CPTJ 13.1 (2026) 33–43

SHOULD SOLOMON HAVE ASKED FOR SOMETHING ELSE? THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PREACHING[1]

JIM SAMRA[2]

I. INTRODUCTION

"Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room" is the title of the award-winning 2005 documentary chronicling one of the largest corporate scandals in the history of the United States.[3] Throughout the documentary the narrator regularly asserts that leading players at Enron—J. Clifford Baxter, Andrew Fastow and especially Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling—were highly intelligent, experienced, and well-educated people. Yet in the words of Paul, it is fair to say that "although they claimed to be wise,[4] they became fools" (Rom 1:22). The leading characters in the Enron scandal exhibited unrestrained greed, overwhelming arrogance, and unmitigated selfishness. Because of their wicked behavior, thousands of employees lost their jobs. Many of those also lost their life savings because the leadership encouraged employees to invest all their retirement money in Enron stock even as the leaders sold their own shares. Deceitful earnings reports based on off-balance-sheet special purpose entities designed to hide exorbitant losses meant countless other investors were defrauded as well. Millions of people in California paid outrageous prices for energy as Enron scrambled in a doomed effort to keep their house of cards afloat, fraudulently manipulating the newly deregulated market to create artificially high prices. The documentary makes clear that though the leaders knew what they were doing was unsustainable they foolishly pressed on until the whole company went bankrupt. In the end, Andrew Fastow was sentenced to prison for ten years, Jeffrey Skilling for twenty-four years. Kenneth Lay died of a heart

[1] A special thanks to the Martin Institute for providing a grant to fund the work on this paper.

[2] Jim Samra is the senior pastor at Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, MI.

[3] The documentary is written and directed by Alex Gibney. It is based on Bethany McClean's and Peter Elkind's *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron* (Penguin, 2003). McLean and Elkind are also given writing credits for the film.

[4] It should be noted at the outset of this paper that while there are often different words from the original languages that are used in the various passages cited, they are all closely related and inhabit the same semantic space as evidenced by various English translations glossing these different words with the terms "wisdom/wise."

attack while awaiting sentencing and J. Clifford Baxter committed suicide. One cannot watch the documentary without asking the question, "How is it that the smartest guys in the room were so utterly foolish?"

For some Christians, such a question is easily dismissed given the fact that none of the leaders at Enron exhibited much of a relationship with God.[5] But one could (and should) ask a similar question about King Solomon. Even though he was endowed with wisdom from God, by the end of his life Solomon has to be considered one of the most foolish people to grace the pages of the OT. Consider the case against Solomon.

II. THE CASE AGAINST SOLOMON (AND OTHERS)

Assuming that his God-fearing father David had him write out Deut 17 as part of his ascension as king, Solomon's defiant choice to explicitly disobey God's commands in that chapter by getting horses from Egypt, marrying lots of women, and accumulating incredible wealth is shocking. It is as if he goes out of his way to disobey each and every one of God's commands for the king (see Deut 17:14–20). Worse still, Solomon himself set up the Hill of Corruption, building high places to Chemosh, Molek and others (see 1 Kgs 11:7; 2 Kgs 23:13).[6] Twelve generations of Solomon's descendants sit on David's throne until Josiah has the courage and spiritual maturity to tear the idolatrous high places down. Who knows how many countless Israelites were led astray over those hundreds of years by Solomon's folly. As opposed to his father David, who also sinned quite spectacularly, Scripture explicitly denounces Solomon as one whose heart was turned after other gods and who did evil in the eyes of the Lord (1 Kgs 11:4–6). Of course, Solomon is not without some redeeming accomplishments, the most noteworthy being that he built the house of the Lord. But after documenting that it took seven years for Solomon to build the temple, 1 Kgs 7:1 subtly comments, "it took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." The implicit condemnation of spending almost twice as much time on his own house hangs thick in the air. Furthermore, Solomon's palace complex included a palatial estate for his "primary" wife, Pharoah's daughter. Such a house was necessary, according to Solomon, because she was unable to live where the ark of the Lord had been housed, an implicit acknowledgement that he knew his marriage to her was unholy (2 Chron 8:11).

