
The Way of Wisdom

DAVE BAST

During the late 1940s, a new field of study emerged in science and engineering known as cybernetics. Cybernetics has to do with how machines or social groups or even individuals can be reorganized through the processing of information in order to operate more efficiently or effectively. The term actually comes from the Greek word *kubernétés*, which means the pilot or steersman on a ship. So cybernetics is all about steering the proper course toward a better way of doing things; really, a better way of life. It is a fancy term for what the Bible calls wisdom, and that is what we want to dig into today on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, this is the second of a very brief, two-part series, mostly from the book of Proverbs, on the topics of folly and wisdom. The Bible, as we pointed out last week, often describes people as falling into one of two categories; so, in the Psalms it is the wicked and the righteous, but in Proverbs it is the foolish and the wise.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and we looked in the first program about folly...we started with a negative part, so we could end now with the positive dimension of wisdom...what we all hope to be...we all want to be wise, not foolish. Nobody wants to be foolish, I don't think...so we are going to end with that; but we noted, Dave, in the first program that the hallmark of the fool is unteachability...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Rooted in pride and arrogance, and in a belief that the world revolves around me; I can make up the rules as I go along; nobody can tell me how to live; I will do it my way, thank you very much—unteachability is the essence of the fool; which means in this program we are going to see a lot about what it means to be teachable, and...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whom we revere most of all.

DAVE BAST

In the most basic sense, they are the opposite of one another. So, if to be a fool means you don't listen, you cannot take instruction, nobody can tell you anything—you know it all already; or in another sense it means you cannot foresee where you are headed, you cannot reason out the end of the path that you are on and how

it is going to destroy you. The opposite is wisdom, which does listen, which does foresee, which does think ahead; and like folly, who is personified in the book of Proverbs as a lady, wisdom is as well, as we learn from this passage from Proverbs Chapter 9.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars; ²she has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. ³She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city, ⁴“Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense, she says, ⁵“Come eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. ⁶Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.”

DAVE BAST

⁷“Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults. Whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse. ⁸Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you. Rebuke the wise and they will love you. ⁹Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still. Teach the righteous and they will add to their learning. ¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹For through wisdom your days will be many and years will be added to your life. ¹²If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, for our listeners who are paying really close attention, then you will realize that we read the *end* of Proverbs 9 in the previous program on folly, and a lot of the language is exactly the same. Both wisdom and folly are standing near their houses at the high point of the city, calling the simple to come in. The difference is that Lady Folly says: You are really simple and I hope to keep you that way; whereas Lady Wisdom says: Leave your simple ways; understand the ways of the Lord and of the right way to live and the fear of the Lord. So, they are both issuing invitations; the question is, into whose house will we go?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The one house, as the end of Proverbs 9 says, Lady Folly’s house is a cemetery—it is the realm of the dead; but this is the realm of the living.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, these are two very different ladies as well, to be frank. Lady Folly is a prostitute...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Who is inviting people to come and die—to throw themselves away, really—throw their lives away in the pursuit of wickedness that leads nowhere but to destruction. Lady Wisdom is this wonderful matron, like a good wife, who has prepared all these good things. She has thrown a banquet. The house has been built; the table has been set; the meat has been cooked; the wine has been mixed, she says; and she sends out her servants with invitations: Come one, come all! Look, if you are simple, come and learn from me; come to my house. So, there are a couple of the great contrasts in this passage; and another one is contrast between insight and being simple, which is really a synonym for a fool.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and maybe...in a fallen world maybe being a simpleton in that sense is our default setting. We are going to need some help to *not* go the way of the foolish, but instead take Lady Wisdom’s invitation to come; but of course, that is premised on what we were saying just a little while ago. That is premised on your being

