

3 August 2025      Theme: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'.

'Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together! My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.' (Psalm 49:1-4)

Well, here we might have a picture of King David, sat on the throne and turning out his latest piece of writing; a reflection on not wasting words carelessly when speaking in public. Thus: 'My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.' He adds: 'I will incline my ear to a proverb', so let us give him one to chew on:

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'. (Proverbs 9:10)

What this means is that if a person truly takes notice of what the Lord their God says in scripture, he or she reduces considerably the risk of trouble that that person may have to live with and in addition boosts their chances of living a godly life, to the extent that they can be confident of their salvation. To the Jews of King David's time, this meant keeping the laws given to Moses, as contained in the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah. The way it went was this: so long as a person kept every law to the letter, contained in the Torah, then they would be saved. There are 613 of them, and if you kept every one, all of the time, all of your life, then you would be saved. Good luck with that!

Who though, could be saved? Who is that good? Well, no-one. Show me a person who has not sinned even once in their lives. It can't be done. Our human nature since the fall of Adam, is incapable of it. Even me, with my clerical collar on can't do it, so the outlook for all other human beings looks grim. What can be done?

The Torah, in addition to stating the laws, also prescribed what sort of atoning actions could be made in order to appease what was by then, a very annoyed, if not a bit angry God. If, through our negligence we have racked up a whole string of misdemeanours for which to atone, these atoning measures were designed to put us right with God once again, in order that at the end of our lives we should not be struck down.

The life of a Jew from Moses time onwards was not full of misery on account of their sin, but most were mindful of it and therefore to make the atonement was simply a part of what they did in their lives to be right with God. Great news! No-one was going to be estranged from God, I hear you say. Well, maybe, but there was a problem.

If you could remember every sin, that you needed to atone for, and did so, then it was great news indeed. It was not so great news if, like me, you have a memory like a sieve. I couldn't write down every sin I committed as and when I committed it, so I only needed to forget one and I am undone. For good.

Sheol, the Jewish name for that place where God is voluntarily absent is not such a great place to spend eternity. So for forgetting even just one sin and not atoning for it, it was: Go to Sheol; Do not pass 'Go'; Do not collect £200. There is no 'Get Out of Sheol Free' card; Sheol will be your eternal home.

Now you can see why Proverb 9:10 says:

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'.

Try and keep to this and your chances of sinning are greatly reduced, at least if you can still keep those Laws without sinning or forgetting to atone for the sins you commit.

What friends can we do then? The Apostle Peter offers some helpful advice:

'For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.' (2 Peter 1:5-9)

Yes, knowledge of these things will indeed help you to live a more godly life and one that brings a person closer to God, but there is one problem: Peter is offering this advice to the Christian whose way to salvation is entirely different to that of the Jew, before Christ revealed himself.

While the advice still applies 'to live a more godly life and one that brings a person closer to God' in the case of the Jew of the old order, the atonements still have to be made for all of their sins and a sin forgotten in error is the only one necessary to condemn them by their own hand.

Thanks be then to the Lord Jesus Christ, who through his atoning sacrifice of himself on the cross, sent himself to the depths of hell to retrieve those there already who would love and believe in him; and close the gates to those who would not. He, it is, who continues to do the same even today for those who have faith in him and cast aside the works of the evil one. This is why Peter can say:

'if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.'

Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you, do not pass up the grace that the Lord Jesus Christ offers to those who would love him and follow him. Think of the story that Jesus told us in Luke Ch.12 of the man who re-built his barns and lived for the day, with no thought of what tomorrow might bring.

That man was entirely self-sufficient. He didn't need a God. He needed bigger barns in which to store the treasure that would fund a luxurious life-style for the rest of his days. He never lived even to see the barn's foundations dug. The only digging done for him was for his own grave!

Friends, do not be like that man. Rather pour your faith into the love of the Lord Jesus and he will see you right. And even if you should fall every now and then, deserving the death that sin against a Holy God brings, have sufficient faith to call on the Lord Jesus in confidence, that through true repentance of heart, your sins might be taken from your shoulders.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'.

Understand what God can do for you; be wise to the fact that through him you can be free in Christ and be confident of your salvation, not on account of anything you have done, but on account of that which he has done for you, so that you would live the fullest life in him.