Proverbs 9:1-6 Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.”

The book of Proverbs is such an interesting and wonderful book but perhaps not as utilized as it should be. Martin Luther in his introduction to the Book of Proverbs said of it, “It may properly be called a book of good works, for in it he [Solomon] teaches how to lead a good life before God and the world.” That’s a pretty remarkable statement. Or how about this statement of Luther: “There in this book Solomon calls all who despise God’s Word ‘fools’ and all those who deport themselves according to God’s commandments ‘wise.’ This does not apply solely to young people—though it is primarily they whom he has undertaken to teach—but to people of all stations from the highest to the very lowest.”

What is a proverb? Most would simply assume that they are short, pithy statements meant to teach a lesson. In many cases that is true, but not all the time. A proverb can be two short lines or it can be a longer discourse on a particular subject. Our book of Proverbs contains both styles. The short statement or style, found so often in our book is set up in the format that is a *“mashal,”* a Hebrew word that means “parallel or similar.” In other words they are short statements meant to teach and train by setting up contrasts.

Some examples of this type of proverb I will share with you. What I did, is took the book of Proverbs, opened it up and picked a few verses here and there to share with you. I think you will appreciate the words. From chapter 10:23 **“A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.”** 11:1 **“the Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.”** 14:15 **“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.” 18:2 “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions.” 20:11 “Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.” 25:28,** one of my favorites, **“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”**

Those are just some of the examples of the type of short statement proverb. Not only do they sound good, but you will find that if you spend some time thinking about them, working to grasp what they mean, you will find you gain in wisdom. Not just any wisdom, but wisdom from the Lord.

That’s what makes this book so interesting. Many cultures and many other religions have books and writings similar to this. There have been cases where those other books and writings have given the same lessons as are found in our Proverbs. While occasionally, by the observation of the human and life, a philosopher can stumble upon a truth or two, the real difference between what they write and what is found here is very simple. The book of Proverbs is found in the Bible, the inspired Word of God. The book of Proverbs is found in the book that God has given and provided us with and thus is the very truth and wisdom of God. There is the difference that is found. Not just general truth. Not just observed truth. Truth that has the fingerprint and backing of God!

The same is also true of those longer sections of the Book of Proverbs, those sections that are a discourse on a particular subject. For instance in the first 9 chapters of Proverbs there is actually a whole discourse on the importance and wonder of wisdom. Not just any wisdom but wisdom clearly defined and laid out throughout this discourse. Please note that our section is found in chapter 9. It is really the conclusion, the wrap up of the lesson on wisdom. It would be good for us to contemplate what is said. Our theme will be: **WISDOM!**

One of the joys of this section is wrestling with the particular style of literature that is found here. In the section that is before us we have the literary device known as “personification.” Personification is where an inanimate object or idea is given human characteristics or even portrayed with human actions and words. In this particular case, the personification of wisdom is given greater meaning because of the way in which she is described and because of the actions that she is found involved in. It is as we come to grips with all this information that we begin to grasp the wonder and importance of wisdom in our lives.

Look at the first line. It says, **“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.”** Almost from the beginning of Proverbs the qualities of wisdom are espoused and we are encouraged to make wisdom a part of our lives. What is most striking is to grasp that wisdom is of and from the Lord. Wisdom is what God wants of our lives. This can be seen in numerous ways. For instance, in our verse wisdom is described as having built a house, a house with seven pillars. It is this line and many others that helps us see that wisdom is really the church of God, yes, the house is a reference to the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. The number seven is the number in Scripture that speaks of God working in the world. We can see that as we hear in Revelation of the seven golden lampstands or of the seven stars or the sevenfold spirit of God, all these things closely connected with Jesus and what he does and is. Clearly wisdom is something we are to want, something precious from God and connected with how God works in this world. Wisdom is the gift of the Church that God has given the world, the Church that is involved in the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

There is more to learn of wisdom. Our next line sheds more light. It says, **“She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city.”** Again a good knowledge of Scripture helps us understand the picture given here. Throughout God’s Word, especially in the Old Testament, the eternal kingdom of God and its joys are presented as a banquet and feast for all of God’s children to enjoy. We hear in Isaiah 25:6 **“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, the best of meats and the finest of wines.”** That whole section of Isaiah is a prophecy of the eternal salvation that will be ours in Jesus. It is thus striking that our section uses the same language. As we think of this meat and wine, how could we miss the connection to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and the life giving force that this meal presents?

Or notice that wisdom sends out her maids and calls from the highest point of the city. Think of how Jesus spoke in his parables of the king sending out his servants to proclaim the banquet ready and to invite the people to come. The fact that the invitation goes out from the highest point of the city is there to remind us that God’s invitation is for all people. Again think of the passages that you have heard that tell God’s people to **“shout, cry out and proclaim”** everywhere the wonder of God.

The next line helps us grasp even more. It says, and remember this is the servants sent out speaking, **“Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.”** Notice that listening to the invitation of the servants is listening to the invitation of Wisdom! And notice that partaking of her food and drink helps us to overcome being simple, helps us to live in the way of understanding.

To grasp what all of this is saying I’ll simply go back to other passages found in this rather long discourse on wisdom. 1:7 says, **“The fear of the Lord s the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”** 2:1-8 says, **“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.”** Or how about from chapter 3:3-4 which says, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.”**

It is rather clear that our section is speaking of the importance of God and His Word. His Word is the source of wisdom and knowledge. His Word leads us to the truth and marvel of our salvation. His Word helps us overcome our simple way, the way of work righteousness. You see, sinful mankind thinks that the way to God is how good you are or whether or not you do and say things more righteously and morally than the person next to you. We think it is about our lives and works. But that is the simple way. It takes wisdom, the wisdom of God granted by the Holy Spirit to see that our salvation is not found in us but rather is found in Jesus. Instead of looking to ourselves, we look to the Lord and what he has accomplished. The greatest wisdom of all is the knowledge of our sins forgiven in Jesus because he atoned for us, because Jesus in the greatest act of love ever known won us forgiveness and grants eternal life.

Didn’t we learn through Jesus and his apostles that it is not this world’s food and drink that is the most important! It is God’s food and drink that counts. Think of our Gospel reading. Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”** The food of God is our Savior Jesus. But do you know how many despise that food? How many turn away from the wisdom of God found in this passage? The majority of the world thinks that God and His Son Jesus are the utmost in foolishness and folly. “I have no time for Jesus” is the clear message of the life of many. Jesus is always on the back burner. Something is always more important than church or hearing the Word. The sad part is that they go through life figuring that Jesus is on that back burner only to discover when they really need him that He isn’t there. They have lost him! They have despised wisdom and her invitation!

By the way, I think it important for you to know that this section at times speaks of “Folly.” Folly is the counterpoint to wisdom. Let me share one such section. Chapter 7:24-27 **“Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.”** As you study this book you will discover that “Folly” is described as a loose and immoral woman who will lead you away from God. She opposes everything of God and pretends that she is greater and more knowledgeable than Wisdom. And pay attention, because Folly likes to imitate, to personate Wisdom. Folly is the personification of the false religion and philosophy of the world. Beware of them, especially as you discover that they lead away from Jesus and his wonder.

This section of Proverbs is so wonderfully interesting. It encourages us in our Christian faith and life. It invites us to make the Lord and his paths our paths. It leads us to the path of righteousness that is found in Jesus. He is the giver of eternal life. He is the core of our hearts. He is the One that Wisdom wants to share with us and that Wisdom wants to feed us with. May you know the difference between Wisdom and Folly! May you hear the invite of wisdom and come to that eternal feast prepared in Jesus for all. Amen.