willing to learn, being willing to take rebuke, right? So, here is another passage from Proverbs: 9:8^bRebuke the wise and they will love you; 9^cinstruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning. That is the disposition of the wise one. Do that with a fool and you get nothing but static—grief.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; a fool will bite your head off. I remember reading some years ago a story told by a well-known preacher's wife, who said when they were just starting to engage in their courtship, and then early on in their marriage, her husband would often ask her to critique his sermons; until she, with wifely wisdom, understood or realized that he didn't really want criticism; he wanted only affirmation, which I can understand...any preacher can understand that. It is a daunting business to put yourself out there like that; but one of the marks of a wise person, hard as it may be...we touched on this in our previous program, too...is they will welcome honest, thoughtful, careful criticism, because they want to become wiser still. That is how it works. If you are never corrected, if you are never given real, good feedback on either your performance in whatever it is...your job, a husband or a wife—a spouse, as a parent, as a performer of whatever kind...everyone who really does want to grow understands the importance of being critiqued, and that is what wisdom does.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, what is interesting is that we are also told that you create good momentum: The wise get wiser still; which is interesting. That means that the wise get more and more and more discerning as they go along in life. You know what is interesting about the book of Proverbs, Dave, is if you want to be a flat-footed literalist in terms of the Bible, Proverbs will drive you a little crazy, because a lot of proverbs contradict each other. So, one proverb says: Rebuke a fool harshly or he will continue in his folly; and another proverb says: Walk away quietly from a fool, lest you get caught in his own folly. It is like, well which is it? Do you rebuke him or do you walk away? Well, the answer is, it depends...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The wise add to their discernment to realize: You know, there is no one size fits all prescription for this, and the wise can tell the difference between somebody you have a good shot at having a useful conversation with and somebody who is just going to shout you down. It takes wisdom to apply wisdom, and that is the good momentum of those who are teachable.

DAVE BAST

Right. There is another wonderful thing here, I think, in this passage that we read from Proverbs 9, and I just want to touch on it before we wrap this segment up; but it is the different destinations that these two invitations—these two houses—wisdom's house and folly's house—the different places to which they lead. So, we read again in verse 11:

Through wisdom your days will be many and years will be added to your life. ¹²If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.

I think one of the things that we tried to say here is, you know, folly ultimately hurts you more than... It doesn't hurt God if you are fool, but it will hurt you; whereas, wisdom will lead to life; and the reason Proverbs is so passionate about this is because it wants us to live; God wants us to live. He wants us to hear this and respond positively in the right way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that, Dave, as you just said: God wants us to live, which is why we need to talk next about the core of Proverbs, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. What does that mean? We will think about it next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is the second part of a very short, two-part series on folly and wisdom, focusing today on wisdom, and particularly how the book of Proverbs teaches us about wisdom; although before this program is finished we are going to see that there is a really important New Testament connection beyond the book of Proverbs as well; but we read again and again in Proverbs 9-10, but elsewhere...we saw this in the very first chapter of Proverbs in our first program, too...the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; knowledge of the Holy One is understanding; and this actually gets echoed in some of the psalms. Here is Psalm 111:10:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

DAVE BAST

Right; so that is a core idea. The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom; it is not the end of wisdom; there are other things that need to be done and understood, but it is the beginning of wisdom; and the question is, why is that so basic? What is it about the fear of the Lord that makes it so important...that makes it run, really, through the whole Bible from beginning to end? This is a phrase that occurs, not just in Proverbs, not just in Psalms, but throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament as well. So, I think maybe the first question to ask is, what exactly is the fear of the Lord?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, many people will probably think above all it means reverence, which it does; awe, the one verse we just read from the Psalms ends with praising God; and that is certainly true. In the previous program, we looked at Psalm 14:1 that says: The fool says in his heart, there is no God; and when you cut yourself off from God as a daily presence in your life, you are probably going to pursue things that are going to hurt you, because God...as you said in the last segment, Dave...God has our best interests at heart; God made his creation to be a place of delight and flourishing. So when you pay attention to God and honor the blueprint... So, the Bible, you know, partly gives us the blueprint for creation: Here is what works, here is what doesn't work. Color inside the lines, stay inside the moral boundary fences I put up and you will be fine...fools ignore all that because they ignore God.

