

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

At a party following graduation, a young college graduate was walking around in her cap and gown; diploma in hand, being every bit what we would call a ‘know-it-all.’ One man went up to her to introduce himself and asked who she was. “Certainly you must know who I am”, she replied. “I am Cecelia Shakespeare Doaks, a graduate of Prestige College. I have my BA!” “My dear child,” the man said, “how sad! Come with me and I’ll teach you the rest of the alphabet.”

There is a tendency in all people to think that they are smarter than they really are. Part of that tendency comes from the age in which we live. We have convinced ourselves that we are the smartest generation of people to ever live on earth. We have vast library storehouses of the wisdom of the ages. We have technical schools, universities and colleges galore. We have the advantage and power of computers to help us in our study of new things—not to mention the access to so much information through the internet. Things that people once dealt with as superstition we now understand. Diseases that once killed can now be cured. Things once hidden are now revealed. We have come to believe that by the sheer power of our wisdom, knowledge and understanding, we can overcome any hurdle, any obstacle, any problem.

True wisdom is a wonderful thing. But our text reminds us that we may not be as smart as we think we are. The wisdom of the world has its limits. The knowledge that so many prize above everything else in this world is not enough for the things that really matter in our lives. True wisdom and understanding are as simple as this: ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”*** Unless we begin with God, then all our wisdom and knowledge, no matter how great we may think it is, will prove empty and useless. Only God can give us the wisdom that really makes a difference for our lives. It is by knowing Him, trusting Him and listening to Him as the only True God that we become wise, with a wisdom beyond all that this world has to offer.

Every parent wants their child to get a good education. We recognize that education can make a great difference for our lives. Students might complain that they will never use math, yet they will find that math is important, for everything from calculating how much paint you may need to paint a room to balancing your chequebook. Those who complain about English classes sooner or later realize that language is essential to life in our world. And reading itself becomes the foundation of life-long learning. Reading, writing and arithmetic are fundamental skills that we need for most things we want to accomplish in this world.

Yet those who are truly wise have learned the truth of our text: ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”*** When we hear that word, “fear”, we often don’t know what to do with it. But it really means that we give God the proper respect, reverence, love, and place in our lives that He rightly deserves. To fear the Lord does not mean to be afraid of Him, although we should be afraid if we try to live without Him as the Lord of our life. To fear the Lord means more than just believing He exists. It means He is the Lord of our Life. He is the one we trust in all our needs. He is the one who we turn to for perfect help, advice and guidance in all things.

In a large metropolitan hospital a famous surgeon always spent a few moments alone before entering the operating room. Because of his remarkable skill and calm composure, many of the young doctors wondered if there might be a relationship between his outstanding success and this unusual procedure. Finally one of the interns got up enough

courage to ask him. "Yes," replied the specialist, "there's a very definite connection between the two. Before each operation I specifically ask God, the Great Physician to be with me and to guide my hands. I freely admit that on many occasions I am confronted with very delicate situations or unexpected conditions in my patient, and I hardly know what to do next. At such times I immediately become conscious of God's help. He always gives me the wisdom I need to complete the surgery successfully. Therefore, I never take my scalpel in hand without first seeking His aid."

If only all of us would do that! If only we would look at our lives each day and realize just how much we need the wisdom and guidance which only God can give. All too often we live as if we are our own god, but that draws us deeper and deeper under the influence and power of sin. Sin has so clouded our wisdom that we make more wrong decisions than right ones. What's worse is that we become so blind to true wisdom that we go right on trying to do it all ourselves, and continue to make our lives worse and worse.

Thankfully, God has done something to set us back on the path of true wisdom. He gave His own Son to save us by bringing us to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And the truth is, we aren't so smart. We are dying in sin, and would suffer because of it forever in hell. But Jesus came to set us free by giving His own life as a ransom for us. He died on a cross to destroy sin's folly and rose again so that we can find the wisdom that makes a difference each and every day. He came to bring us the only wisdom that really matters—that which makes us wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, so many think that they don't need this Saviour. In their wisdom the bible is just another book. In their wisdom, God is just an outdated concept. As our text says, they scoff, believing their wisdom is enough. Yet, as St. Paul said: ***"but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*** (1 Corinthians 1:23–25, ESV)

Oh, what a difference it makes when we tap into that wisdom and strength! When we seek the Lord and His righteousness, all things are added to us. With Him we find ways—good ways—of overcoming the mountainous problems of our lives. In this sinful world life may not be perfect, but in God it does all fit together. And we have the promise of God's wisdom in our text: ***For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.***

A Christian cobbler was a faithful student of the Bible even though he had little formal education. One day a young theological graduate entered his establishment and boastfully declared he could ask many questions that the shoemaker couldn't answer. He was surprised, however, to discover that the man knew all the important truths of the Word, so he posed one final 'stumper question.' "Can you tell me what the Urim and the Thummim were?" The shopkeeper thought for a moment and then replied, "There's much I don't understand about them, but I think the high priest used them to get answers from the Lord. Now, brother, let me tell you something I am sure of. Today I have a better way of knowing what God wants me to do. If I change only a few letters in those two strange words, I can take this blessed Book, and by usin' and thumbin' it, I get all the direction I need from the Lord."

That cobbler knew that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. True wisdom is not found in what we know, but in what God knows and in believing as He speaks to us. When Jesus says of Himself: ***"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever,"*** (John 6:58, ESV) we are told that ***"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"*** (John 6:60, ESV) Even worse, we are told that ***"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."*** (John 6:66, ESV) That can happen to us, too. Paul warns us in our Epistle lesson: ***"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."*** (Ephesians 5:6, ESV) Rather than the empty words of an unbelieving world, we will turn to the God who alone is true wisdom, and by the power of the Holy Spirit we will listen to His voice! Amen.

