

Who is Jesus? Wisdom
Colossians 2:1-8

Your 3 Options

You basically have 3 options.

Option 1: face reality, and seek wisdom and understanding.

“The unexamined life is not worth living,” Socrates said. You can choose the way of Socrates, and face reality. You can examine life. But as soon as you start examining life, things get frustrating, discouraging, even depressing.

In fact, French philosopher Luc Ferry says that all philosophy is a quest to help us feel less awful about the fact that we are going to die. If we look reality squarely in the face, we are asking for headaches and *soulaches*.

Headaches come because our problems are complex. Our world is broken, and it is difficult to grasp this complex brokenness. So it's obviously frustrating to try to fix it. Nobel Prize winner in economics Daniel Kahneman says that we are desperate to make sense of our experiences---so desperate that we quickly invent irrational stories to explain them. We can't deal with uncertainty; but the world is uncertain, like it or not. Paul says in Romans 1 that we often recognize the truth, but push it away.

Theologians tell us that when we fell, our minds fell with us. Seeking understanding and wisdom brings headaches.

But then there are *soulaches*, too. The brokenness of our world isn't just an intellectual puzzle. The more we face reality, the more we grieve over the sorrows of life.

Something in us knows that this is not the way things are supposed to be. Those who pursue wisdom and understanding choose sorrow and grief.

Option 2: Forget Socrates. Ignorance is bliss. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

As the poet TS Eliot wrote, “humankind cannot bear very much reality.” For many people, in Ancient Greece and in the modern world, being awake to reality and asking tough questions about life is unbearable.

Both Ellie and I have just read new books---books that deal with how our phones, our news feeds, and our social media accounts allow us to escape from reflecting on our lives and souls and spirits. Many of us hear passionate sermons, but before they can really sink in, we have distracted ourselves with political news, memes, and cat videos.

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We used to walk to the train station and reflect on our lives. We once had to be alone with our thoughts when we visited the toilet. Ask someone today if they can remember the last time they visited the toilet without their phone.

So, whether we are distracting ourselves with silliness or with the 24-hour news cycle, we are avoiding reality, and especially self-examination.

In first-century Colossae, just like today, people often went for either option 1 or option 2. If you were passionate about understanding and wisdom, there were plenty of philosophers to teach you how to try and live a good life despite your coming death. If you preferred diversions and distractions, there were celebrity speakers, there were sports, there was gossip.

When Paul writes about Jesus to the church at Colossae, he's writing to people who, like us, have to decide whether they are going to face reality and pursue wisdom, or avoid reality and pursue distraction.

He's writes to people, who, like us, are finite. Unable to know everything. Unable to know exactly what to do in every situation. Able to engage the world and be frustrated and discouraged, or able to avoid reality and risk living meaningless lives.

Paul wants to show us, that unless we are redeemed and vitally united to Jesus Christ, we are doomed to suffer the frustration and confusion that comes with *caring*, or the ignorance and foolishness that comes with not caring.

Which type are you? Maybe a little bit of both? I know I go from one to the other and back again all the time. I care. Caring is frustrating and depressing. I distract myself. But that isn't satisfying either. What I should be doing is taking Option 3. Paul's option. What is it?

Jesus: Wisdom in Person

In the face of this crummy choice, Paul has discovered a stunning solution.

He says, Colossians 2:2, that if we belong to Jesus Christ, we can have "the full riches of understanding," and that, 2:3, if we have Jesus Christ, we have the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

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The celebration of God's wisdom is all throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, and even between them. Our text from Proverbs personifies wisdom as a lady who has been around since creation, following God the Creator around and delighting in his work. The Hebrew philosopher Ben Sirach wrote 200 years before Jesus: "Who has seen him, and could tell of it? Who can praise him as he is? There are many hidden things which are larger than what we have seen! We have only seen a little of his works. For the Lord has made everything, and he has given wisdom to the faithful" (Sirach 43:32, LXX). Paul says (Romans 11:33-36): "How unsearchable are the judgements of God, how inscrutable his ways! For from him, and to him, and through him are all things!"

