

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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SUBJECT: WISDOM NOT COOL
TITLE: WISDOM AIN'T COOL (1 OF 3)
TEXT: PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION. I have a soft spot in my heart for my nieces and nephews. I have always enjoyed spending time with them, and while I may have ignored their parents from time to time but I have tried to give them my attention. A few years ago, I showed something to Will, and was a little surprised to hear him say, "Cool!"

My first thought was, "Cool" must be "in" again. My second thought was that it had returned with a younger set than the last cycle. But then, "cool" has been in vogue over a longer period of time than most catchy words and phrases.

When I was in high school, there were students who would introduce others to these new phrases from time to time, usually after seeing a popular movie. One year, a group of boys suddenly started calling everything, and everyone, a cat - as in, "He's a cat;" or "That's a cat." I was a little slow in picking up these expressions, mostly because I wasn't "cool." I did figure out one thing, however, and that is that as soon as any teacher or parent began to use the expression, they were destined to the trash heap of no longer "cool" expressions.

You may remember when "Bad" was good - I mean really good! The only problem was that no one had explained that to the people of South Korea when the Olympics were held there. A number of American athletes decided to show their appreciation for the hospitality of the South Korean people by walking down the street wearing tee-shirts with the imprint, SOUTH KOREA IS BAD. That was not "cool!" It takes some diplomacy to convince South Koreans that "bad" is a compliment.

I recently called my younger brother Mike to ask him if "cool" is still cool. He assured me that he hears it all the time. His older son, Jim, is a senior at LSU; Rachel is a Junior in high school; and twins Will and Joanna are in junior high. When I observed that a lot of people are moving on from "cool" to "awesome" today, Mike said, "Absolutely. I hear it all the time."

In this three part series, WISDOM AIN'T COOL (with full apologies to all my English teachers - and to my wife, who has for more years than I dare mention, taught language arts), I would like to explore the possibility that all that's "cool" may not measure up to the wisdom of God.

I. WHAT IS COOL OFTEN STANDS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE WISDOM OF GOD, PROVERBS 1:2-7.

A. To Some, Being “Cool” Is Knowing What to Wear.

1. It is smart to “dress for the occasion.”

Before each meeting of the board of trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources, board members receive a packet of material, containing information about reservations, expenses, committee meetings, and any pressing business which will be presented. Before meetings at Ridgecrest or Glorieta, there is a note that members may want to wear casual dress for committee meetings and plenary sessions, but that they may want to wear a coat and tie for the banquet.

On 9/11/01, when planes were grounded after the terrorists’ attacks, I was one of the few people at Glorieta who had driven his own automobile. Most people had flown to Albuquerque and rented a car. Arrangements were made for trustees to drive home in rentals LifeWay employees had rented for the meeting, and a bus was chartered for LifeWay employees to return to Nashville. I overheard Executive Vice-President Ted Warren when he was informing employees about the plans. He concluded with the comment, “It is a long trip so you can wear casual dress. But no shorts!” Shorts may be “cool” for some trips, but not on that bus.

2. “Neat” may be “cool”, or it may not be.

There was a time when young people found everything pleasant to be “neat” - as in “cool”. But for the most part neat means - well, neat. There is a lot to be said for neat. Neatness includes hygiene, grooming, and attention to one’s shoes and clothes. I once listened to the head of a law firm explain that his daughter had stopped going fishing with him. When she was younger she loved to go fishing with him, but when she reached her mid-teens she no longer wanted to go with him. This girl responded, “I would still like to fish, but you always stop by that café and drink coffee with those dirty old men!” Her father said, “Those men are not dirty, they are just wearing work clothes.” After a few hours of yard work I am usually sweaty, dirty, and far from neat. But when I start I am usually dressed for the occasion.

For several years now, there has been a debate about school uniforms. Well, school uniforms may be neat but I doubt that everyone finds them to be “cool”. Recently, a student who had just been disciplined went to his teacher and apologized for his behavior. He explained, “I was just trying to be cool. I just do that because I am such a nerd.” When everyone is wearing a school uniform it is hard to tell who is “cool” and who is a “nerd.”

