

CHAPTER 1

THE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF PERSON

*Stay away from a fool, for you will
not find knowledge on their lips.*

Proverbs 14:7 (NIV)

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

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

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

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)

*And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.
2 Chronicles 12:14 (ESV)*

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

.....The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

2 Chronicles 15:2(b) (ESV)

What are the four types of person the Bible speaks of?

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. 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 of them as accurately as we can. We shall also look at how to identify

where we are along the spectrum from wicked to wise 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*

Perhaps one thing which needs to be clarified right at the outset is the difference between being *wicked* and merely *sinful*. The point is that we are all sinful, but we are not all wicked. That has to be so, because God specifically warns us to avoid the wicked and not to follow them or spend time with them, as in this passage:

***¹⁴ Do not enter the path of the wicked
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
¹⁵ Avoid it, do not pass by it;
Turn away from it and pass on.
Proverbs 4:14-15 (NASB)***

The point is that God is telling us to avoid “*the wicked*” and also “*evil men*”, but common-sense dictates that that must mean that we are not all wicked or evil because, if we were, it would make the instruction absurd, as it would be impossible to obey. It would be like telling us to avoid all people who breathe oxygen. It has to follow, therefore, that God draws a distinction between being a sinner, which all of us are, and being wicked, which only some of us are. We shall seek to identify and explain those differences in chapter 4 below and I also go into much greater detail about the wicked, and how to identify and handle them, in my Book 6.

Although the Bible regularly 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 they belong within the group known as the wise. But that doesn't add up. It means over 90% of people assume themselves to be in the top 5%, or even 1%, whereas the Bible indicates that it is very unusual to be wise, and that 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 see 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 be wise, because being a genuine 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 possibly 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. That is the sort of discovery you make when you read the Bible. It is not a complimentary book and 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 vital discovery which 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, prophets and other characters is not so that we can look down on them, or feel good about ourselves in comparison. It is to enable us to see those same faults and sins in ourselves. But we rarely do see such things, even when they are as plain as day to those who know us. Most of us have an excessively favourable view of our own conduct and motives and never examine ourselves at all, let alone conclude, after doing so, that we are at fault in any way:

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

We are each on a spectrum, somewhere between wicked and wise, but there are no precise boundaries

So, the mere fact that you may have become a real Christian does not, in itself, mean that you are already wise, or even that you will become wise. It is, however, an essential first step. We are commanded, from conversion onwards, to seek for wisdom and to continue doing so for as long as it takes until we get it. It is helpful to think 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 in showing how we can 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 thousands of 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 one 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. Such a dramatic improvement 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. On the other hand, 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 correct direction and to become as wise, godly, mature and righteous as we can. Moreover, wisdom is not based on IQ, talent or natural ability. Therefore, 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 literature, 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) associating with, and learning from, other people who are already wise, or at least wiser than we currently are.

Our important relationships are meant to be with people we have chosen carefully, and are not to be entered into randomly

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 therefore 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 may end up as, it is the *foreseeable* result of the countless choices that we make over the years. Bear in mind also that wisdom is only ever pursued by those who already have at least some of it. Only those who currently have enough understanding to at least realise the importance of wisdom, will be willing to set their face towards acquiring it and to make the effort to develop it further, even though they don't yet fully possess it:

A man of understanding sets his face toward wisdom
Proverbs 17:24(a) (RSV)

*An intelligent heart acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*
Proverbs 18:15 (ESV)

*Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.*
Proverbs 19:20 (ESV)

Such a person will also be willing to pay the price, and to make the necessary sacrifices, in order to acquire wisdom, because it does come at a high cost, not only in terms of time and effort, but in other ways too, sometimes even financial:

*Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.*
Proverbs 23:23 (ESV)

One of the costs of becoming wise is that it will cause us to be relegated in the opinions of worldly people. What God calls wisdom is foolishness to them and what they call wisdom is foolishness to Him. Therefore, if you want to become wise by God's definition, rather than the world's, it will result in you being considered a fool and sneered at by many who know you. Apostle Paul speaks of this and there is irony in his tone when he refers to *'the wisdom of this world'* and *"the thoughts of the wise"*, by which he means those who wrongly imagine they are wise:

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 (RSV)

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

and naivety. Please also be aware that most of what I say about *how* to become wise is not within the early chapters of this book. Those are mostly about what it is to *not* be wise, why that matters, and also persuading you that you are probably not wise at the moment.

If you are eager to see the '*how to*' material, that really gets started from chapter 8 onwards. Do please also be willing to consider topics which you may not have thought had anything to do with being wise, such as work, money, decision-making, marriage, and even obscure concepts like political correctness and human rights.

I hope that, by the end of this book, you will agree with me that all of these issues are badly misunderstood and neglected in today's churches, and that they are highly relevant areas of study for those who wish to become wise. Indeed, the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and the profoundly different ways in which God deals with each group, is vital for us to grasp:

¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

Malachi 3:16-18 (ESV)