

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF PERSON

*Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.
Habakkuk 2:4 (RSV)*

*Stay away from a fool, for you will
not find knowledge on their lips.
Proverbs 14:7 (NIV)*

*Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the LORD.
1 Samuel 2:12 (RSV)*

*I am a companion of all those who fear You,
And of those who keep Your precepts.
Psalm 119:63 (NASB)*

¹⁰ *Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
Psalm 32:10 (ESV)*

*Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
1 Corinthians 15:33 (NASB)*

*All day long the wicked covets,
but the righteous gives and does not hold back.
Proverbs 21:26 (RSV)*

*A wise man is mightier than a strong man,
and a man of knowledge than he who has strength;
Proverbs 24:5 (RSV)*

³⁷ *Mark the blameless and behold the upright,
for there is a future for the man of peace.
³⁸ *But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;
the future of the wicked shall be cut off.
Psalm 37:37-38 (ESV)**

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.

James 1:5 (RSV)

"..... for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed"
1 Samuel 2:30 (b) (RSV)

*You will save the humble people;
But Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down.
2 Samuel 22:28 (NKJV)*

²⁵ *To the faithful you show yourself faithful,
to the blameless you show yourself blameless,*
²⁶ *to the pure you show yourself pure,
but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.*
Psalm 18:25-26 (NIV)

*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord always;
but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.*
Proverbs 28:14 (RSV)

¹⁵ *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.*
¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*
Psalm 34:15-16 (ESV)

⁶ *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
1 Corinthians 2:6-8 (RSV)

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
1 Corinthians 2:14 (RSV)

“Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand.”
Daniel 12:10 (RSV)

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.
John 3:20 (NIV)

*Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain
is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.*
Proverbs 25:26 (RSV)

In this chapter we shall examine the four broad groups of people, or character types, to which the Bible frequently refers. As with so many other biblical words, these four are widely misunderstood. Yet every one of us is operating, at any given moment, in ways which place us within one or more of these groups. Therefore we shall define each group as accurately as we can. We shall also look at how to identify where we are along the spectrum of these four groups and how we can move in the right direction. The four groups are as follows:

- a) the *wicked*
- b) the *fool* (the term *scoffer* is also used, though it can refer either to a fool or a wicked man)
- c) the *simple* (also referred to as being *naive*)
- d) the *wise*

Although the Bible frequently speaks of people being wicked or fools, one very rarely hears of anybody describing *themselves* by those names. It is almost as rare to hear of anybody classifying

themselves as simple or naive. Most people, whether they are Christians or not, automatically assume that they belong within the group known as the wise.

But that doesn't add up. It means that 90% of people assume themselves to be in the top 10%. The Bible indicates that it is actually quite unusual to be wise, whereas simple, foolish and wicked people are to be found in huge numbers. Therefore it must follow that most of us are very wrong in the way we perceive ourselves.

Most *real* Christians, as opposed to either nominal or false Christians, are what the Bible calls simple. So, even amongst real Christians, only a minority are wise. A non-Christian or a false Christian cannot possibly be wise, because being a Christian and fearing God are the vital first steps on the path to becoming wise. You can't even start the process without those features. Therefore if you are a non-Christian, or even a nominal Christian, you cannot be wise, at least not in the way the Bible means. You would have to be somewhere along the spectrum from simple through to wicked.

The Bible is not a complimentary book. It never flatters us. On the contrary, it is very frank and tells us the honest truth about ourselves. Moreover, when it speaks in critical terms it is generally referring to what is wrong with *us*, not just '*other people*'. That is a key discovery that most of us have not yet made. But we urgently need to grasp it if we are ever to become wise.

The reason the Bible is so frank about the faults and failings of the apostles is not so that we can look down on them, or feel good about ourselves in comparison. It is primarily to enable us to see those same faults, weaknesses and sins in ourselves. But the reality is that we rarely do see such things in ourselves. Most of us have an excessively favourable view of our own opinions, actions and motives. Therefore most of us never examine ourselves at all, let alone conclude that we are wrong or deficient:

***All a person's ways seem pure to them,
but motives are weighed by the LORD.
Proverbs 16:2 (NIV)***

So, the mere fact that you may have become a real Christian does not, in itself, mean that you are already wise. Nor does it necessarily mean that you will become wise. But it is an essential first step. We are commanded, from the point of conversion onwards, to seek for wisdom and to continue doing so for as long as it takes until we become wise.

It is helpful to think in terms of there being a spectrum, along which we travel in tiny little increments, rather than picturing four distinct groups with precise boundaries and no overlapping. The illustration below may assist us in seeing how we can hope to be able to move, step by step, in the right direction:



In the spectrum above there are no exact boundaries where a person decisively leaves one category and joins another. It is much more indistinct and blurred than that. Yet, there are still broadly identifiable regions. Moreover, nobody is ever 100% wicked, or 100% wise, or 100% anything else. Even the worst of us have some good qualities, and even the best people have their faults, or moments when they let themselves down.

You might say that a person is like a bowl which is filled with grains of pepper, sand, sugar and salt. Imagine that salt represents wisdom, sugar represents naivety, sand is foolishness and pepper is wickedness. If the bowl represents a person's life, then it will not consist of 100% of any of those substances. It will always be a mixture. The only question is *in what proportions?*

So, if you picture this mixture in the bowl, then to become wiser means adding salt and taking away sand, sugar and pepper. Usually it is only done a few grains at a time. That is a more realistic way to view the process of becoming wise, rather than seeing it as an overnight transformation. That has never happened to anybody (except Solomon) and it never will.

A person can't pick up the bowl at the point when they become a Christian and just empty it all out and refill it with salt all in one go. Neither does anyone become entirely foolish or entirely wicked in a single moment. Whatever direction we are travelling in, it takes time to change. However, our objective must always be to keep on and on reducing the pepper, sugar and sand and increasing the salt in our lives. We are to aim to become as salty as possible and in as many ways as possible. In other words, our task is to keep moving along the spectrum in the right direction and to become as wise, godly and righteous as we can.

Wisdom is not based on IQ, talent or natural ability. It is equally open to any of us to become what the Bible (not the world) calls wise. Nobody has a head start, because the biblical definition of wisdom is not about cleverness or passing exams. It is nothing to do with being good at maths, or any other subject. Wisdom in the Bible is mainly about *character*. That, in turn, is primarily defined in terms of our values, attitudes, beliefs and actions, not our ability. Alternatively, you could say that it is about developing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

As for how we are meant to get wisdom, it mainly comes from:

- a) studying and applying the Bible and
- b) mixing with, and learning from, other people who are already wise, or at least wiser than we currently are.

Many of us assume that our relationships are meant to be formed randomly and that we don't need to exercise any judgement as to the people with whom we spend our time. The Bible doesn't support that view. The way you spend your time, and with whom, is seen as one of your most important areas of stewardship. God will hold you accountable for all the relationship choices you make. Each of those decisions will profoundly affect how your character turns out and whether you end up a wise person, a fool, or even wicked. There is nothing random about any of that. Whatever we become, it is the foreseeable end result of the countless choices that we make over the years.

Now let us begin to examine each of the four groups more closely, beginning with the fool. However, the best we can do is to scratch the surface of this huge subject. That's because the Bible has such a vast amount to say about the pursuit of wisdom and about God's view of wickedness, foolishness and naivety.