

## "Correction, Instruction, and Understanding"

Proverbs 9:1-10 Trinity 2 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Some texts are easier to preach than others, just as some sermons are easier to hear than others. The lesson from Proverbs this morning would be great for a theological lecture. As a sermon text, however, it covers too much ground. The challenge before me is to distill the wisdom God provided for us into something applicable for today. The challenge before you is to listen and hear what it has to say. Our theme, this morning, is Correction, Instruction, and Understanding.

At first glance, it looks like some sort of analogy about Wisdom, followed by a warning about the dangers inherent in teaching evil people. I was tempted to ignore the first half of the text. That is where the lecture material comes in. If you read this chapter of Proverbs, however, you will find that at this end Wisdom is inviting the naive, and at the other end of the chapter, Folly makes her invitation. One way is the way of life, the other way is the way of death.

And that is where we find ourselves. Our reality offers us two “invitations”. We always confront the choices of right or wrong, of faith or doubt, of faithfulness or rebellion. This is, in a sense, where we live. We are generally not the target of the invitation in our text. The invitation is extended to the “naive”. The Hebrew word **בְּתוּלָה** there

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means “simple”. The invitation is to the young, the simple, and the inexperienced. Most of us are no longer inexperienced and naive. We still hear the siren call of Folly, however, always inviting us to sin, always asking us to act as though we have no compass and no understanding.

That would be out of character, though. That is one of the realities that grown-up Christians need to learn to face. Sin and “folly” are out of character for the child of God. They are un-natural since we have been redeemed and set free from sin into the freedom of the children of God. We who might consider ourselves mature Christians are those who have eaten at the table of Wisdom. The new Christians and the young people among us are the ones to whom the invitation is spoken.

Wisdom has built her house. It would be tempting to say that you are sitting in it, but that is not precisely true. We, who are Christians, are the house. 1 Peter 2:4-5: “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We are the house of God, the house that Wisdom built. The seven pillars are the Seven-fold Spirit, the one called the

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“Septiform Spirit”, “the Spirit of the LORD, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD,” named in Isaiah 11:2. These pillars have been “hewn out” by being poured out on Jesus, the author of our faith, and the cornerstone of the Church.

Remember, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That “fear of the Lord” means “Faith”. True Wisdom is built on knowing God, and trusting Him, and seeing the world through the knowledge of God. It means to be deliberately a Christian, to choose to walk in the light of forgiveness, and the consciousness of our own weakness and susceptibility to sin. “Proceed in the way of understanding,” the text says.

Correction is one of the things that God’s Wisdom does. But being told that you are sinful, that perfectly natural passions and reactions to things are sin and death is both frightening and irritating. The child of God takes the correction to heart, repents and seeks forgiveness. The scoffer and the wicked man just take offence. The scoffer attacks what he sees as restrictions on his or her freedom. The wicked man simply attacks anything holy because having holiness nearby makes the wicked conscious of the evil nature of their wickedness

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The wise man is the righteous man who takes correction to heart, who is instructed by the discipline of God, and who delights in learning because what he is learning is truth, and how to see himself and all of life through the perspective of the truth. The wise man is the righteous man because, in this passage, wisdom is faith - "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". And faith is the means appointed by God to receive forgiveness, and the righteousness of Christ.

That is where reproof and correction come in. That is why the text says Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning. The Christian knows that he is not complete yet. The more we know about God, the more we can believe. And correction straightens us out and helps us stand firm and faithful, so we receive it gladly – even when it is painful and irritating. The wise know that the problem is sin, not the correction, and not the one who is reproofing us.

What that means is that the better we know God, and understand His will and His ways, the more sense we can make of life. We can find and enjoy a sense of peace in this life when we see the world, and our lives, from the perspective of the truth – God's truth. Life makes more sense when we trust God. It isn't as terrifying, and it isn't as frustrating. We know that God is with us. That knowledge answers the fears of our

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flesh. We know that God is providing for us and protecting us because of His great love for us – so we are confident in every situation when we walk by faith.

See how wise you are? And doesn't it make life better, and make you happy to know that God's will is focused on your salvation? The more you know about God, the better you can understand your life, and the world around you. The more you know about God and how He works among us and in us and through us, the deeper your faith – the more powerful it is in comforting you, in guiding you, in helping you live daily as the child of God in this dark and sinful world.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and so, if we understand that faith is what the Proverbs refer to as wisdom, Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser.

The alternatives are Wisdom and Folly. Since Wisdom is faith, Folly is unbelief. Folly is sin. Folly is all those things we hear people say to look good or sound good, to justify themselves rather than confess and repent of their sins and be truly cleansed. It is the natural way of life to men and women who are by nature sinful. The proverb says, There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. The way of wisdom is difficult and sometimes painful, and

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sometimes embarrassing, and sometimes humiliating because it involves correction - and repentance - and humility. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." The narrow gate is the gate of Wisdom, the gate where we find Correction, Instruction and Understanding.

May you always enter by the narrow gate, knowing that God is always with you, even to the very end of the age. Amen.