

THE FEAR OF THE LORD  
Proverbs 9:10

Intro: The importance of this text is brought out in an earlier verse, Prov. 4:7, which says,  
Wisdom is the principal thing;  
therefore get wisdom:  
and with all thy getting get understanding.

Its importance is increased when we read from the beginning of chapter 4. Solomon was writing for his children (v. 1). And he told them that his father, who would have been King David, had taught him. The substance of David's teaching for Solomon, according to verse 7 of Prov. 4, was,  
Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not;  
neither decline from the words of my mouth.

David had impressed upon Solomon the dual importance of "wisdom" and "understanding," and so when it came time for Solomon to instruct his children, he emphasized the same two things with them: "wisdom" and "understanding." David told Solomon to "get" it, and then not "forget" it. Cf. Prov. 4:5.

Returning to Prov. 4:7, what did David mean when he said that "wisdom is **the principal thing**"?

He meant that it was the first thing that Solomon should seek and get because there was nothing better, nothing higher, nothing more important. He meant that Solomon should start here and never let anything take its place.

We often commend Solomon for his prayer at the beginning of his reign (and we should), but, according to what Solomon said about his father in Prov. 4, it was David who from the very beginning of Solomon's life had instilled in his heart that there was nothing better, nor higher, nor more important than to get wisdom and understanding. This was Solomon's prayer recorded for us in 1 Kings 3:9:

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart  
to judge thy people,  
that I may discern between good and bad:  
for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

Three verses later, in 1 Kings 3:12, the Lord said this to Solomon,

Behold, I have done according to thy words:  
lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart;  
so that there was none like thee before thee,  
neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

No doubt the Lord did something special for Solomon at that

time, but that had been Solomon's main pursuit from his childhood, seeking wisdom and understanding. The Lord had taught David. David taught Solomon. Solomon taught his family, and the Holy Spirit has retained what God taught all of them, and it is recorded for us in this book of Proverbs.

But now let us go to our text: Prov. 9:10.

We need to define "wisdom" and "understanding." What did Solomon have in mind? Better yet, what did the Lord have in mind?

#### I. THE MEANING OF "WISDOM" AND "UNDERSTANDING."

The first thing that needs to be said about these two words is that they have to refer to divine wisdom and divine understanding, not human wisdom and human understanding. All through Scripture the divine and the human are distinguished from each other, and usually contrasted with each other. Therefore, it would follow that if Solomon were to get "wisdom" and "understanding," he would have to get it from God! What God gives to us along this line, He usually does not give it to us all at once, but gradually. It comes as the result of prayer, as we have seen, and of trusting the Lord to give additional light as the need arises.

##### A. "Wisdom."

It seems that the best definition of this word would indicate that it means knowledge and the ability to use it as God intended that it should be used. This is what we would expect a wise man to be and do. And since we are talking about divine wisdom, it would mean that we are to pay special attention to our Bibles where we have the truth of God which we are to learn, and which we are to be able to use in our own lives, and in our dealings with others.

##### B. "Understanding."

This word seems to combine the ideas of discernment and discretion. This would mean that having knowledge, and knowing how it should be used, such a person would need "understanding" to know when and where and how to use the "wisdom" which he has.

A person can have much wisdom, but without understanding he can misuse what he knows. So the two go together, "wisdom," which always has to come first; and then "understanding" which means that the wisdom will be used in the right way and time and place.

David was exercising "understanding" when he did not let Abishai kill Shimei when Shimei cursed King David when he was fleeing from Absalom. Esther used much "understanding" in dealing with Haman and his plot to kill the Jews. Our Lord, as we would expect, showed great wisdom in not coming down from the Cross when the crowds challenged Him to prove that He was the Son of God. It is so important for a wise person to know when and how and where to use what he knows.

But what else does our text tell us? Look at the first phrase of the verse.

## II. "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM."

I do not think that there was any question in Solomon's mind, or in David's mind, as to where true wisdom comes from. If you were to have asked David where to learn what God wanted him to know, and to find out how to use it, he would have told you that it is to be found in the Word of God. In their day they had the books of Moses. Both of them, David and Solomon, were used in writing books of the Bible. Special revelations were given then because God was in the process of giving His Word to His people. It began with Moses, possibly with Job, and continued on until the writings of John were completed and the Bible was finished. And so we should all understand that, if we want to know the wisdom of God, there is only one place to go--and that is to our Bibles, to the Word of God.

