

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

Pastor Mark Gartner

Sermon for Pentecost 16 (Christian Education Sunday) – September 5th and 8th, 2013

Proverbs 9:8-12 (NIV – 1984)

Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 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; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”

Dear children bought with the precious blood Christ,

A few years back there was a commercial where a guy was promoting a product called “Focus Factor”, maybe you’ve heard of it. They used all sorts of fancy words to describe it, but it was simply a pill that was supposed to make you smarter. They made some pretty incredible promises about this product. They said it would increase your memory, causing names and faces to stick better in your brain. They said it would help you focus better during the day, and not get distracted. And they said it would even grow your overall brainpower. Now who wouldn’t want something like this? Something that is guaranteed to give you more wisdom. Everyone wishes they were a little smarter, right? And to top it all off, they were offering it for free – just pay shipping and handling. That’s right, a full month’s supply of Focus Factor for free. What a deal!

But then suddenly one day the ads stopped, and it made me wonder, “What happened?” Well, as it turns out, all those claims that they made weren’t entirely accurate. They couldn’t back them up. In fact, they were so far off target, that the Federal Trade Commission fined the company one million dollars for duping the public. It was too good to be true. Despite all this, Focus Factor is still for sale. You can easily find it on the Internet. Which must mean that people are still buying it. The desire for more wisdom goes deep.

Well, guess what? The all-wise, all-knowing God has an offer for you this morning -- guaranteed wisdom. But this offer is unlike any other that has ever been or ever will be. He doesn’t offer to increase your brainpower, but rather your spiritual power. He doesn’t offer to improve your memory, but rather your faith. It doesn’t come in a pill or easy-to-swallow caplet, rather it comes to you when you hear God’s Word and come to the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord’s Supper. In simple terms we might say it comes to us through Christian Education. Christian Education is all the wonderful tools that God has put at our disposal so that we have the opportunities to be able to hear and learn God’s Word.

But somehow or somewhere the bad idea has gotten around that when we talk about Christian education, we’re talking only about the children and mainly the little children. This idea is often expressed by the parent who says it’s time to bring his child to church again because Sunday School or Catechism Class has started. Or the parents who make such a big deal about getting their children to Sunday School or Catechism class, but don’t make a very big deal about themselves going to the Adult Bible Class to strengthen their own faith.

What we as parents sometimes forget to realize is that Christian education is not like a polio vaccine where you get a good shot of it when you’re young and then you’re good to go for the rest of your life. Christian education is a lifelong process, and it applies to people of all ages. Christian education is learning about Jesus Christ. The goal is not to install proper morals in little children that will keep them out of jail or give them the proper manners that will enable them to get along well in life. The goal is not to get our children through enough Classes to get them a Confirmation Certificate. No, the real goal is to bring children and adults face to face with Jesus Christ forever. The goal of Christian education is eternal life in heaven.

In our text for today, the writer of the Book of Proverbs reminds us of this. He points out clearly that:

Theme: Christian Education Lasts A Lifetime!

- 1. We never outgrow our need for it**
- 2. It gives us a rock-solid foundation for life**
- 3. There are incredible blessings through it**

The heart of God's message in the Bible is that we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life as free gifts through faith in Jesus Christ. We never outgrow our need for hearing and learning this message. Graduation from the school of Bible study is a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. It takes place only when God calls us out of this life to himself in heaven. Until that time no one is perfect. Only a state of perfection would eliminate the need for learning more about Jesus Christ. Because every person is constantly sinful, every person is in constant need of the gospel, the good news about Jesus. Every new day sin dulls and tarnishes what we learned about Jesus yesterday. Sin constantly eats away at faith in Jesus and corrodes it like rust corrodes a car. Every day faith in Jesus Christ needs to be polished and shined with the word of God. An intellectual knowledge of the Bible won't save anyone. Even if a person can recite Bible verse after Bible verse, and repeat fact after fact from the Bible, and recite from memory all the books of the Bible and all the kings of Israel – that is no guarantee that he will go to heaven. But God does promise that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the words of Christ.

Wise King Solomon agrees with that. **“Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.”** **“Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.”** A mocker is someone who makes fun of Bible study for adults. He may openly ridicule the Bible as nonsense. Or, he may praise the Bible to death but never opens it, in which case he is mocking it in his heart. Solomon says a wise man will humbly recognize his own need for lifelong Bible study: **“Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.”** A wise person will not sit back and content himself that he gained a sufficient dose of the Bible in basic instructions as a kid and doesn't need it anymore. A wise person knows he doesn't know it all. Every day he sins, and every day he needs the gospel. He knows that Christian education is a lifelong process. Notice how Solomon puts **wise** man and **righteous** man together. The goal of lifelong Bible study is not to gain more head knowledge. The goal is to be righteous in God's sight at death. The goal is to be found trusting in Jesus when you die.

