Theme: The Beginning of True Wisdom

Text: Proverbs 9:10

10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Dear fellow redeemed, who have been enlightened with the wisdom of Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you in His name.

I once read a funny article about some of the wise sayings, or “proverbs” that people have come up with over the years. For each one of the proverbs it listed it also listed an equally famous yet opposite “counter-proverb.” The writer of the article proposed that you could win any argument and turn any conversation in the direction you wanted if you just used the proper proverb or “counter-proverb.” Here are a few of my favorites from that list:

Actions speak louder than words.  
The bigger the better.
Look before you leap.  
Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
He who hesitates is lost.  
Out of sight, out of mind.

Now, this article was obviously intended to be humorous, but it does illustrate a point about the proverbs people come up with, and the wisdom of mankind in general. At best, some of mankind’s wisest sayings are only true in certain situations, while in other situations the complete opposite is true. Do these types of “situational proverbs” constitute true wisdom? Is a saying or philosophy truly wise if it’s only true part of the time? Of course not. That is why when we Christians are searching for true wisdom we turn to God’s wisdom—the Bible. We turn to the very Proverbs that were inspired by God Himself. Many of these Proverbs were written down by Solomon, a man whom God blessed with greater wisdom than any man on earth (cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34). This inspired king of Israel tells us in our text for today what true wisdom is: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Wisdom is more than just knowing something; it’s more than just intellectual “head knowledge.” I’ve heard wisdom defined as “applied knowledge.” One dictionary gives as its first definition of “wisdom”: “good sense – the knowledge and experience necessary to make sensible decisions and judgments” (Encarta Dictionary - Online). I think it’s safe to say that everyone at some time or another in their life searches for wisdom.

🧧 Young people desire wisdom because they want to know more about the life that they have not yet been able to experience much for themselves.
🧧 Students, especially those who are about to graduate and move on into the “real world” of full time employment, desire wisdom so that they can apply all the things that they have learned over their years of schooling to their occupation or calling.
🧧 Parents desire wisdom so that they know how to raise their children properly and manage their household well.
🧧 Even older folks, who are generally looked up to for their wisdom from all their life experience—even they desire wisdom to help them make the proper decisions as they deal with uncertainties they face as they near the end of their life.

Are you searching for wisdom in your life right now? Maybe you’re facing a difficult decision. Maybe you’re at a crucial point in life where you really need some guidance as to what you should do next. Perhaps you’re simply looking for wisdom to just make the right decisions in your day-to-day life.
If you find yourself searching, hoping, praying for wisdom where are you going to turn as your starting point to obtaining it? More schooling? Self-help books? Maybe a mentor, a person older or wiser than yourself? Well, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived points us to a rather unusual place as the starting point of wisdom: He says in our text that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

This starting point may not seem so unusual if we first of all gain a proper understanding of the term "fear of the LORD" as it is used in the Scriptures. It does not mean to be afraid of the LORD or to be terrified of Him. Rather, to "fear the LORD" means to revere or respect Him. To "fear the LORD" means to honor Him; to stand in awe of Him. 1) for all that He is 2) for all that He can do and 3) for all that He has done for us—especially sending His Son Jesus to this earth to save us helpless, rebellious sinners from eternal death. It is this "wisdom" of how God has forgiven us through Christ that causes us to "fear" the LORD with reverential awe. As Psalm 130 states "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared" (Psalm 130:3-4). God’s forgiveness doesn't make us afraid of Him. His forgiveness is what makes us not afraid of God! But God’s undeserved love and forgiveness do cause us to “fear” Him, because that is where His true glory shines most brightly. Yes, God’s power, wisdom, and might are impressive, but it's His grace and forgiveness that truly make us stand in reverential awe of Him!

When we take a look at the second half of our verse from Proverbs we observe something that is typical of Old Testament Hebrew poetry. The thought of the first phrase is repeated and expanded by the second: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). The "knowledge" of God, "the Holy One," is the most important "wisdom" and "understanding" we can have and there is only one way to obtain it. Solomon tells us in Proverbs 2:6 "For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Fortunately for us the LORD is so gracious that He has given us the Words of His mouth, "the Holy Scriptures which," the Apostle Paul tells us, "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

It is this "wisdom" that Paul spoke about in his first letter to the Corinthians. In our Scripture reading for today we heard Paul write, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (1 Corinthians 2:2, 4-5). The "wisdom" of "the message of the cross" as Paul puts it just a few verses earlier in that same letter, "is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." That is why "we preach Christ crucified...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23, 24-25).

Is the wisdom of this world useless, then? No. It can be very useful and God uses it in many ways to bless His people. But man's wisdom is limited, it is flawed: it is temporary; it is changeable and ever-changing. The theories and philosophies of our age are proposed to be the wisest and most enlightened. Yet, in about 50 years or so, the people of that generation will be saying the same thing about the theories and philosophies of their generation. The proverbs and wise sayings of human beings do not always hold true: Many hands make light work...but, Too many cooks spoil the broth!

Most importantly, man's wisdom is missing the most important thing: It can never give us salvation.

The wisdom of God, on the other hand, is eternal; it is unchangeable and unchanging for it is based on the words of God Himself. Jesus once said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Matthew 24:35). It is a wisdom that is very useful effective and practical in this life, since, after all, it is the wisdom of the Creator Himself. And God tells us His wisdom is there for the asking.
As the Apostle James reminds us, it is there for us through prayer, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). God’s wisdom is there for us through understanding God’s will in the Scriptures, as the Apostle Paul by inspiration reminds us, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). The “will of the Lord” is ultimately our eternal salvation. God’s wisdom alone gives us that salvation! It makes us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). Forgiveness and life through the cross of Christ; that is true wisdom!

Who wouldn’t want that for themselves? Who wouldn’t want that for their children, or their grandchildren? We all want what’s best for our children. That’s what Christian Education gives them: The very best! Whether it’s through catechism instruction, Sunday School, or through our Christian Day School, Christian Education gives them the wisdom of salvation that has eternal benefits!

This true wisdom which has been given to us as a gift from God will also guide and direct our hearts and minds so that we are wise in every area of our life. "The fear of the LORD," the "knowledge" of what the "Holy One" has done for us in Christ will inspire wisdom in us in every situation:

✦ In temptation we will remember that He overcame all temptations for us.
✦ In trouble we will remember that He who once calmed the storm for His disciples on the sea can still calm the storms of life for us, His followers.
✦ In despair we will remember that He endured the despair of eternal punishment of death and hell for your sins and mine while He hung on the cross.

Because of this "wisdom" of Salvation through Christ we know that one day we too will share in the perfect knowledge of heaven, and we will "Know just as [we] also [are] known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). May God fill us with His Spirit through His Word and give each one of us His wisdom—true wisdom! Amen.