3. What’s “cool” to some people is something “weird”.

My wife and I were waiting for our meal to be served at McAllister’s when a young boy, maybe thirteen or fourteen came into the restaurant. He had a handkerchief tied around his head and the

seat of his pants were just above his knees. He headed straight to a black man who was sitting at a table and started bumping fists with him. He was dressed “black” and trying to act “black”. It was not a very good act. He, no doubt, thought he was being “cool”. I, on the other hand, was wondering how cool the young black man thought he was.

4. “Grungy” is “cool” to some people.

It is as though some young people today think it somehow “uncool” to be well groomed. Clothes must be wrinkled, with an appropriate number of holes; and of course, the pant legs must be well shredded - not just worn, but shredded. Everything is ragged but the WWJD bracelet.

5. “Skimpy” is “cool” to a lot of people.

Sadly, we live in a culture that encourages immodest dress. It goes without saying - and most things that could go without saying probably should - that we did not move from the ultra-modest dress of the Puritans to the immodest dress many young women wear today in one step. Changes came in increments - from pants to shorts, to short-shorts, to mini-skirts, to more shameless attire.

I once listened to a pastor’s wife rant and rave about an evangelist who had preached against girls wearing shorts. She went on to say, “And while he was preaching he was wearing light pants and I could see the outline of his shorts through his pants!” I sat there wondering why her husband didn’t explain the difference. He sat there wondering who knows what. They were in their late forties and they had two sons and three daughters. Someone needed to tell those girls that the way they dressed could have moral implications.

A friend told me a story he insisted was true. The mini-skirt was the epitome of “cool” at the time and many church members were adopting the style of the day. My friend told that the pastor of a local Black Baptist church who was not happy when his organist showed up in a mini-skirt. After playing for the “song service” she left the organ bench and took her seat on a front pew. She immediately began pulling and tugging on her skirt. After observing her attempts to pull down her skirt, the pastor paused and said, “It ain’t going to be long enough - but it ain’t any shorter than it was when you left home.” That was a wise pastor. A courageous one, too!

6. Wisdom in dress does not place a premium on what’s “cool”.

Certain guidelines should be considered in buying clothes. Common sense says that one should try to get the best quality at a price he can afford. Common sense will lead us to buy clothes that are practical and suitable for occasion for which they are to be worn. As to style, there is an old adage: “Be not the first by which the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old.”

The Christian will go beyond that to select clothes that are modest, and clothes that will enhance one’s testimony for the Lord. “Crude” and “lewd” may be cool to some people, but the wisdom of God will direct us to avoid dress that call our commitment to Jesus Christ into question. A girl who

dresses in a manner that encourages lust may be popular, but she can easily compromise her testimony. A boy who dresses in designer clothes in a Sunday School class where no one else can afford to wear expensive clothes may find that others he would like to reach are holding him at a distance. Those who boast of their expensive clothes and shoes around those who cannot afford them are compromising their witness - whether they are wearing their WWJD bracelet or not.

7. The Wisdom of God will help us here.

You may be wondering what Solomon had to say about mini-skirts and bikinis. Any you would be right! Styles have changed over the past three thousand years - what does he know? The Holy Spirit, Who inspired every word of the Book of Proverbs, knew exactly what He was doing. The Lord has given parents the responsibility to bring up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and He holds them accountable for doing that. He also commands children to obey their parents. Parents should teach their children and young people how to dress, not only “to suit the occasion”, but also to glorify the Lord.

“Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live,”
Pro.4:1-4.

What does the way we dress have to do with the wisdom of God? Why do we need to give this so much attention? In the first place, wisdom in the Old Testament has moral implications. No immoral person can be considered wise. A person who does not make good moral decisions is called a fool. In the second place, while Solomon did not have much to say about dress codes, the Apostle Paul lays down guidelines that would keep Christian women from being identified with immoral women of pagan temples. One's dress can identify one with the Lord, or the world.

My son, John, has several years experience in working with young people, both as chief prosecutor for a medium sized city and prosecutor with a district attorney's office specializing in juvenile prosecutions. He frequently has parents to call him and ask if they might take their teenager by his office and see if he can talk with them. He can often tell by their dress, hair, jewelry, speech, and body language whether it is going to do any good to talk with them. Sadly, by the time some parents ask for help it is too late. Earlier compromises by those parents was a major factor in the trouble they were having with them at the time.

