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*Messages by various speakers mostly on
the book of Romans
at the Streetlight Christian Church
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August 12, 2007
Brother Richard Horlings

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

The Fear of the LORD is the Beginning of Wisdom

Reading: Proverbs 1:1-19
Text: Proverbs 1:7

This evening we are dealing with a passage of Scripture that occurs four times in the Old Testament. Thus, it must be important. That is why I have the more popular rendering of this text as the title for this evening's sermon: The Fear of the LORD is the Beginning of Wisdom. Our text says 'knowledge'. We may like to understand all these words separately, but seeing that Scripture uses all these words side by side, so can we. When our text speaks of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, it is speaking about the same thing the whole time.

What is wisdom? If you ask the average person what wisdom is, they would probably say that a wise person is one who is smart or someone who knows all the right answers to any difficult questions. When God calls people to believe in Him, He also calls them to be wise. In other words, you all are called to be wise. That does not mean you have to know everything. When you are wise in a Biblical way, it does not mean that you become a genius. Wisdom for a Christian means that you know how to live

your life in a way that pleases God. It means that you know what sin is, and why you must avoid sin with all your strength. If you are wise as a Christian, you will know what a temptation is and that you must not fall for it.

None of us are perfectly wise because none of us are perfect. Yet we still have to seek to be wise and to live as much as we can like wise people.

Where does this wisdom come from? In the book of Job, in chapter 28, Job asks this question. Where does wisdom come from? You can't dig it out of the ground. You can't buy at any store. Where then do you get wisdom? Our text gives us that important answer: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

I'm sure that this isn't the answer we would have expected. We would expect that a Christian becomes wise by knowing God, or by reading the Bible, or by listening to the preaching. No, Scripture says that wisdom begins with fearing God.

When we look at this we might say, "Oh, does that mean that I have to be scared of God?" That depends. If we live our lives fearing God, that does not mean that we have to be scared of God at all times. We should not think of God as one who will send down a thunderbolt from heaven to kill us if we ever do something wrong. If that was the case, we'd all be long dead. While fearing God doesn't mean that we always have to be scared of God, it does

mean that we have to have a healthy respect for God. It means that we have to know who God is. God is the almighty God. That means that He has power over everything in the universe. He is also one who judges us. He is our king who has authority over us. God loves us, but He is not our equal. He is not our buddy who can only give us help and advice, no, He is our Father and He tells us what we must do. We must submit to Him.

If we do not submit to God, we should rightly be afraid of God. If we reject God, then the presence of God is terrifying. That is why it says in Rev. 6:6-17 that on Judgment Day, “they called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”

On the other hand, if you believe in our hearts that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and if you attend church faithfully, pray, and treat others with kindness, and so on, you don't have to be afraid of God. You still fear God, but this fear comes from reverence. This is positive fear instead of negative fear. This is good fear.

Let me explain it this way. I know that many of you do not have cars, so please bear with me. If you are driving your car, and you see a policeman standing beside his car with a radar, what would you do? Would you start speeding or drive through a stop sign? You shouldn't do this anyway, but you would not break the

law in front of a police officer, because you fear him. You know that he can give you a ticket or arrest you. That does not mean that we have to shake with fear every time we see a police officer; it means that we don't sin in front of him. On the other hand, if you are driving down the road and you see red lights flashing from the car behind you, then you have to be afraid, because you have probably done something wrong. That's the difference between positive and negative fear. Positive fear makes you say, “I must not do something wrong.” Negative fear makes you say, “Uh-oh, now I am in trouble for doing something that I knew was wrong.”

This is not to say that by fearing God and being wise, we can save ourselves. Not at all. Through wisdom we know not to sin, but it does not save us from the sins we do commit. Jesus Christ does that. We are saved by His death on the cross. Christ did not die so that we could indulge in sin, but so that we could be wise. He is our wisdom, 1 Corinthians 1:30 says. Since Christ died for us and gave us His Holy Spirit to live in us, we can have wisdom. Obtaining wisdom, Proverbs says, will lead to a disciplined and prudent life (Prov. 1:3). That means that you know how to make decisions that give glory to God. This means that you know how to resist sin and that you do that. Proverbs gives two examples. First of all, if you have wisdom, you will know that it is wrong to join a gang and rob people and possibly kill people (Prov. 1:8-17). Such people only end up robbed and beaten up in the end.