The book of Ecclesiastes forces us to ask the same critical questions about Solomon. Traditionally, the view is that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes as an aging, regretful, self-critical reflection on wisdom. Even if it is not written by Solomon, Ecclesiastes is at least written from a Solomonic perspective for the purpose of providing a foil of the "fall from which we are redeemed."[7] A representative for the position of non-Solomonic authorship

[5] Interestingly, Kenneth Lay was the son of a Baptist preacher.

[6] According to Ps 14:1–3 and Rom 1:21–23, such idolatry is the very definition of what it means to be a fool.

[7] Daniel J. Treier, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Brazos, 2015), 121.

states, "The person who calls himself Qoholet pretends to be Solomon in order to argue that if Solomon cannot find satisfaction and meaning in life in these areas, no one can."[8] While Ecclesiastes accurately records Solomon's feelings on a variety of subjects, other portions of the Bible correct these feelings with truth unknown or unappreciated by Solomon. For example, the Solomonic wisdom in Ecclesiastes that everything is meaningless is explicitly contradicted in the NT by Paul's contention that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).[9] Likewise Solomon contends that God has laid a heavy burden on mankind (Eccl 1:13), but Jesus states that his burden is light (Matt 11:30). And though Solomon states that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9), in Isa 43:19 God says that he is doing a new thing.[10]

All this begs the question, did Solomon ask for the wrong thing from the Lord? Or perhaps more precisely stated, is there something better that Solomon could have asked for than wisdom? In 1 Kgs 3:5, Solomon is famously given a blank check by God. "Ask for whatever you want for me to give to you." Solomon fills in this blank check by asking for a wise and discerning heart so that he may govern God's people well (1 Kgs 3:9). At first blush this seems like a good choice. God himself commends Solomon for not choosing a long life, wealth, or the death of his enemies; in that sense he is pleased by Solomon's choice (1 Kgs 3:10). But while I can commend my child for choosing to eat a bowl of cereal rather than gorging himself on Cheez-Its™, that does not mean a salad would not have been a better choice. So, I ask again, if we consider where the gift of wisdom landed Solomon, could he have requested something better from God? Solomon asked for wisdom to help him distinguish between right and wrong, but that apparently did not help him to choose the right in many cases.

Now lest you think that I am picking on Solomon or that we can write Solomon off as an exceptional case where wisdom did not work out that well, consider Ahithophel, David's advisor. Ahithophel, like Solomon, has wisdom to help govern the people of God. Second Samuel 16:23 says of Ahithophel, "now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God." Pretty high praise. But in the end Ahithophel betrays David, convinces Absalom to defile and dishonor God by sleeping with David's concubines in public, and commits suicide when his military advice is rejected (2 Sam 17:1–23). We could hardly call him a model of spiritual maturity.

And what of Job's friends? They claimed to have wisdom, but they could not recognize what God was doing in Job's life. Even Job himself in all his godly wisdom could not fathom the conversation between God and Satan that had transpired to lead to his suffering; Job unwisely believed

[8] Tremper Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1997), 6.

[9] Psalm 127:1, traditionally attributed to Solomon, also undercuts the contention that everything is in vain. "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain." The implication is that if the Lord does build the house, then the laborers are *not* laboring in vain.

[10] We could, of course, add to this the idea of a *new* covenant, a *new* heavens and *new* earth, as well as Jesus's statement in Rev 21:5 that he is making all things new.

God needlessly and unjustly caused him to suffer. Job deserves incredible empathy for his intense suffering and honor as a spiritual giant in his faithful endurance, but in his struggle to make sense of what has happened to him, his wisdom appears to lead him astray as much as it helps him to understand.

