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**R. C. SPROUL**

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## Chapter One

# Introduction to Wisdom

As a college student, I majored in the academic discipline of philosophy. On the first day, in the very first philosophy course that I took, the professor wrote the word *philosophy* on the board. He then broke it down into its etymological derivation. *Philosophy* comes from the Greek, and of course, the Greeks are usually seen as the founding fathers of Western philosophy—first with the pre-Socratic philosophers; then with Socrates himself; followed by Plato, Aristotle, and others.



## What Is Biblical Wisdom?

The word *philosophy* combines two important Greek words: the first part of the word comes from the Greek *phileō*, which means “to love.” We are familiar with this word in the English language because we all know the meaning of the city of Philadelphia—the city of brotherly love.

Some may also be familiar with this word from Jesus’ conversation with Peter in John 21, where Jesus repeatedly asks Peter, “Do you love me?” (vv. 15–17). In this exchange, the New Testament uses two different words that are both translated by the English word *love*. The first is *agapē*, which is the spiritual love, the zenith of love, the kind of love that God sheds abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And there is also *philia*, which is used for brotherly love and affection. This is the word that was joined here to the word *philosophy*.

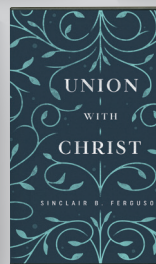
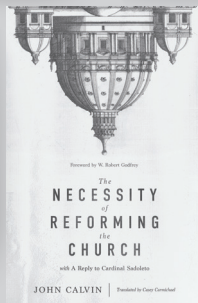
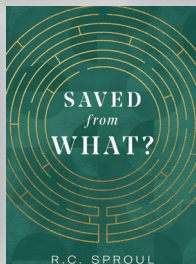
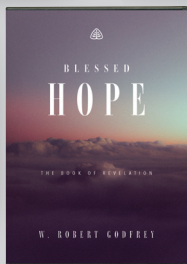
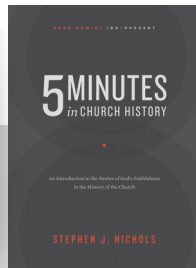
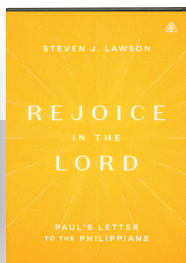
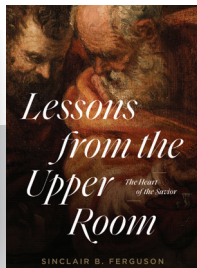
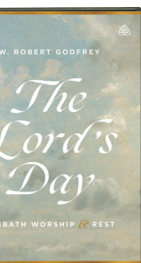
The second part of the word *philosophy* comes from another Greek word, *sophia*, which is the word for “wisdom.” When you combine these words, *philia* and *sophia*, the simple meaning of the term *philosophy* is “the love of wisdom.” This intrigued me as a college student in my first course in the study of philosophy because I naturally assumed that by studying philosophy I would learn all about wisdom in a practical sense.

However, I soon discovered that Greek philosophy, for example, focused on abstract, weighty questions in metaphysics (the study of ultimate being) and epistemology (the study of the process by which human beings learn). It is true that historically in the discipline of philosophy, one of its subdivisions is ethics—particularly, the science of normative ethics, which is the study of imperatives on how one ought to live. And normative ethics was certainly a concern of the ancient Greeks.

Socrates was convinced that proper conduct, or right living, is intimately connected with right knowledge. That is, for a person to behave in a courageous manner, he must first understand what courage is and what courage means. So, Socrates was convinced that philosophy was not just an unrelated, impractical, abstract discipline of human speculation but very much concerned with concrete daily living. He was concerned about the decadence of Greek civilization in his day, and he saw that the Greek culture was in the process of disintegration because it had lost its moral foundation.

It's amazing how many parallels there are between the Greece of Socrates' day and America of today. So many of the same crises are being visited. But despite Socrates'

We want to see men and women  
around the world connect the deep truths  
of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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