

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 4, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Proverbs 9:8-12 (NIV)

Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you. 9) Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning. 10) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 11) For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. 12) If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Many people believe that education is the key to success. Some parents save many years to be able to send their children to the right school. While education is important, it is not an instant guarantee of success. The student needs to have the proper motivation and the willingness to use the knowledge they have gained appropriately. Even then, success may prove to be elusive. When we think about our school days, we no doubt can think of individuals whom we regarded as wise and then there were the wise guys – the ones who thought they had all the answers but failed to use the answers properly.

Even though many people place a high value on education there are always a few who make a mockery of it. When it comes to what the Bible has to say about what is wise and what is foolish that is especially so. Many people know what the Bible says – but they dismiss what it says about right and wrong. In many areas of behavior and life, God’s idea of virtue is considered evil, and what God condemns as evil is regarded as the highest level of success. For many the Bible is an irrelevant piece of old-fashioned morality – no longer worthy of being followed but certainly good for a few laughs. Christians recognize such a blatant rejection of God’s Word as folly. They may even pray that such wise guys would wise up and accept the truth.

Not every “wise-guy” rejects the Scriptures. Many people seem to respect the Scriptures and have an intense desire to mine the treasures of the Bible in order to dig up all kinds of wisdom. There is an interest in what the Bible says about being able to enjoy a better life. The Bible is used like a handbook that deals with anything from psychology to raising a family, to succeeding in the workplace, to providing solutions to a variety of problems. Such wise guys are missing the really point of Scripture. Jesus said: **You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ...** (John 5:39 NIV)

True wisdom consists of using the Scriptures to see Jesus as the one who provides eternal life.

Considering the words of our text – the promise of becoming wiser, the contrast with the foolish mocker, and the rewards that result from learning and wisdom will lead us to conclude that the study of God’s Word is worth our time. At the same time, it encourages to apply what we have learned properly by keeping our Savior God as the focus rather than focusing on many the things of this world. So...

Theme: Don’t be a wise guy – be wise

1. Accept godly correction and instruction
2. Recognize the Lord God and the source of wisdom and understanding
3. Enjoy the blessings of Godly wisdom

Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you. 9) Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.

I'm sure we've all heard the "wise-guys" who claim that it's wrong to judge others. They may even quote a verse from Scripture: **Do not judge, or you too will be judged.** (Matthew 7:1 NIV) Our text points out the wisdom of accepting the rebuke of those who have our faith and relationship with the Lord in mind. A rebuke involves condemning actions which are contrary to God's will. Some might accuse Christians of judging others when they rebuke sin. That might make us reluctant to show concern for sinners by pointing out sin. But when we keep in mind what is at stake – that sin destroys faith and our relationship with God and that our judgment is not based on our opinions but on God's clear will and commands then we will be less reluctant to reach out in love to those who are sinning against the Lord. That's letting God's Word speak and do the "judging."

Not everyone will welcome our rebuke with open arms – our text says that the mocker (we could call him the know-it-all wise guy) will hate those who rebuke him. This individual refuses the correction of others because he has set himself up as the authority in all things --- the self-proclaimed expert on all issues. Such people are doomed to remain in their ignorance as long as they continue to scorn correction and to look down on others.

Perhaps you've encountered some of these "wise guys." They think that they have all the answers and they challenge you for your faith. When you talk about God, they deny his existence. When you talk about the Bible, they dismiss it as old fashioned, unscientific and even irrational. Underneath their proud exterior lies a troubled conscience, too proud to accept the reality of a God who forgives sin.

In contrast to the "wise-guy," the wise man is willing to listen when his sin is pointed out in a loving fashion. Although the knowledge of his sins causes him sadness – he does not despair because he knows his sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake and in faith, he looks to the Lord for forgiveness and new life.

As we consider this text, we discover the marks of those who are wise, – they desire what God desires, they are aware of their failures to carry out God's desires. They humbly recognize their weaknesses and lean on the Lord for his forgiveness and assistance. They accept Godly correction and instruction. Their wisdom isn't a matter of intellect and knowledge of facts – their wisdom lies in God's gift of a contrite heart and faith inspired by the Word of God.