One of Job's friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, was from Edom, a country renowned in the Bible for its wisdom. Yet Obadiah declares that like Solomon, Edom in its wisdom is guilty of arrogant pride and disobedience so much so that God promises he will destroy the "wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau" (Obad 8).

Now do not get me wrong, wisdom is a blessing from God. The wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 14 says of David that he has "wisdom like that of an angel of God" (v. 17). Pharoah selects Joseph to manage Egypt's economy because he is "wise and discerning" (Gen 41:39). The city of Abel is saved from destruction by an unnamed woman of wisdom (2 Sam 20:16–22). Moses searches for wise and understanding leaders to help him judge Israel (Deut 1:9–18). These are just a few of the positive examples connected to wisdom in the OT. So, of course, wisdom in the OT is often associated with spiritually mature people as well, but what do we do with Solomon, Ahithophel, Job's friends, and others?

III. BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Consider the account in Gen 3 of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. In Gen 3:6 we are told, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and *also desirable for gaining wisdom*, she took some and ate it." The centrality of wisdom to the temptation and fall in Gen 3 is confirmed by the poetic language of Ezek 28:11–19, which appears to draw on language, imagery, and ideas from Gen 1–3.[11] God says of the king of Tyre, "In the pride of your heart . . . you think you are as wise as a god" (Ezek 28:2).[12] Then to heighten the accusation, Ezekiel draws on primordial language starting in verse 11: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty . . . Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor." In doing so, Ezekiel confirms that wisdom played a central role in the temptation and fall of created beings. What should we make of this?

A. Old Testament Clues

A clue to answering our question about whether Solomon could have made a better choice is found in Ezek 28. In verse 3, the author poses a rhetorical question to the king of Tyre: "Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you?" This is intriguing. We might have expected him to ask, "Are you wiser than Solomon?" Perhaps Daniel is named because he is Ezekiel's

[11] Either Ezekiel poetically describes the fall of the king of Tyre in terms reminiscent of the fall of man or he alludes to a "primordial conflict in heaven, the rebellion of a lesser deity," whether Satan or someone else. See Ronald Clements, *Ezekiel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Westminster John Knox, 1996), 129.

[12] The same accusation of being wise is present in verses 3, 4, and 6.

contemporary, or maybe the reference is to a mythical Ugaritic figure named Dan'el.[13] But I think the point is that Daniel, the main protagonist in the book of Daniel, provides a better corrective than Solomon.

Daniel is a better corrective because while Daniel does have Solomonic wisdom given to him by God for understanding all kinds of literature and learning (Dan 1:17a), he also receives from God the ability to understand visions and dreams (Dan 1:17b). When Nebuchadnezzar asks for that which no wise man could ever know—revealing Nebuchadnezzar's hidden dreams—Daniel does not turn to wisdom and learning but to the Lord who reveals mysteries. When God reveals this mystery to Daniel, he praises God as the one who "gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things" (Dan 2:21–22a). Daniel goes on to tell Nebuchadnezzar that the mystery of his dream and its interpretation for future kingdoms was given to Daniel "not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive" (Dan 2:30). Solomonic wisdom was not the means of figuring this out. Rather, God revealed mysteries to Daniel that no wise person could ever ascertain through wisdom.

In contrast to Solomon, there is no evidence at all that Daniel became a fool at the end of his life. In fact, Daniel is called highly esteemed by the angels who interpret his visions (Dan 9:23; 10:11, 18). Ezekiel lists him along with Noah and Job as three of the greatest examples of righteousness in the OT (Ezek 14:14).