However, I want you to notice that Solomon did not begin to teach his son, his children, Bible study methods. Now it is important to know how to go about studying the Bible, but the methods are not what is primarily important. When Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," he was speaking about the attitude of heart which a person has when he approaches the Word of God. This is what is primarily important.

The word "beginning" not only means the starting point, but it speaks of the opening of the Scriptures to one who wants to learn the wisdom of God. There are many people, even the Lord's people, who read their Bibles every day, but who learn very little or practically nothing. Why? It is because their relationship with the Lord is not what it should be. They do not approach the Word of God in "the fear of the Lord." This is probably one reason that we read in Prov. 4:23,

Keep thy heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life.

The profit we get from reading and studying our Bibles is directly related to our relationship with the Lord, and

Solomon described that here as "the fear of the Lord." What does this prominent Biblical expression mean?

To fear the Lord means that we hold Him in the highest esteem. We come to Him always with a sense of our unworthiness. We honor Him with our words, and with our lives. We do not come to pass judgment on Him, but we come to worship Him, to honor Him, to obey Him. And, as we might expect, we come with a real fear in our hearts lest we disobey Him or displease Him in any way. To fear the LORD means that we are always conscious that He is the living and eternal and unchanging God, and we, although His children, are not worthy of any of His blessings because we are only sinners saved by grace. We come not to decide if we are going to do His will; we come anxious to know His will so we can do it.

If you want to know how to learn the wisdom of God, don't worry so much about where you are going to begin; let your concern be about how you are going to begin, your submission to the Lord, and your commitment to do His will. The person who comes to the Lord, fearing Him, will learn far more than the most educated Christian who does not fear the Lord.

But what does the second part of our verse say?

III. "THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY IS UNDERSTANDING."

Let me remind all of us that the Bible was not given to us just to give us a lot of information about history or doctrine. We certainly have that in Scripture. No, that is not the main purpose.

Let me read this verse to you as it appears in the NKJV:  
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of **the Holy One** is understanding.

If the truth of God is to be opened to us, we must approach God and His Word in "the fear of the Lord." If we are to understand how and when the truth of God is to be used, we must concentrate on learning about God, "**the Holy One.**" The main purpose for which we have been given our Bibles is to teach us about "the Holy One." It is when we are learning of Him that we are given "understanding."

As an illustration of this very thing, I would remind you of our Lord's ministry to two of His disciples, the record of which is given to us in Luke 24. They were disappointed at what had happened to the Lord, that is, His death by crucifixion. But they were also confused by the reports of His resurrection. How did the Lord relieve their disappointment and their confusion? Listen to what Luke said in Luke 24:27:

He was speaking of the Lord when he said,  
And beginning at Moses and all the prophets,  
he expounded unto them in all the scriptures  
**the things concerning himself.**

What effect did it have upon them? Their reaction is recorded in Luke 24:32:

And they said one to another,  
Did not our heart burn within us,  
while he talked with us by the way,  
and while he opened to us the scriptures?

That which gives both meaning and delight to our understanding of the Scriptures is when we see "the Holy One." This title belongs not only to God, the Father, but also to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit.

As "the Holy One" our God is infinitely clean and pure. There is no moral blot upon Him at all. As "the Holy One" He is forever above us and worthy of our complete devotion and constant worship. He is glorious in His holiness (cf. Ex. 15:11), and the more we know Him, the more we will fear Him, that is, reverence Him, worship Him, and to desire to please Him in all that we are and do.

Concl: So, where does this bring us, and what does this mean to us?

If wisdom is the principal thing, then nothing is more important than that we seek daily a greater knowledge of the Word of God. There is nothing higher, nor better, nor more important that we can do.

If we are to get it, then we need to seek our "wisdom" and "understanding" from the Lord by prayer, by reading, by meditation on the words of Scripture. We need to go where we can hear the Word taught, and we need to thank God for anyone who helps us understand the Word better.

But we need to remember that we do not approach the Scriptures like we would some other subject. It is most important that we come to the Word in the fear of the Lord, not to decide whether or not we are going to believe it, and obey it, but coming in loving submission to the Lord, with devotion and an eagerness to learn all that He will teach us, committed to believe and obey. And yet we must always keep in mind that the Lord Himself is the One around Whom all of Scripture is built. We come to learn of Him. When we see His place in the Word, and His place in our lives, then we will have "wisdom" and "understanding." May God bless us in the pursuit of the truth.