Parents must determine what their children and teens wear, not their peers. When they go to court, or to prison, it is not going to be their “friends” who are going to visit, grieve, and write to them. It will be their parents. What this means is that parents can save themselves and their children a lot of trouble by applying the wisdom of God in their homes from the beginning.

If Solomon fails to address the importance of dressing in a manner that glorifies the Lord, Jesus and

Paul cover it in the New Testament. Jesus lays down the law for all of us:

“But I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:28-29).

Paul was inspired to write:

“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness” (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Now, here is a principle you may apply in dress as well as speech or behavior in general:

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col 3:17).

B. To Some, the Latest Hair Style Is What Is “Cool”.

1. There is nothing wrong with changing one’s hair style.

Beauticians go to meetings to learn the latest style and return to introduce it to ladies - and sometimes men - at their shops. What is “in” at the moment is what is “cool”, but only if you are among the first to try it. Of course, my barber seems to know what he is doing, but I would be surprised if he has been to any school or meeting since barber school.

2. Shocking is what is “cool” to many young people and some young adults.

Dennis Rodman played in the NBA with orange hair, or maybe it was green, or purple. Before long, teenagers everywhere were forming some kind of rainbow brigade. We saw streaks of red, blue, orange and green, often on the same head.

I have no word from the Lord on hair styles or hair color, but we can deduce certain things from the Word of God. Paul, for example, asks:

“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering” (1. Cor 11:14-15).

Now I know someone will challenge me on this. I have just said that I have no word from the Lord, and then I quoted from Paul’s First Epistle to Corinth. Well, Paul does not say how long “long” is.

I have no doubt that Paul is saying that men should look masculine and women should look feminine. There is no reason for a man to be ashamed of their masculinity and there is no reason for a woman to be ashamed to be feminine.

Once again, one might wonder why I would mention hair style. And once again, I must stress that people with whom I am in contact tell me that they can tell a lot about young people and young adults by their hair style. Now, it is easy to misjudge someone on the basis of dress or hair style, so we need to practice Spirit-led caution. But Christians should be very careful to avoid compromising their testimony over something superficial.

II. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS NOT ALWAYS COOL.

A. The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom, Pro. 9:10.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction,”, Pro. 1:7.

1. The fear of the Lord is the source of the knowledge of the holy.
 - a. The wisdom of God is spiritually discerned.

The world will never understand the wisdom of which Solomon and Paul write. In the first place, the world will not understand the wisdom of God because it is in rebellion against him - and it is being blinded by the prince of this world. In the second place, it cannot perceive the wisdom of God because it is blind to spiritual truth.

- b. The wisdom of God recognizes absolute truth.

Dr. Norman Geisler, one of the greatest apologists of the past fifty years, was the guest of Tim Widmon and Marvin Sanders on their AFR radio program on 10-21-02. As a matter of fact, he broke the news to the media around the world the next day. He announced the discovery of the ossuary of “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus” in Jerusalem. A Jewish archaeologist had announced that the inscription was a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. Lost people immediately demanded more proof - and so did some liberal Christians. The experts in the field said that it was common to list the father, but to find the name of a brother inscribed on an ossuary was very unusual. This is one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made, and it was worth listening to Dr. Geisler if only to hear about it.

Dr. Geisler made another statement that was especially relevant. He said that when they started holding conferences on the Christian faith many years ago, he had ten points. In recent years he has had to add two points up front: First, there is such thing as absolute truth; second, the opposite of true is false.

We live in a world that has been taught that all truth is relative. Truth for one person may be the opposite of what someone accepts as true - in other words, the opposite of true may be true to those who have embraced Humanistic and New Age (postmodern) reasoning.

2. The wisdom of God is revealed to believers.

It is not unusual to hear people speak of faith - and consequently, the wisdom of God - in a manner that testifies to their ignorance of God. Bill O'Reilly interviewed a man whose friend had been killed by the Beltway sniper. The man stressed his faith in God to see him and his friend's family through their grief and minister to them. The host responded that if someone can adopt such an attitude it would be a psychological advantage to him. He apparently has no concept of spiritual benefits one may receive through faith.