Another clue in answering our question is found by comparing what Solomon asked from God with what other OT characters asked. Two of the more well-known requests in the OT come from Moses and Elisha. Moses asks for a transformative vision of God's glory (Exod 33:18); Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs 2:9).[14] Both appear better than Solomon's choice of a wise and discerning heart (which admittedly was a better option than choosing riches or the death of his enemies): Moses and Elisha end up far more spiritually mature and godly than Solomon. If, as Jesus says, "wisdom is proved right by her deeds" (Matt 11:19), then Moses and Elisha made wiser choices than Solomon in what they requested from the Lord.[15]

Both clues—Daniel's different kind of wisdom and the better requests of Moses and Elisha—point to the Holy Spirit. Nebuchadnezzar does

[13] E.g. John Hilber, *Ezekiel* (Cascade, 2019), 93–94; Clements, *Ezekiel*, 64. For a critique of Daniel as the Ugaritic Dan'el (and implicitly a defense of the possibility that this refers to the biblical Daniel) see Harold H.P. Dressler, "The Identification of the Ugaritic Dnil with the Daniel of Ezekiel," *Vetus Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1979): 152–61.

[14] The implication from the story is that while Elisha articulated the request to Elijah, he is actually asking God for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, not Elijah. See Donald Wiseman, *1 & 2 Kings*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1993), 195.

[15] We could even say Solomon's father David asked for something better than Solomon for governing the people of God when he asked God to, "Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Ps 86:11). The psalms of David are filled with examples of requests from David from God, many of which ask the Lord for similar things as Ps 86:11 (e.g. Ps 5:8; 17:7; 27:4; 43:3; 119:5).

not employ trinitarian language, but when he says Daniel has the "spirit of the gods in him," we understand this to be a reference to Daniel having the Holy Spirit. Paul links Moses's transformative vision of God's glory with the experience of believers in the Spirit under the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:7–18).[16] And when Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he is really asking for a double portion of the Holy Spirit who empowered and guided Elijah.

But is not the Holy Spirit also connected to wisdom? If Moses's and Elisha's requests are tied to the Holy Spirit, what about Solomon's? Perhaps asking for a wise and discerning heart is another way of asking for the Holy Spirit.

It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit is remarkably absent from Solomon's story. Both 1–2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles speak of the Holy Spirit, just never in connection with Solomon.[17] Furthermore, while the Spirit is connected at times to wisdom in the OT,[18] he is far more often connected to prophecy and power.[19]

B. New Testament Considerations

Three NT passages—Luke 10–11; 1 Cor 1–3; and James 3—also help us evaluate Solomon's request.

Luke 10–11

Luke 10 opens with the sending of the seventy-two. When they return victorious Jesus is full of joy through the Holy Spirit and states, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (10:21). He contrasts that which is revealed by God with that which is learned through wisdom. Jesus makes this explicit in the next verses when he says that the only ones who know the Father are those to whom the Son reveals him. Prophets and kings longed to see and hear what the disciples were able to see and hear, but God did not reveal it to them, and they could not access it through wisdom (10:22–24).[20]

---

[16] See Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 309–20. See also Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (Hendrickson, 1996).

[17] E.g. 1 Kgs 18:12; 2 Kgs 2:16; 1 Chr 12:18; 15:1; 2 Chr 20:14; 24:20.

[18] One example is Bezalel in Exod 31 who is filled with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding. The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of wisdom and understanding in Isa 11:2. In Deut 34:9 Joshua has either a wise spirit or, more likely, the Spirit of wisdom.

[19] See the survey in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregg R. Allison, *The Holy Spirit* (B&H Academic, 2020), 5–49.

[20] Fred Sanders refers to what is happening in Luke 10:22 as a "closed circle of divine knowledge." The only way into the circle is not through learned wisdom but by the revelation of God. Sanders specifically analyzes the Matthean version (Matt 11:27) in which the Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all. He makes the perceptive comment that the Holy Spirit is implicitly present in this passage about the revelation of God the Father and God the Son to us as the One in whom everything is happening. In Luke's version, the connection to the

This contrast between that which is revealed and that which is known through wisdom and learning leads into a discussion about prayer in the opening verses of chapter 11. In these verses Jesus urges his disciples to display shameless audacity in our requests of God. After imploring us to ask, seek, and knock, Jesus summarizes the quintessential request of God with the statement, "how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:13) Given the explicit mention of Solomon's wisdom in Luke 11:31, it is hard not to hear Jesus subtly critiquing Solomon's request from God and offering a better option.