Such individuals also recognize that they are always able to benefit from further instruction. They will never know it all. **Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.** The more one knows God's word; the more one trusts God's promises, follows God's way, accepts the crosses God sends and is generally prepared both for this life and the life to come. This verse, which draws compares the wise man and the righteous man reminds us that we're not talking about worldly wisdom. Believers are righteous for Christ's sake. The believer who grasps what God did when he declared the world righteous through Christ is truly wise.

Such a person recognizes the Lord God as the source of wisdom and understanding. **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

The fear of the Lord lays a foundation for the pursuit of additional knowledge about the Holy One. Without it, there can be no real understanding. What is the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord flows from a recognition of the greatness, the vastness and the awesome power of God. Whether or not a person trusts in God will determine whether their fear of God provides them with comfort or terror. The person who trusts that God is using that power for his or her benefit has a proper fear of the Lord – he evaluates all he does in light of the knowledge that God is working with him and for him. On the other hand, those who do not have such a confidence are filled with terror at the thought of the powerful God working against them and rejecting them.

I'm sure we have all known someone who has a lot of "book knowledge" but who isn't very practical. Knowledge of the Holy One – gaining more insights into his nature and his ways – isn't just book learning – it's practical. The better we understand God the more sense we can make out of our own lives. The Holy One explains where we come from, what our purpose in life is and where we are going. He is our peace and comfort. He teaches us right from wrong. He shows us sin and grace.

True wisdom begins with a fear of the Lord. The Lord is God's Old Testament Gospel name – the name God used when he wanted to assure his people of this love for them and his faithfulness to his promises. The Lord – the I am God, as he explained himself to Moses – is absolutely independent, never changing, the God of free and faithful grace, the God of our salvation. True wisdom begins with the fear (trust) of this God.

This God is also the Holy One – the one who demands perfection and condemns sin. These names for God give us a balanced view of God and lead us toward divine wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Those who are wise in this way will enjoy the blessings of Godly wisdom.

The Lord says: **For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. 12) If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.**

When the Holy Spirit enables us to know the Lord and his will and enable us to follow God's will, we can be sure of the Lord's blessings. God's laws of love provide for and protect those who follow them – our text says: **your days will be many and years will added to your life.** These blessings are called rewards of wisdom.

In the fourth commandment, the Lord promises long life to those who are obedient to their parents. Those who are faithful to their marriage partner are less likely to incur the wrath of a jealous spouse or contract diseases associated with the sin of adultery. Those who are content with what the Lord has given them are less likely to suffer the ill effects and life shortening affects of worry. Situations like this may be what the writer of our text has in mind when he promises many days and additional years for those who are spiritually wise.

Some "wise-guys" may point out that believers don't always enjoys a longer life than unbelievers. We've all known faithful children of God who were called to eternal life at an early age. This verse is not claiming that believers will outlive unbelievers – it only says that the days and years of the wise will be prolonged. From our vantage point, we cannot measure or test the fulfillment of this promise – we simply take hold of it and trust it.

There is of course a way in which the life of every believer will be longer than the life of those who are foolish – a way that is verifiable. Fear of the Lord and knowledge of the Holy One doesn't only mean additional time on earth. There's a much more precious blessing. As God's word leads us to that faith by which we fear and know God, it makes us wise for salvation. Since it teaches us that Jesus Christ is our Savior who forgives our sins that Word infinitely extends our days and years with the gift of eternal life in heaven. Contrast that with the eternal death of the unbeliever and the eternal suffering which is a part of their eternal separation from God and the meaning these words becomes crystal clear.

Dear friends take the closing words of our text to heart: **If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.** Don't be a wise guy (one who puts their own wisdom before God's wisdom) be wise.

1. Accept godly correction and instruction
2. Recognize the Lord God as the source of wisdom and understanding
3. Enjoy the blessings of Godly wisdom

Amen.