DAVE BAST

I think a lot of people today would want to emphasize the fact that the fear of the Lord does not mean that we are scared of God, that he is not frightening. Actually, I kind of believe the pendulum has swung a bit too far. It is true that in past generations, I think there was a sense of the terror of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And the fearsomeness of God, and people quaked at the...sinners in the hands of an angry God; you know, that great Jonathan Edwards sermon...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Where he compares us to spiders hanging by a thread over a roaring fire; but today, you know, people tend to fall all over themselves to say, oh, we shouldn't be scared of God; and my tendency is to say, well maybe just a little...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

I mean, God is not tame, you know. It is like Aslan in Narnia, he is not a tame lion...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he is good, but he is not safe.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think you are right, Dave. I mean, you can go to any number of churches that sort of are kind of talking to God, even in prayers, like God is a buddy you are meeting after work for a drink somewhere. A little more reverence wouldn't hurt there.

DAVE BAST

Right; but the main thing is that the fear of the Lord means that we begin to take God seriously; we never treat him lightly; we do not take him for granted; and in particular, we have a kind of a childlike dread of offending him or alienating him or disobeying him. So, the fear of the Lord really functions in a number of ways, and we see it repeated again and again throughout the scriptures with all kinds of promises attached to it; all kinds of developments that it can lead to. One of the things, for example, that the fear of the Lord will do is will restrain people from doing evil.

So again, just to go to Proverbs, here is a verse from Proverbs 8:13:

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil; and again from Proverbs 16: ^{6b}By the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil. So it keeps us from doing the bad things that we might otherwise do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because we will never find the gate that leads to the paths of wisdom, we will never find the front door to Lady Wisdom's house, to use the image from earlier...

DAVE BAST

Right; we won't even get started without it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, if you don't acknowledge God in all your ways; if you don't acknowledge that reality is finally God-centered. It is not me-centered; it is not human-centered; it is God-centered. He is the deep well of gravity around which all of us orbit; and you accept that or you don't, but if you accept it, now you have a good chance to then say: Okay God, tell me what I need to know. I will do what you say. I think you have my best interests at heart. I trust you; I love you; so teach me. Again, teachability...so very, very important.

DAVE BAST

I think we could say from scripture that the fear of the Lord leads us, not just to obey God, but to serve him with a kind of joy and gladness, to worship him. So, just a little bouquet of verses from the Psalms, for example: Psalm 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. Psalm 2:11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Or a great passage—a classic passage from the book of Deuteronomy Chapter 10:

¹²And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹¹and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For your own good.

DAVE BAST

There is a lot in there...that "for your own good" line.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Dave...that quote from Deuteronomy that you just had there from Deuteronomy 10...the theme of Deuteronomy, which is Moses' final sermon to the new generation of Israelites before they finally leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land, the core refrain in Deuteronomy is "remember and do not forget;" remember God and do not forget. When you get into the Promised Land, where you are not dependent on manna and miraculous water flowing from a rock, but now you have your own gardens and you have your own smartly dug wells, do not conclude: Hey, I did this. I earned all this. No, remember and do not forget; you are as dependent on God in the Promised Land as you were in the wilderness when your life was hanging by a thread. Remember and do not forget; and that is what the wise do. We remember every day: I am totally dependent on God's good will.

DAVE BAST

Right; I also love, in that Deuteronomy passage, the combination of fear and love. It says fear the Lord first, but also love the Lord your God; and those two things...as John Henry Newman...the great Cardinal Newman of the 19th Century...said must always go hand in hand all our days: Fear and love; because fearing God will temper our love; it will make it...it will prevent it from sliding into a mere kind of sentimentality that does not take obedience seriously. It just says: Aw, it's all good no matter what I do; and loving God will keep our fear from turning into a kind of a shrinking from him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...terror.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so those are the ways of wisdom. That is what the Bible teaches us in the Old Testament in particular, but there is something more in the New Testament, and we will conclude with that in just a moment.
Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, as we are now concluding a two-part series on folly and wisdom, focusing in this program now on wisdom; and Dave, we began by noting that in Proverbs both folly and wisdom are personified as a lady...Lady Wisdom; but you know, there is another personification ultimately in the Bible of wisdom, and we learn about it in the New Testament when we find out that Jesus Christ is now the wisdom of God. You know, we are accustomed...and I think we think much more of this in the Church to thinking about the beginning of John's gospel: In the beginning was the Word. So, Jesus is the Word of God—the *logos* in the Greek, right; and so, we tend to think about that, but in the New Testament Jesus is also the *sophia*, the wisdom of God, which is feminine, which is maybe one reason we don't like to associate with Jesus because in human terms he was a male; and yet, we are told that Jesus is *sophia*; not just *logos*—word—but *sophia*—wisdom, as well.

