

What Does It Mean That “The Wisdom of the Poor Is Despised”?  
(Ecclesiastes 9:16)

Question:

In *Ecclesiastes 9:16*,

*the Bible says, “The wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heard.”*

Does this mean we should not listen to the advice or counsel of people who are poor or have no influence? How should we understand this verse?

Answer:

Let’s first look at the full context of this passage, beginning in verse 13:

“This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me: There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man. Then I said: ‘Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.’”

—*Ecclesiastes 9:13-16*

This story illustrates a sobering truth: even though the poor man had the wisdom to save an entire city, he was quickly forgotten and his words were ignored. Solomon reflects on this injustice—not to say that the poor are unworthy of being heard, but to highlight how society often overlooks those without wealth, status, or influence, regardless of the value they offer.

Theological Reflection:

The Bible consistently teaches that God values wisdom, not status or wealth. Scripture tells us,

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”

(Proverbs 9:10),

which means that true wisdom begins with a right relationship with God, not with academic degrees or financial success.

In James 2:1-5, the Apostle James strongly rebukes the Church for showing favoritism to the rich while dishonoring the poor. He writes:

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” —*James 2:5*

Clearly, Scripture affirms that poor people can be spiritually rich and incredibly wise. The problem Ecclesiastes reveals is not the lack of wisdom among the poor, but the human tendency to overlook it.

Solomon’s point is this: wisdom is better than strength (Eccl. 9:16a), but sadly, the world often values power, appearance, and wealth more than godly wisdom. This should not be so among God’s people.

Application:

- Do not judge a person’s wisdom by their appearance, income, or education.
- Be humble and willing to listen to advice, even when it comes from someone the world may consider “less.”
- Realize that some of the most valuable insights may come from the quietest voices—those not in the spotlight.

Ecclesiastes 4:13 reinforces this when it says:

“Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.”

In God’s eyes, it’s not about how loud your voice is or how high your position is—it’s about the character and wisdom rooted in righteousness.

Final Thought:

The message of Ecclesiastes 9:16 is not a call to ignore the poor—it’s a challenge to the pride and prejudice that cause us to do so. Let us be the kind of people who value wisdom wherever it’s found and honor the humble insights God often chooses to use.

May the Lord help us to listen with humility, and not despise the voices He may use to speak truth—even when they come from unexpected places.

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