Secondly, chapter 5 and 7 says that wisdom teaches you not to follow prostitutes. If you are wise you will know that you must not follow sexual temptations, be they prostitution or pornography or anything else. Why? Because you will fear God. This fear exists so that you will not sin (Ex. 20:20)

God will punish those who do not fear Him. Those who do not believe in God will be under God's curse. After all, who says in his heart, "there is no God."? The fool! The fool is also the same person who despises discipline and instruction (v. 7). Such a person has no use for wisdom. But even if you are a Christian and you believe in God, you will still have to pay the penalty if you sin and don't fear God. If you steal, you may have to go to jail or always be afraid of the police arresting you, for example. People who commit adultery are often depressed people, because they know that they are sinning and have a guilty conscience.

Therefore, don't be a fool. Don't resist God's laws. They are good for you. "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous." (Ps. 19:9).

On the other hand Wisdom says, "whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm." (Prov. 1:33) Such persons do not have to fear God's wrath. They might have trials and struggles in their lives, but they will be content, knowing that they belong to God and to Jesus Christ.

Fearing God is not the opposite of love. Fearing God means truly loving God. The fear of God need not drive us away from God, rather, a proper fear of God will bring us closer to Him. 1 John 4:18 says that perfect love drives out fear. In this case we are thinking of terror, not reverent fear. True Christians always fear God in a positive way, but they are never afraid of God in a negative way. If you love God, you will not be afraid of God, but you will have respectful fear of God, just like you can fear a police officer who can give you a ticket, but at the same time like him, because his presence prevents people - including yourself - from committing crimes.

Be wise! For the sake of your salvation, fear God, and live as a wise person. Then you will not have to be afraid of God, because wise people know that God loves them and that God saves them from their sins through Jesus Christ, who gives them this wisdom in the first place.

We live in an age when people do not like to speak about fearing God. People love to speak about how God is love, but they do not want to fear God. That is because they want to feel free to commit sin and they want God to love them regardless of their sinfulness. It doesn't work that way. If we don't fear God, we will not be wise as Christians and we will not bother to try to live like good Christians.

I urge you all to take these words of Scripture seriously. Christ freely saves people who believe in Him from their sins. True believers must be wise and live as wise people, not like foolish people who say that or act like God does not exist. Live like a person who does believe in God and live your life out reverent fear of God, for that is what saved people do.

August 19, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 1:16-17 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Reading: Romans 1:1-17
Text: Romans 1:16-17

Our text this evening is a very famous passage in Romans - it describes the very heart of the letter. Yes, our text is very impressive. But have you ever wondered why Paul begins with the words “*I am not ashamed*”? In fact, Paul literally says “BUT I am not ashamed.” Why does he talk here about being ashamed of the gospel?

Well, what IS the gospel? Paul describes it very directly and clearly in verses 1-4: “*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

The gospel of God here is described as being about his Son, son of David and Son of God, our Lord. The gospel then is about Jesus Christ - who he is and what he has done. Paul often describes the gospel in similar ways. For instance, he said to the Corinthians, “*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*” (1 Cor. 2:2) To preach Christ is all he needed to do. He was not ashamed to say so.

So Paul is saying: I’m not ashamed of the gospel about Jesus Christ. I will stand up for the Lord Jesus: for what he has done for me. I will confess that he was born to the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell, on the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead. About this gospel, Paul says, I am not ashamed.

Do you remember what Jesus once said would happen to you if you were ashamed of him? Mark 8:38 says “*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*”

Why might a person be ashamed of Jesus? Jesus warned us that we must not be ashamed of him “*in this adulterous and sinful generation.*” In other words, the fact that we live in a time that could be called sinful and adulterous could easily make us ashamed to confess Jesus before others.

What do you think? Is adultery - that is, sexual sin - a significant problem in our time? Yes, I think so. It is hard to imagine a time of worse sexual sin (pre-marital sex, pornography, marital unfaithfulness, divorce, homosexuality). And if people give themselves over to one sinful choice, then what will stop them from all other sorts of sinful choices? An adulterous and sinful generation cannot tolerate people like Jesus or his followers. Jesus taught us what it means to live by faith. We must not ignore God or his holy law. We must not seek the pleasures of this sinful and adulterous generation. We must fear God, obey his law, worship his divine majesty and live out of his grace.

Now you might say: *But I've never seen God. Why should I live for something that I've never seen. Why should I let something that might not even exist, control my whole life? If I do*

that, I'll miss all the pleasures that I could have with this generation. It would be sad if a person did that, for what did Jesus say would happen to him? Jesus would be ashamed of him before the angels in heaven, when he stands before the throne of judgment in the last day. Then that person will realize what a foolish choice he had made.

That is why Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel. He is not ashamed because it is the power of God to save us. But you have to believe, and show that you believe by hating sin, by fighting against it, and by repenting from the heart when you do sin. If you believe, then you know that God's power will save you. Whatever pleasures you must deny yourself in this world, whatever suffering you must endure for Jesus now, will be as nothing when God brings you into paradise in the last day.

