

Proverbs 1:7-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-1/proverbs-17-9/>

Wisdom is not something we can do by ourselves. We need the help and instruction of others and, most importantly, a trust and dependence on God.

The fear of the Lord is a classic statement echoed throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 20:11; Nehemiah 5:9,15; Jeremiah 32: 40) and especially within the books that comprise the wisdom literature genre (Job 28:28; Psalm 19:9; Ecclesiastes 12:13; and fifteen times in The Book of Proverbs).

Since we have a negative connotation around *fear*, this phrase is often described as a healthy reverence for *the LORD*. But perhaps we should rethink the term *fear*. Every human experiences fear. Our fears are connected with our values. We tend to serve most what we *fear* most. If we *fear* for our lives or the lives of our family, it is because we care deeply about them. We value life. This would lead us to *fear* enemies or invaders because we are concerned they will take or destroy something that matters to us. If this is our greatest *fear*, then the prospective invaders become our effective masters without even having to invade.

Proverbs desires for us to escape service to any *fear* other than the *fear* of God. If we *fear the LORD* then we will place gaining God's approval as a value above all other values. This actually allows us to live in peace amidst the threat of an invader, even while recognizing and preparing for the possibility. And it would allow us to live in peace and freedom even were the invader to capture our land, because no person can stop us from applying wisdom in order to please God.

The wisdom books consider the mystery of God of vital importance. We cannot control Him. Only He is God. He might put us through challenging circumstances (like Job) or ask us to trust him (like Solomon in Ecclesiastes). Trust requires us to recognize we are vulnerable. If we recognize we are vulnerable, there will be an associated *fear*, an uncertainty that tells us we are exposed to uncontrollable circumstances and unknowable future events. Vulnerability insists that we trust. The only question is "Whom will we trust?" Will our trust be misused or misplaced by trusting ourselves or something else that is not trustworthy? Or will we trust God? By trusting God, we simultaneously proclaim that He is the one we value and the one we fear.

This is *the beginning of knowledge*—to *fear* God. To care that He thinks well of what we do before all other fears. To put our faith in God rather than trusting ourselves. It is a frightening prospect, because it is a submission, a surrendering of control—or rather a surrendering of the illusion of control. It is, in reality, an embracing of what is true and real. As Ecclesiastes teaches, it is folly to believe we control the "hebel" of life, the uncontrollable, vaporous, and incomprehensible complexities of all that is. But wisdom and fulfillment are available when we face reality as it is, trusting that a sovereign and omnipotent God's *instruction* comes from a place of benevolence.

This is where wisdom starts: acknowledging that God is God and I am not. Therefore, it is prudent and necessary to put my trust in Him if I desire to live a life that ends in fulfillment.

Notice that *the fear of the Lord* is where *wisdom begins*—where it **starts**, but not necessarily where it ends. 1 John says that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). But the prior verse states: “By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). This progression begins with the *fear of the LORD*, then proceeds to the love of obedience, then to boldness, because perfect love leads us to complete obedience.

It is perhaps somewhat similar to a child who has constructive human parents. The child’s obedience initially comes about simply because they are physically overmatched. It begins in the fear of their parent. But they eventually grow to realize their parents had their best interest at heart and end up behaving just like their parents “in this world.”

We should strive to get to a place (through trust/faith and wisdom) that we do not fear what God thinks because we have the boldness of knowing we love Him and are walking fully in His ways. But at the *beginning* of that trust, *fear* of what God might think of us, do to us, or ask of us is a reasonable starting place. It is not only the *beginning* point, but also the foundation for living a life that will be completely fulfilled by God’s evaluation that we were, indeed, good stewards of the opportunity He provided.

The *knowledge* which *the fear of the LORD* is the *beginning of* is the Hebrew word “yada.” It encapsulates learning facts, perceiving reality, and applying wisdom. It is an all-encompassing word for human perception, comprehension, and skill in application.

On the other hand, *fools despise wisdom and instruction*, the same two words (*wisdom/instruction*) are used in the first “to” clause in verse 2, “to discern the sayings of understanding,” which establishes the purpose of the book. Here we get the main protagonist of Proverbs (Wisdom) set against the main antagonist (Foolishness). *Wisdom* is an applied knowledge and necessitates action. It is not just what we do (right or wrong) but how we do it.

Fools despise this. They avoid *instruction* and correction. They seek to bend all that is around them to their own will (an endeavor certain to lead to futility and frustration). They avoid submission/*fear*/trust in God and live life according to the perception of their own fleshly desires. They *despise wisdom and instruction*. They represent the other path available to humans. They form a worldview around themselves, one that necessitates avoiding *instruction*, making an enemy of *wisdom*.

Interestingly, Proverbs does not focus on converting the fools. It is concerned mostly with establishing what differentiates the *foolish* from the *wise*. It does not treat its young audience as a wise person fending off foolishness. Neither does it portray them as a fool needing to change their ways. It does not assume or judge where the reader is, but simply presents the two paths, the consequences, and the realities of each. In this way, Proverbs recognizes conclusively that each person has been given (by God) the opportunity and stewardship to choose either wisdom or folly. God will ultimately judge that stewardship at life’s end (Ecclesiastes 3:17). Meanwhile,

this incredibly consequential decision is left to us. Proverbs is available to all who desire *instruction*.

Verse 8 holds the two-part command to *hear* and *do not forsake*. It introduces the family dynamic, the first arena of teaching for any young person—*Hear, my son, your father's instruction. And do not forsake your mother's teaching*. Notice that these are passive traits. Learning requires listening. We cannot gain wisdom until we first *hear* and understand. That is a prerequisite to application..

The familial illustration of *father* and *mother* to describe *instruction* and *teaching* help reinforce the young and naïve as the book's audience. It also reinforces the value of hearing/learning in a familiar setting—the family. It is a short parable we can recognize—parents teach us how to live life and God is the ultimate parent; submitting to his teaching is how we gain wisdom.

These teachings are *a graceful wreath to your head and an ornament to your neck*. The word translated *wreath* means an attractive ornament. At the time, it might have envisioned an elegant turban that showed distinction. A modern equivalent to an *ornament to your neck* might be something like “a prestigious watch.” The point is that when these teachings are lived out, they make us presentable to others. This again emphasizes that these teachings are to be lived practically, in community with others.

Biblical Text

**⁷ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

**⁸ Hear, my son, your father's instruction
And do not forsake your mother's teaching;**

**⁹ Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head
And ornaments about your neck.**