**Scoffer? Or Wise Man?**

**Proverbs 9:1-10**

In our Old Testament passage, it talks about scoffers. What exactly is a scoffer? Well, if we look at other English translations, there are many which use the word “scoffer,” but a couple replace that with “mocker,” and another few replace it with “scorner”. Basically, someone who has heard the Word of God and makes fun of it, derides it, mocks it, laughs at it, or just does not want to believe it is true – is a scoffer.

This text is simple! Listen to it again. *Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

We are told numerous times in Scripture that God’s Word is a double-edged sword. God’s Word is both Law and Gospel. To speak in the most simple terms, God’s Law shows us our sinfulness and how sin is acted out in our lives. This bring sorrow to our heart, which in turn leads us to repentance. Repentance is sorrow over our sin and guilt, the desire to change our sinful ways, which in turn looks to the mercy of God for forgiveness. That forgiveness was purchased by Christ and is delivered in Word and Sacrament.

(It is also good to remember that the Law serves as a guide to show Christians how to love God and their neighbor.)

Now consider our text again. You and I know that it is the job of Christians to call one another to repentance - that is - to call one another to see their sinfulness, repent of their sinfulness, and trust in God’s Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Our text declares to us that if you do this to scoffers they will only insult you, hurt you, hate you, make fun of you, and will not believe you.

Unfortunately, scoffers are not simply numbered among the atheists who refuse to believe anything having to do with God. There are many scoffers who wear the cloak of Christianity, and claim to walk under the banner of believing in Christ.

Our initial response is to say, “OK, I will leave scoffers alone. I will not speak to them at all. I will not call them to repentance.

Do you see how this leaves us in the middle of a terrible quandary that is unfortunate! This text from Proverbs tells us that if we speak the truth to the scoffer it will not be a pleasant experience. Yet by the same token, we are called by God to do just that.

Maybe we should first determine if there are any scoffers in our midst? How many of you here trust the Word of God totally and completely? You never question it?

Really? So you tithe? You pray before every meal, after every meal, and numerous times during the day – without ceasing? You never think that some ideas in it might be outdated and no longer applicable to our 21st Century life?

You also believe that your salvation is the Trinitarian work of God? That the Father sent the Son to live the holy life you and I fail to live, and to do it in our flesh? That the Son endured the cross and shame, giving His innocent life unto death to purchase forgiveness for all mankind? Finally, that is it the work of the Spirit through that Word, to build, sustain, and nourish that faith, working in believers to trust the work of Christ for their salvation - and working in believers love toward God and toward their neighbor?

My point is this, you may be a scoffer. In fact, we have all been – at one time or another – a scoffer. You may be scoffing my words to you at this moment.

Some scoff, claiming that it takes more than just faith to be saved, claiming, “Our works also count.” Some scoff by claiming that faith HAS TO BE our own work – God desires to give us His grace, but we first need to ask for it. What does it say in Hebrews? *We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Hebr. 12:2)

If we look at the Greek, when it says that Jesus is the author, it has the force of meaning “the one who began” our faith. While that word translated as perfecter, has the force of meaning “the one who finishes” or more specifically, “who brings to completion” our faith. Jesus begins, and will bring to completion, our faith.

Yes, believers will (and must) produce good works, as God requires them of believers. But good works flow from faith, they do not produce it. As a branch on an apple tree cannot help but produce apples, so a believer cannot help but produce good works. If you remove a branch from the trunk of the tree it will no longer produce fruit, and it will wither and die.

Do you scoff at God, thinking He hasn’t done anything useful for you lately? Have you thought that you have been praying, but He has not been answering? Maybe what you are asking is not in accord with His eternal will, so His answer has been, “No!”

Friends, I know how hard it is. I have struggled with faith these last few months. There are days I have wanted just to retire, head up to the cabin, and live off the land. I have felt like a failure. I have scoffed, “Where are you God, in the midst of this mess? I am called to care for those entrusted to me, for Your Word declares that you will hold me accountable? But some things I cannot control! It is not fair!”

Our text says something about the wise man too. *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

The wise man falls on His knees in repentance, for fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of the Lord is manifest in repentance, for repentance sees nothing worthy in self and trusts solely in God. Fear sees the awful sinfulness staining oneself and begs God for mercy – and knows it has been purchased, where it is delivered, and receives it…“I am not worthy to be Your undershepherd, forgive my failings and make me worthy – in Christ!”

Knowing the Holy One is insight. Who is the Holy One? Christ! The sinless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. How do we know this? It is by the words of a fallen angel, an unclean spirit that we know this to be true. In the first chapter of Mark’s gospel we have an encounter recorded for us where a demon-possessed man and Jesus come together, the demon recognizes Jesus as God’s Holy One. Listen to it. *Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”* (Mark 1:23-24)

Do you have knowledge of the Holy One of God, do you in fear of the Lord, in repentance, come to Christ? That is insight!

The wise man seeks Christ in repentance and finds the Holy One - in the Word of forgiveness spoken.

The wise man seeks Christ in repentance and finds the Holy One - in the table that Wisdom has set of bread and wine, for the wise one knows, that as Jesus has proclaimed, there is Christ - His body, His blood. It is a meal at which the wise eat and drink and are given life.

 We are forgiven for our times of scoffing, and granted life. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.