Now Paul adds that in this gospel of Jesus, God's righteousness is revealed. God's righteousness is something that makes right what is wrong, that makes straight what is crooked, that brings peace where there is war, comfort where there is fear, love and friendship where there is hatred. The gospel reveals God's way to heal us, restore us to himself, quiet our fearful hearts and strengthen us for the tough work of living as Christians in a sinful and adulterous world.

God wants to tell us through this letter about this gospel. He wants each of you to believe and to live by his power, to

experience the wonder of his righteousness. God might be unseen, but he shows himself wonderfully to his children. We will walk through the letter of Paul to the Romans together, at least through the first 8 chapters.

Let's commit ourselves to listening to it each Sunday evening for the next four months. This is the gospel about which Paul says, "I am not ashamed." Let each one of us learn to say with Paul, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*"

August 26, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 1:18 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness..."

To do Good, you must Know God

Reading: Romans 1:18-32
Text: Romans 1:18

Can a person with cancer get healing from the disease? How? Is it painful? What about a person who is addicted to cocaine? Can he stop using that drug, or any other drug for that matter? How? Is it easy?

If you have a disease, you might not like it, but you need to talk about it. It does not help to deny it. You need to name it,

confront it, overcome it, or you will die of it. So for us human beings, it will never help to avoid talking about our greatest problem: sin. We need to talk about it. We need to name it, confront it and overcome it, or we will all die because of it.

But naming it, confronting it and overcoming it, is not easy. It is painful. You must feel the pain. You must get yourself down to the foot of the cross and look up at Jesus, crucified - for that is what should have happened to you because you have sinned. But the punishment for our sins was put on Jesus. The preacher of the gospel is called to do nothing else than to preach Jesus Christ, crucified. Paul says that is all he did: He clearly portrayed Jesus Christ as crucified (Gal 3:1)

But you will not seek the cure, if you do not name the disease. The disease is sin - your sins against God. You need to name them, identify them before God and confess them. Paul talks about sin here in Romans 1. We must pay attention. If we don't, we will not find any pleasure in Jesus, the healer for our soul.

Our passage is about God's wrath (verse 18). What is God angry about? Well, he is angry because people don't confess him. To confess the truth about God is a great blessing, which very few people are willing to do. You must be willing to do that. You learn about God here in church. What you learn is confirmed by everything that God shows about himself in creation (see verse

20). It is simple enough for every person to know God. God is great and awesome, and he should be worshipped.

But because of sin, we don't want to worship God. People would rather make their own gods and worship them (vs 23). They prefer their own gods because they let people do what they want. They are, after all, gods created in the image of man. In the OT the prophets often complained about the pagan gods who encouraged people to commit sexual sins with the cult prostitutes. Today too, we hear about the god who is within us. If we listen to that god, we can do whatever we want.

False doctrine is everywhere. Why do we always try to believe something about God that is not true? Because we don't want to listen to God. We want to do the things we want, not what God wants. So, says Paul, people reject what they know about God to worship false gods, so that they can live sinful lives. Eventually, however, God punishes them by giving them over to their sinful choices - he lets them do the sin they want - until the people become sick of it, entrapped by them, enslaved by them. That sin entraps people is clearly taught by Paul for he says over and over that when people give themselves over to sinful patterns, then God gives them over to those sinful patterns (see verse 24, 26, 28) and they become helpless to resist them.

You know what happens to a person who drinks too much alcohol? Or uses tobacco? He becomes an addict. An addict is a

slave. He has lost his freedom. But that is not just true of alcohol, tobacco or drugs. It is true of any sin. When you commit sin, you become a slave to that sin. It becomes a pattern or a habit that curses your life.

We need to listen to God. We need to stop doing what we want and do what God wants. We need to get serious about the Lord's Prayer when we ask, "Your will be done" - not what I want, but what you want in my life. Otherwise, we will get stuck in some sin and lose our freedom. But to do that, we need to know God, and confess him. What a blessing that the church teaches about who God is and how we can live with him. Because when we know God and confess him with joy, then God will give you freedom. He will set you free from sin and the power of the devil.

Let us learn to be honest before God. Let us be honest first about ourselves - confess your sins. Don't be afraid to name them before God. He is a gracious and forgiving God for Jesus sake, so be honest with God. Don't hide anything from him. Confess your sins to him. He will forgive you for Jesus sake.

And then, be honest about God - acknowledge what the whole world shows you: That God is glorious, majestic, powerful and deserving of all praise. Discover the wonder of his love as revealed in the Bible, and then, love him, and worship and praise him. You will discover how good it is to be honest in the presence of God.