This reminds me of a young lady. She was born into a rock-solid Christian family. She had attended a Lutheran elementary school for eight years of her life and Lutheran high school for four more years. One day after church she said to me: “Pastor, I already know that Jesus died for my sins. I know that I'm going to heaven. I've heard all the Bible stories in the Bible over and over again. Why do I need to go to Bible class?” I don't remember what I said, but Solomon has a good answer: **“Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.”** She did have one thing right. She did know enough to be saved. The three year old child who sings in Sunday School: “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” knows enough to be saved. But God doesn't want us to stop there. He wants the wise to become wiser still. He wants the righteous by faith to add to their learning. Peter's last words to Christians were to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. If our faith is not growing, it's dying. That's why we go to church every Sunday. That's why we have Bible studies for young and old every Sunday. And since this is the first day of a new Fall Bible Class, Teen Bible Class, and Sunday School, I would like to personally encourage each one of you to partake of the rich feast God sets before you in his Word. I can guarantee that it will be a wise investment of your time.

2. It gives us a rock-solid foundation for life

The wise person who humbly recognizes his ongoing need for Christian education will also have rock solid foundation for his life. Sooner or later every person starts wondering about life's most important questions: “Why am I here? Where am I going? What is the meaning of life?” The wisest scholars and brightest minds have tried to come up the answers. But their best explanations just don't satisfy.

Solomon knew the answer. **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”** The Lord has the answers to life's most important questions. **“Fear”** here does not mean terror. It means deep respect for God and his word. **“Beginning”** means foundation. Deep respect for Jesus' words provides a rock-solid foundation for life. Jesus said whoever hears his words builds on a rock foundation and will not be moved, even when the storms and winds blow hard. His word answers life's most important questions: Who am I? I am a special creation of God, intimately loved and carefully watched over. I

am a sinner, but redeemed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Where am I going? I am going to have an inexpressible and unbelievable joy in heaven when I die. And why am I here? I exist to praise the God who created me and saved me. I am here to live for him and to tell others about him. And every day I live on this earth brings me one day closer to the time when I will live with him forever. God's Word gives real meaning and purpose and direction to life. It gives us the peace that transcends all human understanding. Knowing what he has done for us and continues to do for us gives us a rock-solid foundation for our life.

3. There are incredible blessings through it

Finally, there are incredible blessings in lifelong Bible study. **“For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.”**¹² **If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”** Sometimes people say the Bible is boring and they don't get anything out of Bible class. Have you ever had a boring meal? Have you ever been served Hamburger Helper? It may be boring compared to steak and lobster, but it's still doing good things inside you. Not a lot of people like broccoli, but it's one of the healthiest things that you can eat. When it gets on the inside of you it does things that we don't really understand, but it gives needed fiber and fights cancer and heart disease—it's good for you. It's the same thing with Bible study. It may not seem exciting or very powerful on the outside, but it does things that you can't even understand or pinpoint what it's doing on the inside in our heart and soul and mind.

The greatest blessings are invisible and imperceptible. You grow when you are in contact with the Word of God. Whether you are opening the Bible and reading it for yourself or here in worship hearing it and receiving it, things are happening inside you. You will grow in faith. You become more confident that Jesus loves you, forgives you and you are going to heaven. You are also guided by God's wisdom. You will make wiser decisions in life. You will make less immature, selfish decisions.

For example we think about the peace and comfort that God brings to us as his children. We have the peace and knowledge that God loved us enough to die for us and that God promises to be with us each and every day. How do we know this is true? We know this is true as we dig deeper into God's Word. We know this is our faith grows stronger day by day. We know this is God's forgiveness shows us that God is taking care of everything our life both physically and spiritually.

The best thing we can ever do is get closer to God's Word. The best and most loving thing we can ever do for our children is bring them to God's word. The opposite is also true: **“if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”** May we all, young and old, cherish the words of the Bible as they are read and explained to us. May we read and study the Bible well at home, in family devotions, in personal Bible reading, in regular worship, in Bible classes, in Sunday School and Catechism classes. Christian education is lifelong. We never outgrow our need for it. It gives a rock-solid foundation for life. It gives amazing blessings. It's all about Jesus and his love for us. Amen.