

Etymology of Sophistication: Friedrich: “Sophia always denotes a quality, never an activity”: Thought Must Precede Action

15. The concept of the sophisticated spiritual life must be explained and analyzed so that the application of the royal law can become a part of the believer’s lifestyle.
16. First of all, the idea of “sophistication” needs some attention. The etymology of this English word traces back to the Attic Greek noun σοφία, *sophia*, and the Greek adjective σοφός, *sophos*.
17. A definition of each of these words lays the groundwork for its English application:

σοφία *sophía*. Deep knowledge, natural and moral insight, learning; cultivation of the mind and enlightened understanding. Wisdom, knowledge, insight, deep understanding. (p. 1300)

σοφός *sophos*. The meaning of *sophos* in the New Testament and its Hebrew equivalent, *chokmah* [חָכְמָה], differs from the classical meaning in at least two ways. First of all, the biblical concept of wisdom is theocentric rather than anthropocentric. It denotes an understanding of God’s ways. Lastly, wisdom signifies the possession of a certain adeptness or practical ability. It does not necessarily imply brilliance or scholastic training; rather, *sophos* indicates adroitness, the ability to apply with skill what one knows (especially religious truth). Skilled in learning, learned, intelligent, enlightened, in respect to things human and divine.¹ (pp. 1301–2)

18. The concept behind each of these definitions is expressed in this excerpt from Gerhard Friedrich:

From the adjective σοφός there developed quite early the abstract noun σοφία. An important point is that in contrast to specific epistemological terms like γνώσις, σύνεσις, and others, in which we have verbal abstracts, σοφία is derived from an adjective and always denotes a quality, never an activity. This is the reason for the great shift which took place in its meaning. In general σοφία denotes a materially complete and hence unusual knowledge and ability. In the early Greek period any practical skill of this kind counted as wisdom, then during the classical period the range of meaning was strongly restricted to theoretical and intellectual knowledge, and finally in the usage of the philosophical schools of Hellenism and later antiquity the practical element was united again with the theoretical in the ideal picture of the wise man.²

19. PRINCIPLE: “Σοφία *always* denotes quality, never an activity.” The emphasis is on unusual knowledge rather than ability. Quality is an absolute while activity or ability is relative.

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed., “σοφία” and “σοφός,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1300–1302.

² Gerhard Friedrich, ed., “σοφία, σοφός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:467.

20. The sophisticated spiritual life is quality not activity as is indicated by its English definitions:
- sophistication: the process or result of becoming knowledgeable, complex, or developed.³**
- sophisticated: having acquired worldly knowledge or refinement. Complex or complicated; refined.⁴**
- sophisticated: a system developed to a high degree of complexity; of a person or their thoughts and understanding; aware of and able to interpret complex issues.⁵**
21. The believer who advances to the sophisticated spiritual life has done the hard slog of learning the entire realm of systematic theology. He has catalogued doctrines into constellations of thought that feed amalgamated data to the conscious mind. His ability to think in the light of divine viewpoint enables him to resolve issues, solve problems, evaluate circumstances, and make decisions, all from a position of strength.
22. This approach to life has a high degree of quality because it is organized in the soul from the source of the Word of God by the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit Who recalls pertinent information as situations require.
23. Sophistication therefore means quality. The activity of the Christian is relative. Because it is dependent on the spiritual status of the individual, it can vary from divine good, to human good, to evil.
24. Because so much of modern Christianity places emphasis on activity first there is a significant lack of quality. Quality must precede activity for the activity to result in divine good.
25. Quality is produced by those who have become knowledgeable about the World of God and have become refined in their thinking as a result. This creates the ability to cogitate on complex issues from a biblical worldview.
26. This ability describes a person of spiritual sophistication whose inventory of ideas is developed from intensive Bible study over a period of time.

³ Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, s.v.: sophistication."

⁴ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v.: "sophisticated."

⁵ The New Oxford American Dictionary, s.v.: "sophisticated."