

“The Oldest and Wisest”—Proverbs 8:22-23,30-31

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Oldest and Wisest”, is Proverbs 8:22-23,30-31 → *The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. . . I was beside Him, like a master workman, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“If I only knew then what I know now.” This thought attests to the dynamic of life that with age comes wisdom. While it is assumed that an older person has more wisdom about life it is also a reality that many younger people know much more about many others things in life. The many changes in technology coupled with a perceived lack of common sense proves a challenge for the person who is striving to “grow old gracefully.” Thus, a person’s wisdom is challenged when he has to ask his seven year old grandchild to teach him how to program his smart phone. However, your wisdom is cherished when that grandchild seeks your help to do some basic life skills. Wisdom is important at all developmental stages in life.

Our text also speaks about wisdom in connection with time. In the context of Proverbs chapters eight and nine, the Holy Spirit places before us two choices: following the way of folly (personified as an adulterous woman luring you into wickedness, unbelief and ultimately spiritual destruction), or following the way of wisdom (personified as a woman leading you to faith, obedience and eternal life). The use of women in this contrast is natural since sophia, the Greek word for wisdom, is a feminine noun. The important application of these words, however, concerns your choice. Will you follow Yahweh or the devil, the sinful world and your own sinful nature? Will you choose wisdom or folly?

The concept of “wisdom” in Scripture is different than “knowledge,” although they are naturally related to each other. Knowledge is possessing information about something while wisdom is being able to apply that knowledge in some kind of productive and useful way. The judgment, “they got all the book learnin’ but no common sense,” expresses a feeling that a person knows everything about a particular topic but just can’t seem to apply it in a practical way to life.

Paul revealed the importance of knowledge and wisdom as he wrote to the Christians in Colossae about their faith relationship with the Lord Jesus. He said in Colossians 1:9-10 that he continued *to pray for* them, *asking that they may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all*

*spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Growing in the knowledge of God is meant to display spiritual wisdom and understanding, that is, it is intended to lead you to bear fruit **in every good work**. The knowledge of God's will is ultimately found in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:31).

In vv. 22-23 of our text, wisdom is spoken of as a person Who existed with God from all eternity, the oldest and the wisest. It says: *The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.* In light of Christ's being God in human flesh, existing from eternity with God the Father and through Whom all things were created (cf. John 1:14; Colossians 2:15-17; Hebrew 1:1-4), the Church has understood the wisdom referred to in our text here as a type of Jesus. We confess this understanding of Jesus in the Nicene Creed with the words: "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds . . . begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

Our text also gives us a picture of Jesus' joy while working *beside Yahweh like a master workman, . . . daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the children*

of man. (verses 30-31) The wisdom with which we and the universe were created is actually unfathomable. Throughout it's history we have studied God's creation and creatures, learning so much and using that knowledge in so many wonderful ways. Such knowledge has brought many blessings into our lives and benefitted our standards of living immensely! Yet, there is still so much more to learn!

Such knowledge, though, does not automatically mean the wisdom of God is recognized. Scientists, archeologists and numerous other academic disciplines have actually used this knowledge in an effort to discredit the wisdom of God. Evolutionary theories, genetic manipulation, physical hypotheses and various research has been used to reshape moral and spiritual values in our lives. With no Creator there is actually no need for morality or accountability amongst people. Such "wisdom" as this eventually leads to relativity where right and wrong are determined individually without respect for human life and no need for a god. Thus, while gaining knowledge with the observation of Yahweh's creating *acts of old*, mankind does not know how to deal with his sin which uses God's knowledge to discredit Him.

Think about peoples' desire to be "right" all the time. In conversations one gets very defensive if disagreed with or confronted about wrong behavior. Our value system and experiences demand us to think we know better than someone else? When was the last time you listened to

a couple share their experiences from a trip or vacation, only to listen to them correct each other about minute details of the trip that really added nothing to sharing the experience? Who cares? Apparently we do because we have to be right. It is that which fuels the need for self-justification when we mess up as well.

Proverbs 9:10 says: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* Notice the **beginning** of wisdom is *the fear of the LORD* (i.e. faith). If trust in Yahweh is not the starting point of your knowledge then your wisdom will be all messed up. This is evident in the first temptation of history recorded in Genesis chapter three. The devil's lie to Eve was *you will be like God*. Then, *when the woman saw . . . that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* (cf. Genesis 3:5-6) From that point on their knowledge was used improperly as their guilt over disobedience to Yahweh clouded over their wisdom. With their new "knowledge" they thought it wise to separate themselves from God and from each other, no longer living in *the fear of the LORD*. They lost being right all the time in the original righteousness with which God created them, yet continued striving to justify themselves in their sinfulness.

The fear of the LORD—faith in Yahweh—is very important as *the beginning of wisdom* in your life. First, it is the only way you will find

peace in the midst of your sin, your unholy living and disobedience to God. The LORD gave you the promise in Genesis 3:15 to send a man, born of a woman, Who would *bruise* the devil's *head*, thus destroying his power over *the children of man* in whom Jesus rejoiced and delighted at creation. In *the fear of the LORD*—faith in Yahweh—you have *the knowledge of the Holy One* (i.e. Jesus) and gain *insight* into God's grace, steadfast love and forgiveness of sins as you repent and trust in that which you confess in the Nicene Creed: Jesus “was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead” (you will be in either one of those two categories).

The fear of the LORD—faith in Yahweh—is very important as *the beginning of wisdom* in your life as you also confess the work of the Holy Spirit Whom Jesus has given you: “And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.” When we observe life as it is given to us in God's creative *acts of old*, we will not come to conclusions apart from His miraculous working in them **then and now**. His revealed Word will inform our discoveries while always remembering that He is God and we are His creatures. We will also marvel over His wisdom reflected in His creation as we desire to learn more about both He and His creation.

God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the oldest and the wisest today as well. He desires to live in a right relationship with you. So, in His infinite wisdom He came into that which He created to establish a righteous relationship with those whom He created. In the Person of Jesus, *Who was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth*, He did what the world thought was a foolish thing: He lived the righteous life under God's law **for you**; He was the righteous sacrifice **for the forgiveness of your sins**; He rose from the dead to give you the *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (cf. 2 Peter 3:13). He still delights *in the children of man* as you walk in *the fear of the LORD*. Amen.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.*

His praise endures forever!

(Psalm 111:10)

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