That sense of subtle critique deepens as one analyzes Jesus's words about Solomon in 11:29–32. For one, while both the Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh will rise up and condemn the people of that generation, only Jonah is mentioned as a sign, not Solomon. The sign of Jonah in Luke's gospel is Jonah's prophetic preaching. This is why Jonah himself was a "sign to the Ninevites" (11:30) just as Jesus was to that generation. In Lucan theology, prophetic proclamation is linked to the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:17–18).[21]

It is also important to note that Jesus does not say he is *wiser* than Solomon; instead he says that he is *greater* than Solomon. Wisdom itself is being downplayed in favor of the full greatness of who Jesus is. The implication of Jesus being far greater than Solomon in Luke's Gospel is that rather than asking for wisdom, the true disciple of Jesus would want to ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit just as Jesus was (Luke 3:22; 4:1).

1 Corinthians 1–3

A second relevant passage is Paul's extended discussion of wisdom in 1 Corinthians. Paul explains that he came preaching the gospel not with wisdom or eloquence because God's plan is to destroy the wisdom of the wise and frustrate the intelligence of the intelligent (1:19). He then sets up a parallel of sorts between the Law and wisdom. He starts by asking, "where is the wise person?" and then offers two different "types" of wise people: the teachers of the Law and the philosophers of this age. The teachers of the Law are the Jews who demand signs (an allusion to Luke 11:29[22]), and the philosophers of this age are Greeks looking for wisdom (1:22).[23] The preaching of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1:23). But to both Jews and Greeks, Jesus is the power of God (especially

Holy Spirit is more explicit given the reference to the Holy Spirit in the Luke 10:21. Fred Sanders, *The Holy Spirit: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2023), 20–21.

[21] See also Luke 1:67; 2:25–32; Acts 19:6; 28:25.

[22] See also Mark 8:11–12.

[23] Although Solomon is Jewish, he is a representative example, a figurehead, for wisdom in the same way that Moses is for the Jewish Law. If so, then it is possible to see God giving Solomon wisdom as akin to God giving Moses the Law. For Paul, the law is holy, righteous and good (Rom 7:12), but because of the sinfulness of the human heart, what was meant for good resulted in death. So too for Solomon, the gift of wisdom from God was a good gift, but because of the sinfulness of Solomon's heart the wisdom of God—which was holy, righteous and good—resulted in death for Solomon.

for Jews) and the wisdom of God (especially for Greeks). Paul asserts that Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1:30).

Chapter 2 begins with the repeated affirmation that Paul did not use wise and persuasive words in his preaching but instead focused on giving demonstrations of the Spirit's power (2:4).[24] Paul's point is that he employs not the wisdom of the age but that which comes from God. This wisdom is necessarily revelatory because it is a hidden mystery (2:7). And it is inaccessible to the rulers of this age or else they would not have crucified Jesus (2:8). Such wisdom is not accessed through merely human observations and learning because "no eye has seen, no ear has heard," and "no human mind has conceived," what God is doing (2:9, citing Isa 64:4). Rather than being learned through wisdom these things are "revealed to us by his Spirit" (2:10). This is much more in line with the revealed wisdom of Daniel than the accrued wisdom of Solomon; it fits with the teachings of Jesus in Luke 10–11.[25]

Paul returns from his digression on wisdom to address the practical matters of conflict in the Corinthian church in chapter 3. He accuses the Corinthians of being worldly and not people who live by the Spirit in their focus on human wisdom. He then acknowledges himself as a "wise builder" (3:10) but counsels the Corinthians not to deceive themselves: "If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become 'fools' so that you might become wise" (3:18).[26]

James 3

A third NT passage whose perspective is helpful is James 3:13–18. In this passage James asks, "who is wise and understanding among you?" The proof of one's wisdom is a good life and deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. As recounted above, Solomon does some good deeds in humility early on, but by the end his foolish choices have overshadowed the good he has done.

