God, and the gifts He gave him, end up so far off track? And this thought kept pushing its way to the front as I prepared for this sermon. I kept spending a great deal of time just reading and thinking about Solomon and what he had, and what he lost.

Then the second and more momentous family event put this message completely into perspective for me.

On October 22 at 6:58 a.m., we had a new addition to our family. Our son and daughter in law, Mark and Christy, had a little girl. She was their second child, and our ninth grandchild! Mark and Christy had been up in the air over the new baby's name, even though they had known for several months what gender the baby would be.

But, for whatever reason, when our new little one arrived on Friday morning Mark took one look at her and said to Christy, "I think she looks more like a Sophia," and as Christy looked at her she agreed and they named her Sophia, a name they had not even considered before; they named her Sophia Grace.

Now I know that Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom. It is even the Greek word used in the Septuagint for the very word that describes the gift God gave to Solomon in I Kings 3, but I decided I needed to do a bit more of an in depth study on our newest granddaughter's name.

But before I get into that, let us turn to I Kings and see the account of God's gift giving to Solomon.

Let us start in I Kings 2. These are David's last words of instruction to his son Solomon.

I Kings 2:1-4 Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

Here we have Solomon, who had been given the throne by the grace of God, rather than those who were ahead of him in order of succession, specifically Adonijah, and here he was receiving direction from his father David, a man after God's own heart, how to take charge and be successful. And those instructions were to follow all the statutes, commands, judgments and testimonies as it is written in the law of Moses!

Brethren, turn with me to Deuteronomy 17.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 "When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. And he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly

multiply silver and gold for himself. Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

We see here most specifically above everything else, it was the duty of the king to read and write and study the words of the law as written originally here in the book of Deuteronomy by Moses!

Please keep this passage in mind as we go on, but there is one more point I want to reinforce about Solomon, before we move on. As I said a minute ago, Solomon had been chosen by the grace of God in the order of succession. It was strictly according to the sovereignty of God in the same way as Jacob—"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"—and just as we, too, have been carefully chosen out of the world around us!

Please turn with me to II Samuel 12: 24-25. This was following David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba, his repentance, and the death of their child.

II Samuel 12:24-25 Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

"Solomon" means peaceful, but by the word of God through Nathan, Solomon was known to God as Jedidiah, which means "Beloved of God."

Turn with me now to I Chronicles 22.

I Chronicles 22:5-13 Now David said, "Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it." So David made abundant preparations before his death. Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon: "My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the LORD my God; but the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.' Now, my son, may the LORD be with you; and may you

prosper, and build the house of the LORD your God, as He has said to you. Only may the LORD give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the LORD charged Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed.

Here you see God's plan and purpose for Solomon, or Jedidiah, His beloved!

Now let us go back to I Kings 3. This is the very start of Solomon's reign.

I Kings 3:1-4 Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall all around Jerusalem. Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

These verses may seem odd at the beginning of the narrative of Solomon's reign as king but they are very telling generally about how he thought.

The very first thing we see is an indication that he did not have enough faith that God would secure Israel's borders, even though his father David had told him God's promise, as we have already read in I Chronicles 22. Here he was following the customs of the nations around him and making allegiances through marriage.

Verse 3 also may already be hinting that although he loved the Lord, who loved him from infancy, his life's path was not a conviction of his own but that of his father David. Rather than walking in the statutes of the Lord, he was walking in the statutes of his father David.

Nonetheless verse 4 shows us that he was more than abundantly enthusiastic in his sacrifices to the glory of God. A thousand sacrifices must have taken days to complete.

Let us now read in I Kings 3.

I Kings 3:5-15 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an

understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

God was pleased at the request! But I would like you to consider again, his request came from the mind of what his father had told him, as recorded in I Chronicles 22:12-13. Was there really conviction that all of his life's efforts would be the result of the grace of God, or just his own careful use of a particular gift?

In Verses 16 through 27, we immediately are given the record of perhaps the most famous of Solomon's use of his gift of wisdom regarding human nature, with the account of the same baby being claimed by two different women. But I would like you to focus on what it says in verse 28.

I Kings 3:28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.

The people had seen God's wisdom at work in him, and it says they feared the king. They held the king in reverential awe because of this gift of discernment.

Brethren, if Solomon's convictions were not his own, then things like this could very well begin to turn his focus from the Gift Giver, and his duty to use the gift to accomplish God's will, to the gift itself.

I told you, I did a short study on the word Sophia, and it is interesting what I found. In a world that is enmity toward God and His purpose, there is, as you can imagine, much confusion about wisdom and even its relationship with God.

A few hundred years before Christ so many Jews were in Greek speaking areas that their Old Testament source became a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and along with this a number of the Greek Gnostic philosophies became synchronized into the religion of the Jews.

I am going to read to you a small portion of what I found because I want you to see how subtly the creation can end up being the object of worship over the creator.

Jewish Alexandrian religious philosophy was much occupied with the concept of the Divine Sophia, as the revelation of God's inward thought, and assigned to her not only the formation and ordering of the natural universe, but also the communication of all insight and knowledge to mankind. In Proverbs 8, wisdom (the noun is feminine gender in Greek) is described as God's Counsellor and Work-Mistress, who dwelt beside Him before the Creation of the world, and sported continually before Him.

