

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Wisdom Personified”
Hebrews 9:11-14
Proverbs 8:12-21**

**Christ the King Sunday
November 25, 2018**

Hebrews 9:11-14

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Proverbs 8:12-21

“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. I have counsel and sound wisdom; I have insight; I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries.”

“Wisdom Personified”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Throughout literature and cinema, writers have always personified attitudes and emotions with various means. A few years ago the movie *Inside Out* premiered and depicted five emotions of a young girl dealing with her family’s move. Going back to the twenties and thirties, you have A. A. Milne’s famous characters of Winnie-the-Pooh and the other animals of the Hundred Acre Wood. Each of the characters personify different aspects of human thought. One such character is Owl. He’s depicted as a talkative teacher, with spectacles and seemingly high intellect. Although, he is actually scatterbrained and not as wise as he lets on. In fact, throughout history, writers and artists often associate wisdom with owls. Personifying abstract things is one of the best ways to wrap our minds around them. We shouldn’t be surprised to find such personification in the Bible, because there are a lot of abstract concepts in there.

One such concept is wisdom. And the ancient Jews had a highly developed doctrine of wisdom. The Hebrew word is *chokhmah*, and it appears 149 times in the Old Testament. In the books of the Apocrypha — those books that appear in Catholic bibles but not Protestant ones — there are three major books dedicated to wisdom: Baruch, Ben Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon. These books, along with Proverbs, describe Divine Wisdom as existing since before the world was made and acting as God’s agent in creation. God gave Wisdom to Israel in order to guide and instruct his people. In the other books, Wisdom is described as the spouse of Solomon and she gives to God’s people of her bounty. And it is this Wisdom who speaks to us in the eighth chapter of Proverbs.

Wisdom tells us that she dwells with prudence and finds knowledge and discretion. She's setting up for us an understanding that true wisdom is perfect and sober. There is no variation, there is no confusion, there is no falsehood. Did you notice that these words also describe God himself. Wisdom is establishing for us that she comes from God and that she is an extension of God. She tells us that the reverential fear of the Lord is equal to the hatred of evil. That's a pretty stark line in the sand. If we revere the Lord then we must also hate evil. Most of us would be quick to agree with that statement. Who really loves evil, anyways? Well, Wisdom then throws us for a loop. She specifies for us some examples of evil things. Murder, destruction, and exploitation? Nope, that's not what she lists. Pride, arrogance, the path of evil, and perverted speech. It's easy to hate evil when it's massive, abstract, and out there. It's much harder to hate evil when it's teeny-tiny, questionably bad, and intimately 'personal. Even the pathway of evil, not evil itself, just the very thought of evil, she hates. And my guess is, if Wisdom hates it, God hates it, too.

God sent Wisdom to this world to help his children grow closer to him and deeper in faith. Wisdom says she has counsel, soundness, insight, and strength. You know what? We already know who Wisdom is. Wisdom is the Holy Spirit. Part of God's plan for redemptive history was revealing his Spirit to the Israelites in a way that would bear witness to the third person of the Trinity. In a way, Wisdom, for the ancient Jews, is the personification of the Holy Spirit. When Wisdom says, "by me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just," historical Christianity sees that as an action of the Holy Spirit. But rulers aren't the only ones who should live rightly. Anyone who wishes to live in righteousness must hand himself over to the Spirit. We can't expect to act righteously if we don't open ourselves to discerning what is righteous. And the only way of discerning what is right is through Wisdom.

This is why she says "I love those who love me." It is every person's responsibility to seek after wisdom. We usually associate wisdom and wise people with experience or agedness. We almost automatically assume someone who is elder is also wiser. And when we see young people acting wisely, we say things like "She's wise beyond her years." Now, I think we all know some pretty foolish old people; even really smart people aren't always wise. And, of course, we do know young people who are quite adept and learned, despite their youthfulness. This tells me that Wisdom has no respect of persons. It doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, how much experience you have, if you love Wisdom, she'll love you. In fact, she adds, "those who seek me diligently find me." Wisdom isn't hiding from us. It's not a needle in a haystack nor a precious gem that few can afford. All we need to do is seek after wisdom. It's not going to just come to us without effort; but wisdom isn't unattainable. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. He's always there. He's in our midst. God has given to us his Spirit, we just need to open our hearts and let him in. That's the transformational work of the Spirit that Jesus told Nicodemus about.

But there is work that needs to be done on our part. God gladly gives to us the Spirit, but we have a responsibility, too. Wisdom tells us that her "fruit is better than gold, even find gold, and my yield than choice silver." As I was ruminating on this passage, I kept recalling this same phrase, but couldn't remember where I heard it. Then it dawned on me. The Psalms say something similar. After some research I found Psalm 19:10, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." What is it

that Scripture is telling us is better than fine gold? Well, Psalm 19:10 is talking about the Law of the Lord. And I think Wisdom, in talking about her fruit and her yield, is talking about the same thing. In fact, when I think on it further, the Law of the Lord is how God instructs his people in the ways of wisdom, truth, and righteousness. That which is better than fine gold and silver, better than the sweetest honey, is our obedience to God.

God wants us to be in relationship with him. And that relationship is going to be according to *his* design and *his* desires. Therefore, a rightly ordered relationship with him is a relationship of obedience to his Word and will. We, like Wisdom, are to walk in the ways of righteousness and in the paths of justice. My friends, here again we see the Double Love Rule reflected in Scripture. The Greatest Commandment to love God wholly and love neighbor fully is enacted through righteousness and justice. When we open ourselves to Wisdom — to the Holy Spirit — we are opening ourselves to being led down these two concurrent paths. And when we give ourselves over fully to obedience, Wisdom says we are inheritors. Friends, we are coheirs with Christ. We are adopted by the Spirit, and therefore inheritors of the Kingdom of God. This is the greatest treasure of all time. It is indeed ours if we live a life according to God's will. A life that walks the way of righteousness and the path of justice.

Let us pray. Magnificent and Beneficent God, we give to you all thanks and praise because you are our King. No earthly ruler can attain your glory and no earthly leader reigns without your providence. We ask that all people may be guided by your wisdom to see the light of the Gospel. May we accept Christ's kingship over us, and through that obedience, may we welcome your Spirit's guidance. We ask for the wisdom to seek after righteousness and justice, that we may display, without trepidation, the emblem of our Sovereign Lord Jesus. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.