Perhaps to explain why some seemingly wise people end up as such tragic figures, James then contrasts wisdom that "does not come down from heaven" with wisdom "that comes down from heaven" (vv. 15–17).

The wisdom that does not come down from above is characterized by bitter envy and selfish ambition. An honest evaluation of Solomon's choices, both in the historical books and as represented in Ecclesiastes, must affirm that many of them exhibit strong selfishness and self-centeredness (e.g.

[24] Here Paul introduces the Holy Spirit for the first time in 1 Corinthians and will spend the rest of the chapter speaking of the Holy Spirit in relation to wisdom.

[25] As Gordon Fee puts it, "Paul does not attribute the gaining of wisdom to the Spirit." *God's Empowering Presence*, 912. Ephesians 1:17 and Col 1:9, which use the language of wisdom in connection with the Spirit, both speak of that which the Spirit reveals and not what we learn through wisdom. See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 642–43.

[26] Is this not Solomon's journey, at least as it is pictured in Ecclesiastes? Though wise according to the standards of the age (cf. 1 Kgs 4:29–34), Solomon's journey into foolishness leads him to the root of true wisdom: fear the Lord and keep his commandments (Eccl 12:13).

Eccl 2:1–11). Likewise James claims that earthly wisdom will result in disorder and every evil practice. The narrative account in 1 Kgs 11 of God's anger against Solomon for his wicked ways as well as the adversaries God raised up to oppose Solomon leave the ending of Solomon's story replete with disorder and evil practices.

Although James mentions neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit explicitly in this passage, allusions to both can be seen when the passage speaks of "wisdom from above." A canonical reading of James 3 in light of Jesus being wisdom from God (1 Cor 1:30) and Jesus being the one "who comes from above" (John 3:31) points to Jesus as the Wisdom who comes from above. In this vein, Jesus's incarnation, life, and death are the quintessential examples of good deeds done in humility (Phil 2:3–8), demonstrating that Jesus is Wisdom from God. Likewise, the wisdom that comes from above is "first of all pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17). James's list is similar to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Gal 5. So too the same Spirit of wisdom (Isa 11:2) that came to rest on Jesus during his baptism (Luke 3:22) is the same Spirit that enables us to be transformed into the image of Jesus (2 Cor 3:18).

Read against the backdrop of Solomon's failures, the NT passages above confirm the clues discovered in the OT: a request to be filled with the Holy Spirit would have been Solomon's better choice.

IV. WISDOM AND PREACHING

Probing the question of whether Solomon should have asked for something else is not just a meaningless exercise, a chasing after the wind. For all Christians today—but especially for pastors, preachers, and teachers—the implication of such a question is: should we ask for something different from the Lord than the wisdom of Solomon? The Teacher in Ecclesiastes bemoans the burden of this God-given wisdom (Eccl 1:12–18). Should those who teach and preach in the church today not take heed and ask for something different for our preaching and teaching? Solomonic idolatry, overindulgence in sex and money, and frustration with the meaninglessness of life in many of our congregations should cause us to question if such spiritual immaturity is a result of preachers and teachers giving sermons too infused with human wisdom.

This was certainly the case in Corinth. After Paul left, the Corinthian church became mired in the same kind of spiritually immature behavior that characterized Solomon's later life. It is no surprise that 1 Corinthians is taken up with issues like money and sex (1 Cor 6), idolatry (1 Cor 8), and meaninglessness (1 Cor 15). These are the same issues that plague so many of our churches in America today. All this makes Paul's discussion of wisdom in 1 Cor 1–2 not an ivory tower essay but an impassioned defense of Paul's own ministry of preaching among the Corinthians and a prophetic word designed to expunge from the Corinthians their idolatry of wisdom that led to so much spiritual immaturity. Because God has purposed to destroy the wisdom of the wise and because the wisdom of this world is foolishness,

Paul consciously chose not to preach with wise and persuasive words but to focus on demonstrations of the Spirit's power so that the Corinthians' faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power (1 Cor 2:4–5).

