

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM
Proverbs 9:10; 8th Grade Graduation; May 23, 2017

By the time you are in eighth grade, you start to realize just how smart you are. You have discovered that you know a lot of stuff that your parents don't know, especially when you ask them to help you with math and English homework. You have discovered that your teachers don't know everything, and you enjoy catching them in their mistakes and pointing out their mistakes. What you are going to discover in the coming years is that you are going to grow smarter and smarter, and your parents, teachers, pastors, and older people in general, will grow dumber and dumber. By the time you are through high school you will probably consider me and most adults total morons.

Before you get too smart for me, deign to let me instruct you in this Word of God, Proverbs 9:10, which says:

**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**

The Book of Proverbs is largely made up of wise sayings from King Solomon. In parochial school you learned the story of how Solomon became wise. Shortly after he became king of Israel and still a young man, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and gave him something like a "blank check." **"Ask what I shall give you"** (1 Kg 3:5). The LORD offered to give Solomon whatever he wanted from God.

What would you ask for from God if He offered that same thing to you? Keep in mind that God is all-powerful and everything belongs to Him. Keep in mind that God would be offended if you asked for something small or inexpensive. If you could ask God for anything, what would it be?

What Solomon asked for was understanding so he could tell the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, which would be invaluable for a king (3:7-9). God liked Solomon's choice and gave him a wise and discerning mind beyond that of anyone before or after him. During your years attending a Lutheran grade school your teachers and pastors went to great efforts to teach you to understand and discern the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, to be wise like Solomon.

But when Solomon spoke about the **beginning of wisdom**, he did not describe it in terms of right and wrong. He said, **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.** To be wise, as the Small Catechism explains the First Commandment, is to, “Fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Knowing the difference between right and wrong is meaningless if its foundation is not true faith in God.

The opposite of being wise is being foolish. According to God’s Word, the height of foolishness is to deny that there is a god. **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no god.’”** (Ps. 14:1) Don’t be a fool and give up your faith in God, your love and trust in God above all things. Solomon’s introduction to his Proverbs states: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction** (1:7). Don’t ever think you are so smart that you end up being a fool by despising your ongoing need to grow in wisdom through instruction in God’s Word.

You have received up to nine years of instruction in the Christian faith in your schools, but if you think that you have learned enough for the rest of your lives, you are wrong. That is a foolish attitude. What you have learned will serve you for the rest of your lives, but it is only the beginning. Your faith in God will come under attack in high school and the rest of your lives. If you think that any Christian is immune to spiritual attacks you are fooling yourself and are setting up yourself to fall into “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.”

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Who is this “Holy One” Solomon refers to? It is our holy God, but more specifically, it is a title of the Son of God who came into this world as a man to save sinners like us. King David, the father of Solomon, prophesied in Psalm 16 that, after Jesus died and was buried, that God the Father would **not let His Holy One see corruption in the grave** (Ps. 16:16; Ac 2:27), but raised Him from the dead. God has given you knowledge of the Holy One, Jesus Christ, whom St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians one as **the wisdom of God** (1:24). Insight is to have faith that God, in His wisdom, chose to send Jesus to save you by His death and resurrection. **In Christ...are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge** (Col. 2:2b-3).

Today you are graduating from eighth grade, a significant milestone in your education. I'm sure that you are looking forward to high school with fear and trepidation as well as excitement and anticipation. Something that often comes as a shock in high school is changing from being on top as eighth graders to being lowly freshmen. The little kids will no longer look up to you; upperclassmen will look down on you. You are about to become the lowest form of life in high school. But a year from now – if you survive being a freshman, and you will – you will become sophomores.

Sophomore, the designation for the second year of high school and even higher education in college, is an interesting word. I don't know who came up with the term, but it was not meant to be a compliment. To be called a "sophomore" is put-down. The term sophomore is a composite of the two Greek words that mean "wise" and "fool." Sophia means wisdom, and moron means fool. Sophomores are "wise fools," which describes how you think you are wise after a year of high school, but you are really still just a fool, a moron.

In 1 Corinthians chapters one and two St. Paul plays off the words for wise and foolish to describe what it means to be a Christian. He says that **the Word of the cross of Jesus is folly/foolishness to those who are perishing** in unbelief. From the world's perspective it is stupid, moronic, and foolish to love and trust in a God who came into this world to die on the cross for sinners. If Jesus Christ is the only true God – and He is, with the Father and the Holy Spirit – the world says to you, "Don't be a fool and believe in that God."

But God's Word says to you, "Be a fool." St. Paul wrote: **It pleased God through the folly (foolishness) of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 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** (1:21b-25).

As you graduate from eighth grade my hope is that your life-long aspiration is to be a “sophomore,” a wise fool in the Christian sense of the word. That is, be wise in the way of God, having knowledge and insight of the Holy One of God, Jesus Christ your Savior, which will make a fool in the eyes of the world. **God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong** (1:27). You will never become so smart that you won't need Jesus your Savior. You will never become so powerful that you will be able to overcome the weakness of your sinful flesh. God in His wisdom became weak in Jesus to save the weak, you and me.

Wise Solomon wrote: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.** God has given you a beginning of wisdom in Christ. May you learn that He is also wisdom's middle and end. Amen.