

The Wisdom of Proverbs

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Proverbs

What is the difference between being smart and being wise? Wisdom goes beyond knowledge. It is more than a catalog of facts. It is a masterful understanding of life, a practical art of living, and an expertise in good decision-making. Proverbs challenges us to gain knowledge, to apply that knowledge to our lives, and to share the wisdom we gain with others.

Where can we turn to gain wisdom? The book asserts that wisdom goes beyond knowledge. To produce wisdom, knowledge must be mixed with the fear of the Lord. "Fear" (Hebrew *yare*) of the Lord is often used in the Old Testament as a synonym for "living in response to God." The book of Proverbs declares that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is insight" ([Prov. 9:10](#)). Knowledge without commitment to the Lord is as useless as cement without water to make mortar. Paradoxically, accepting the proverbs by faith into the heart produces the fear of the Lord.

True wisdom for the Christian starts with insight into who the Lord is, what he has done, and what he desires for us and for the world we live in. As we grow in our understanding of the Lord, we learn how to cooperate with him as he sustains and redeems the world. This often makes us more fruitful, in ways that benefit ourselves and in ways that help others. It causes us to revere the Lord in the midst of our daily life and work.

The book of Proverbs further tells us that the wisdom we gain is not just for ourselves, but also to share with others. We share wisdom not only by teaching, but also by wise living, imparting wisdom to those who see us and follow our example. The opposite is also true. If we live foolishly, others may be tempted into the same foolishness, and we harm not only ourselves but them. Often, progress in our life's work makes us increasingly visible, and the effects of our wisdom or foolishness influence more and more people.