Who does Lady Wisdom point to? Of whom did Ben Sirach write? Who is this One with unsearchable judgments, from whom, and to whom, and through whom everything is?

Jesus.

As one theologian remarks: "Despite everything which God has already made known through revelation, there are still treasures, dimensions, connections, heights, and depths which even Paul ... [has] not yet understood, or fully investigated, or fully fathomed" (M. Barth).

Outside of life in Christ, Paul teaches, we will always end up in confusion, frustration, and foolishness. He says in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 that the best wisdom of the *world* will always look at Jesus Christ and find him, and find *you*---if you're following Jesus---foolish. That God deliberately frustrated the wisdom of the philosophers. He says that our obsession with Jesus, and our delight in his death on the cross---such foolishness to the world---is actually God's wisdom.

Does this mean that non-Christian philosophers, scientists, economists, psychologists, and our wise secular friends, have nothing to say that's worth considering? No! Christians will take understanding and wisdom wherever we can get it!

But it does mean this. As Paul says in 2:4, you can craft all the fine-sounding arguments in the world. They may be compelling arguments, with much truth in them. But if you try to obtain wisdom and knowledge apart from the One in whom every ounce of wisdom and knowledge is possessed and hidden, you will have, at the heart of your wisdom and knowledge, a fatal misunderstanding, a catastrophic folly. Every bit of wisdom and knowledge is ultimately wise and true only as it relates to the One, Jesus, who is himself the treasure trove of all wisdom and understanding. Without

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pointing to Jesus, without finding its fullness and richness in him, every bit of merely human wisdom is foolishness.

Let's be careful here, though. We Christians are the ones being generous to our non-Christian neighbors. The world tells us "your Jesus and his death is foolishness." We tell the world "your wisdom is really valuable when I relate it to, and submit it to, Jesus Christ." The world tells me "don't waste your time with that silly Jesus." I tell the world "come, and have your wisdom acknowledged, challenged, and perfected in Wisdom himself, Jesus Christ."

And that's your invitation today. If you want the good life, if you want to face death with true joy, if you want your best stories, ideas, philosophies, desires, and hopes to find a happy ending that actually never ends, come to Jesus Christ, the eternal treasure trove of untold knowledge and unfathomable wisdom.

The Wise Christian Life

Lastly, then, if Jesus becomes Wisdom for you, what changes about your life? I'll give you just a taste.

Like everything in the Christian life, knowing and being united to Jesus gives us humility and confidence at the same time.

It humbles us. We no longer need to pretend that we know it all; that we're wise on our own. We can be teachable. Do you know how wonderfully refreshing it is to be around someone who has a teachable spirit? We will spend eternity being teachable, and enjoying the thrill of learning and applying our learning.

Our humble, teachable spirit in Christ means that we can repent when we realize we were wrong, either about the facts, or about what we said and did with those facts. When we've been foolish, we can say we're sorry, and trust that Jesus is growing us in wisdom as we do so.

But we need to be confident at the same time: our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't just know all things in a technical and exhaustive sense. He knows all things in a practical and situational sense. He doesn't just know stuff; he knows how to apply what he knows in just the right way at the right time. He is wise!

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My old pastor (Sinclair Ferguson) once said: None of us know everything, and there are a lot of things about which we know practically nothing. But if we know Christ, we know at least something---actually the most important thing of all---about absolutely everything in the universe. That in relation to this or that thing, about which I know little, Jesus Christ is wise and is Lord.

The world around us will realize that we are different: We do not grow overwhelmed and paralyzed by the unknowns, because all the unknowns are known by Jesus, to whom we are vitally united. And so we approach life---not with fear or resignation, but with wonder, awe, and joy.

Friends, you can have more than frustration and sorrow as you pursue a meaningful life. You can have more than the endless distractions of a life that avoids the pursuit of meaningfulness. You can live in Jesus, and for all eternity you'll never stop experiencing the joy of unlocking new treasure troves of understanding and wisdom. In his stunning wisdom, he laid down his life for you at the "foolish" cross. He took his life back up again. And he offers new life---life in him---today. So come, and live in Jesus, your Wisdom.