In accordance with the description given in the Book of Proverbs, a dwelling-place was assigned by the Gnostics to the Sophia, and her relation to the upper world defined as well as to the seven planetary powers which were placed under her. The seven planetary spheres, or heavens, were for the ancients the highest regions of the created universe. They were thought of as seven circles rising one above another, and dominated by the seven Archons. These constituted the (Gnostic) Hebdomad. Above the highest of them, and over-vaulting it, was the Ogdoad, the sphere of immutability, which was nigh to the spiritual world.

Now we read in Proverbs 9:1, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." These seven pillars being interpreted of the planetary heavens, the habitation of the Sophia herself was placed above the Hebdomad in the Ogdoad.

It is said further of the same divine wisdom (Proverbs 8:2): "She stands in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths." This meant, according to the Gnostic interpretation, that the Sophia has her dwelling-place "on the heights" above the created universe, in the place of the midst, between the upper and lower world, between the Pleroma and the Ektismena. She sits at "The Gates of the Mighty." In other words, at the approaches to the realms of the seven Archons, and at the "entrances" to the upper realm of light her praise is sung.

The Sophia is therefore the highest ruler over the visible universe, and at the same time the Mediatrix between the upper and the lower realms. She shapes this mundane universe after the heavenly prototypes, and forms the seven star-circles with their Archons under whose dominion are placed, according to the astrological conceptions of antiquity, the fates of all earthly things, and more especially of man.

She is "the mother" or "the mother of the living." As coming from above, she is herself of pneumatic essence, the *metrôphetein* or the *andynamis*, from which all pneumatic souls draw their origin.

Brethren, I think you can see from this how far mankind's thinking, when separated from God by our failure to live according to His ways, and acknowledge Him as the giver of everything, can lead!

Even the world should have been able to see God by the awesome details of His creation and yet this world ends up worshipping the creation rather than the creator. If we do not align ourselves with every word of God, then we align ourselves with vanity of the mind of Satan. This is where Solomon went off the deep end. He was not convicted enough to follow the simple

instructions of his father David, or God, Himself, and it turned him to the seek life's meaning in the gift given to accomplish the God's purpose rather than by a strengthened relationship with God.

The Gnostic philosophy of wisdom I read to you was nothing new. It had just taken different forms in pagan religions through the centuries, but the idea was always the same. It was the mind of Satan attempting to muddy the thinking and understanding of the Word as Creator and His position as the Son of God, the only source of our Salvation!

That was a long time before Christ, and yet it still exists to this day. And the man wrote, "Mother Earth," "The Trinity," and calling the Holy Spirit as, "The Sophia" in some cases.

Solomon through his failure of conviction and dedication to the source allowed his own vanity to lead his life. I even read in one of the commentaries that some of the high places that Solomon had built for his many pagan wives were to goddesses such as these.

The point is that as the beloved of God, we must always keep in the forefront of our minds our obligation to give our lives as living sacrifices, completely set apart to God and His purpose, while knowing that we are entitled to absolutely nothing! Whatever gifts we have are by the grace of God to enable God's purpose for us to succeed. David knew this. It was his conviction. Solomon did not, and he lost sight of the one by whose grace he reigned, and the gift itself became more valuable to him than the one who gave it.

I do not mean to imply that the wisdom we receive from the books that Solomon wrote is not valuable. They are an important part of God's word on the issues of how to live and why life apart from God is merely a breath; God was true to His word and gave Solomon everything He had promised him. However, the lesson for us is what more could have been Solomon's as the beloved of God, if he had only kept up his part of deal, and followed the instructions to the king to copy the book of Deuteronomy, and make it his source for a relationship with God, so that he could keep in front of him daily, the truth that all he had was by the grace of God.

Because he did not do this, this once beloved of God does not find his name written among the faithful in Hebrews because he was more mindful of the city from whence he came and could not see the promises afar off.

Please turn with me to I Peter 2.

I Peter 2:5-10 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not

obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Brethren, we are the called out and beloved of God at this time. Do we see through obedience to God's word that everything we have and are is a gift by the grace of God to make us able to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God? Only through the grace of God have we obtained mercy to be called the people of God!

Every aspect of our lives needs to be lived with the understanding that all we have and all we are is only possible by the grace of God.

Brethren, John Ritenbaugh wrote in the 1995 Forerunner....

Because grace's applications and ramifications to individual lives in their particular situations over time are virtually endless, there is no end to this subject. The apostle Paul summarizes it best when He writes in Ephesians 2: 8, "For by grace you [are being] saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

Grace is not a one-time application of God's mercy, but a continuous outflowing of His gifts to His spiritual children. It is, all things considered, the most important aspect of our hope for salvation through the resurrection. He owes us nothing, yet He freely gives of His love and powers that we might share glorious, powerful, fulfilling and unending life with Him and Jesus Christ.

Brethren, hang in there and realize that everything we have is by the grace of God to His beloved to be used as He sees fit!

I pray that our little Sophia Grace learns to live her life according to the wisdom of God while understanding that all she does must be to His glory through the grace that only God can give her!