

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 20, 2009**

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Hymns: 40, 235:3, 294, 381, 235:6.

Lessons: Proverbs 2: 1-22, 1 Corinthians 1: 17 – 2:14, Luke 14:25-33

Text: Proverbs 9:10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

There is an old German proverb that translates to something like this: “With a good beginning, the battle is half won.” We might offer this similar idea: “You need a good foundation on which to build.” Where is that idea more important than in our spiritual life? We have to start with the right foundation. St. Paul writes by the inspiration of God to the Christians in Ephesus and to us: *“you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”* Ephesians 2:19-20.

Some people come to faith in Jesus Christ later in life, after their life's foundations have been laid and they have made many mistakes – many sins done in ignorance – in their lives before they came to know the Word of God. The New Testament is filled with such people. But the New Testament is also filled with people who were religious – religious Jews as well as pagans who had a false religion – and didn't find the truth in Jesus Christ until later in life. But you – most of you – have all had the advantage that you have known about Jesus Christ all your lives or have built your foundation on Jesus Christ all your lives.

So what is the right foundation? What is the good beginning? God's Word in his divinely inspired book of Proverbs makes very clear what is

**THE BASIS AND SOURCE OF ALL TRUE WISDOM**

1. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*
2. *And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

School has started, and I hope and pray that you young people are all off to a good start. It usually happens that the first day of school things go great – new clothes, new school supplies, new things to learn. But sometimes the glow rubs off soon. But let me remind you that what you learn early really makes a difference. If you don't learn it right, you will be in trouble some time later for you won't understand something that comes later. For example, if you don't learn the addition tables right, it will trouble you as long as you live or until you learn them!

If you can remember what you learned from Luther's Small Catechism, you will remember that he explains each of the commandments by including the word “fear”. From the first commandment you learned this: “You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Luther begins his explanation of every other commandment with the words “We should fear and love God ...”.

So what does the word fear mean? The King James version of the Bible uses the word 400 times, and the New International Version uses it 260 times. Because our text comes from the Old Testament, we will look at the fact that there are several different Hebrew words translated “fear” in the KJV. One of them refers to fear

only as “dread” and “terror”. But the word in our text is a Hebrew word that includes the meaning of “reverence” as well as “dread” or “terror”.

Although I am not a scholar of the German language I think that Luther used a German word that gives the flavor of reverence -- to put the fear of God into, to be in awe of, or to stand in awe of, to be awestruck. That is shown by the explanations you learn about the word “fear” from the explanations of Luther’s Small Catechism.

The catechisms we have used start with this idea that the first commandment makes it clear that by this commandment God teaches us that he wants us to give glory to him above anyone or anything else. Then comes the explanation of “fear God above all things”: Placing his word and command above the word and command of anyone else. To that we would include the ideas also from the catechism that we fear God above all things when we respect Him and give all glory to him as Our God. ***“To fear the LORD is to hate evil”***. Proverbs 8:13. “Look up to him only!” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did this by being thrown into the fiery furnace rather than obey the command to worship the image king Nebuchadnezzar set up. Joseph, when tempted to sexual immorality with the wife of his employer Potiphar, asked ***“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”*** Genesis 39:9.

So when we respect him and place his Word and command above every other word and command, we are fearing the Lord.

That, our text says, ***“is the beginning of wisdom.”*** That totally contradicts what the world would tell you.

By the grace of God you have come to give all glory to God and to place his Word and command above every other word and command. St. Luke tells us in chapter 10: ***“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”*”** Luke 10:38-42. Mary was a woman who sat at Jesus’ feet listening to his words while her sister Martha complained to Jesus that she wasn’t helping with the meal preparations. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the one thing needful that will not be taken away from her. She had chosen the Wisdom from God.

Is there any more important wisdom or learning or education than learning what Jesus Christ has done for you? Everything else – all other wisdom –that we can learn only lasts for 10 or 30 or 50 or even 101 years, should we live that long! And then that may even change in our lifetimes! But the wisdom we learn from God will last us a lifetime and beyond – it will last for eternity.

First comes the wisdom that Jesus Christ died for your sins. Then comes, by the power of the Holy Ghost working through that word, faith in that wisdom. We trust what God says. We trust that Jesus truly earned eternal life in heaven for us, despite our sins. From God comes that message – that wisdom – to repent of our sins and believe the Gospel. And again we look at the work of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to walk by faith.

We walk by faith. But God adds a promise to this: ***“For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you”*** Proverbs 9:11-12. Humanly speaking, we’d like to think of living longer on earth. But Jesus allows us to live even longer – to live forever

but with glorified bodies in heaven. It is really God who rewards you. He gives the faith, he gives the reward of eternal life. We don't earn anything except eternal damnation. But God gives us eternal life!

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."*  
Proverbs 1:7.

The NIV translates the second part of our text "**Knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**", although the KJV only says "*the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*" When we realize that the scriptures often speak of Jesus as the HOLY ONE OF GOD, the message of this verse becomes even clearer. When we know and believe in Jesus Christ, we have what we need to live forever.

There are blessings when we have the true fear of the Lord, as we read in Proverbs 19:23 (NIV) *"The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble."* We can rest content even here on earth, knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ, the highest wisdom, is ours. We can be assured, as we read in Proverbs 16:3-6 (NIV) *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The LORD works out everything for his own ends-- even the wicked for a day of disaster. The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished. Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil."*

Our epistle lesson spoke about the wisdom of God in this way: *"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."* 1 Corinthians 1:21-25.

Jesus Christ is our boast to wisdom. As we read in Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NIV) *"This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."*

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

May Jesus Christ, our true wisdom, guide and keep us forever, day by day. Amen.