The Apostle Paul was a bit more narrow than that. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He wrote:

*“And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God**” (1 Cor. 2:4-5).*

Paul continues:

“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:6-8).

Paul is just getting started:

*“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, **not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words**” (11-13).*

It gets better:

*“But **a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because **they are spiritually appraised**. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For **WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM?** But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:14-16).*

Whether in speech, dress, or behavior in general, the children of God must make spiritual decisions. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him to God the Father*” (Col. 3:17).

B. The Wisdom of God Expressed in Jesus Christ Is not “Cool.”

1. Only believers have the “mind of Christ,” (1 Cor. 2:16).
2. Lost people can only be taught to accept certain standards.

I will never forget the day I sat on a hospital bed at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, listening to Kenny Wagner talk about his values and the standards by which he lived his life. This man had killed more men than I had baptized at that point in my ministry - though I would soon baptize about forty-five prisoners. I had only recently begun my first pastorate.

He had just startled me by announcing that he could “put a bomb” under Gov. J. P. Coleman, who had been making some comments about Kenny Wagner - comments carried in the Jackson Clarion Ledger. I was relieved to discover he was talking about a political bomb! I was sitting there trying to recall how many people this man had killed when he handed me a little tube of lozenges and told me to take one for my cough. I held them for a minute or two before he told me to go on and take one. I said, “Yes Sir,” and took one.

I spent a considerable amount of time with Wagner and during our visit I discovered why people protected him for many years between his escape years earlier and his surrender to authorities after health problems demanded care he could not receive anywhere except the prison hospital. He really was an interesting man. He was also a man who had adopted some standards for his life. I was a little amazed when he announced, “I will never tell you a lie, and I would respect your sister the same way I would respect my own.” I believed him. But he would die eight days later without a Savior. He had adopted his own standards but never saw any need for Jesus Christ. Oh, he assured me he had nothing against God. He said, “A preacher told me one time that if I wasn’t for Him I was against Him, and I don’t have anything against Him.”

A friend told me he had changed his mind about social dancing following a humiliating experience. One evening, he joined others from his church for visitation. He and a friend rang the door bell and a man invited them into his living room. As they began to witness to the man, he stopped them and looking at my friend, asked, “Didn’t I see you at (he named a club) the other night?” My friend said, “Yes sir, I was there.”

The man they were trying to lead to the Lord shocked them: “Then, what are you doing here trying to tell me what to do? You do the same thing I do!”

Let me assure you that at that moment it did not matter what my friend had believed about dancing.

What mattered was what this lost man thought. Sadly, because my friend had decided to exercise his freedom to do what he wanted to do, he missed an opportunity to lead a person to the Lord. Let's face it, that man may well be in hell today, and one factor was the way a professing Christian chose to live his life.

C. True Wisdom Confesses Jesus Christ.

Paul calls God's wisdom a mystery. The key to that mystery is Jesus Christ. I thank God that key to that mystery was not left for you and me to discover it, or to attain it through some mystical process. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus sent to convict sinners of sin, warn them of God's judgment, and to convince them to trust Jesus Christ for salvation.

Once you know Jesus experientially, you will understand that you do not get to know Him by abstaining from certain habits, from questionable dress, or language. However, when you receive Him as Savior you receive Him as Lord. You become His slave, bought with a price. You belong to Him. Your desire is to honor Him and to glorify Him before the world. Paul said best:

"For, to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

CONCLUSION. Are we trying to persuade Christians to adopt a boring, Puritanical style of dress and speech? Of course not. My urgent appeal to you is to remember that you are not your own; you have been bought with a price. That price was the greatest price ever paid. Jesus Christ poured out His life's blood for you and me at Calvary.

Just as Paul had to make decisions about whether or not to eat certain things, you and I have decisions to make every day. Some of those decisions have to do with entertainment, some with what we will do or will not do on the Lord's Day, and some of those decisions have to do with what we will wear, what we will say, and how we will relate to those around us.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17).

INVITATION