DAVE BAST

Which is a wonderful insight to read back into Proverbs. So when that Lady Wisdom invites us to come to her house and eat this rich feast of good things and live, it is really the Lord Jesus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Son of God.

DAVE BAST

Who is inviting us to come home to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What John's gospel tells us when he says; In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God...and through him all things were made, John is saying when you read Genesis 1 and it says: And God said, "Let there be light," that was the Son of God, who became Jesus, doing the talking. Now you just made the good point when you read Proverbs and Lady Wisdom is talking, that is also the Son of God, who became Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, and here is where we see this in the New Testament. It is in 1 Corinthians Chapter 1, where Paul has just been talking about wisdom and foolishness, again, in slightly different terms from what we have been discussing in our series from Proverbs; but he points out that God's way of salvation does not seem very wise by the world's standards...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because the world values, again, knowhow, science, technology, knowledge...all that stuff...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Strength, brawn, guts, courage...

DAVE BAST

Right, and we have seen that is not real wisdom in biblical terms, but that is how the world defines it; and it thinks of a message of salvation through a cross...that is just dumb, that is just folly; that is foolishness to the world's way of thinking; but Paul says God has turned all this upside down and set it on its head; and you can see that that is true, Paul says to the Corinthians, by just looking at yourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul writes: ²⁶Brothers and sister of Corinth, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential, not many were of noble birth; ²⁷but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

DAVE BAST

Jesus is our wisdom—he is wisdom from God; and in him we find our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption—everything—all the treasures of God are found in Jesus Christ. So really, the ultimate in wisdom is to come to know Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here, Dave, all the threads of these two programs come together and get braided into a lovely cord because we have said all along, the hallmark of the fool is unteachability, you just cannot teach him; he will not take rebuke, he will not take instruction, he will not listen to you when you try to save him from stepping off the cliff or sawing off the branch he is sitting on. Fools are unteachable. The wise are eminently

teachable. The fear of the Lord—we sit at the feet of our God and we learn. Well, that all now comes together in the New Testament because, Paul says, the way of salvation...namely, that it comes from a bloody instrument of Roman execution, a cross of all things...that is the wisdom of God; and Paul says you are never going to learn that just listening to the world...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You will only learn that that apparent folly is actually wisdom when you are teachable, and you let the Holy Spirit fill you, you become one with Christ, and you listen to what the Gospel teaches you. You will never learn that any other way. You have to be teachable, or you won't even get the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Right; which is meant to lead us to Christ; and so Paul says here...not in this passage, but just prior to this, that the world through wisdom does not come to know God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Wisdom purely considered in worldly terms as science, knowledge, technology, will never lead people to God. Reason will not lead people to God—pure, unaided thinking. Striving—religion—will not lead people to God. That is not the way to God because God has intentionally passed judgment on all these worldly ways by saving people through the cross; as you said, this bloody instrument, and specifically through the message of the cross, or the preaching of the cross, which is foolishness to those who are perishing. It seems stupid. What? You just stand up and tell a story about a man who died on a cross two thousand years ago? But it is actually the power of God and the wisdom of God because through it we are saved.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, it was true in Corinth in the Greek world that they also valued strength and courage and brawn and intelligence; boy, that describes our culture all over the place today, doesn't it? I mean, you know, we know that might makes right and nice guys finish last, and that is the cultural air we breathe. You pull yourself up by your own bootstraps; be strong and courageous; be a self-made man or woman. So, if that was a problem in Corinth, it is a real problem today, which means again, the only way we are going to learn the ways of God and what constitutes true wisdom, which is, as we have said, again, in both of these programs, the way that leads to life, and in this case, to life eternal, well, that will come through our being teachable and taking what God has to reveal to us in the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Which is, Jesus Christ, to put it most simply...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The wisdom of God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, God leads us to him if we will only learn. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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