What then should we ask God to supply us as preachers? If God were to give Paul a blank check and offer him anything he wanted, specifically with regard to his work as a preacher, I do not think he would have made the same request that Solomon did. He would not have chosen human wisdom. I believe that he would have chosen to have the power of the Holy Spirit radiate through him and to have the mysteries of God's wisdom revealed by the Holy Spirit in his preaching. James writes, "If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5). The blessing of living under the new covenant is that rather than ask for a one-time gift of wisdom like Solomon, the Christian has been given the ability to regularly, daily, even hourly if necessary, ask God for wisdom for each and every situation. Although James does not explicitly reference the Holy Spirit here, the implication is that because we have access to God the Father by the Spirit (Eph 2:18), we are free to ask him for wisdom whenever we need to.[27]

V. CONCLUSION

While mulling over the practical implications of this argument, I was privileged by God's providence to attend the Center for Pastor Theologians Conference on Kingdom Politics.[28] As I sat through the plenary sessions during one of the days of the conference, I was struck by the fact that on that particular day two of the presenters were academics and one was a pastor theologian. The two academics presented intellectually engaging, wise, and thoughtful reflections on the topic of the conference. But I felt something different happen in me and in the room when the pastor presented his material. He explained that his presentation consisted of two sermons from a sermon series on politics he preached in his local church. And while his style of delivery was not substantially different than that of the academics, the content was remarkably so. The pastor's main focus was an exposition of a biblical text. There were almost no citations of scholarly works or references to books read. And the material was a pastoral and practical attempt to help people love their neighbors and live out their baptismal identity in ways pleasing to the Lord. But it was not just the content that was different; it was the moving of the Spirit. Admittedly, my sense of the Spirit's activity during his sermon/talk is subjective. But the Spirit is usually discerned in community and my feelings about the contrast between the two presentations on one hand and his sermon/talk on the other were confirmed by at least five or six independent conversations with a diversity of people who were also present.[29]

---

[27] For more on James 1:5 and what it means to ask God for wisdom see Jim Samra, *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude* (Baker, 2016), 7.

[28] The conference was held in Oak Park, IL, September 23–25, 2024.

[29] Given that both the pastor theologian's sermon/talk and the two academics' papers

As I reflected on the difference between the pastor theologian's sermon/talk and the presentations of the two academics, I came away with the sense that this was the very difference between the wisdom of Solomon and the revealed wisdom that comes from the Spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:12 affirms the weariness and futility of much study of books for the learned, whereas Jesus speaks the words of life (John 6:68), and the words that proceed from the mouth of God bring life (Deut 8:3). There was a weariness and futility to the two academic papers and a sense of life to the sermon/talk of the pastor theologian.

If we are honest, given the chance, many pastors, and especially many pastor theologians, would like to be "the smartest guys in the room." We would like to be well-read, able to speak intelligently about many subjects, and have our sermons thought of as being erudite and learned. Being the smartest people in the room did not work out very well for the leaders of Enron. Nor did being the wisest person in the room work out well for Solomon. Although Solomon was given wisdom by God, his story stands as a stark warning to those who would strive for wisdom as the means to proclaim the kingdom of God. Rather, "we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). And it is because of this very crucifixion, the subsequent resurrection, and the ascension that we have received from God the promised Holy Spirit who reveals to us things which cannot be seen, heard or learned through wisdom. When approaching God in prayer with the opportunity to, "ask from me whatever it is that you want me to give to you," our response should be, "pour out your Spirit, Lord, on us and on our congregations. Take away wise and persuasive words from our sermons and give us manifestations of the Spirit's power and revelations of your unsearchable mysteries through the Spirit of the Living God."

---

were presented at a conference, I can only imagine how much more pronounced the difference would have been with regard to the Spirit's moving had we been gathered as a church in the presence of the Lord.