

Proverbs 1:8, 2:1-15

Hear, my child, your father's instruction,  
and do not reject your mother's teaching;

**2** My child, if you accept my words  
and treasure up my commandments within you,  
<sup>2</sup>making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
<sup>3</sup>if you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding;  
<sup>4</sup>if you seek it like silver,  
and search for it as for hidden treasures—  
<sup>5</sup>then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.  
<sup>6</sup>For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;  
<sup>7</sup>he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,  
<sup>8</sup>guarding the paths of justice  
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.  
<sup>9</sup>Then you will understand righteousness and justice  
and equity, every good path;  
<sup>10</sup>for wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
<sup>11</sup>prudence will watch over you;  
and understanding will guard you.  
<sup>12</sup>It will save you from the way of evil,  
from those who speak perversely,  
<sup>13</sup>who forsake the paths of uprightness  
to walk in the ways of darkness,  
<sup>14</sup>who rejoice in doing evil  
and delight in the perverseness of evil;  
<sup>15</sup>those whose paths are crooked,  
and who are devious in their ways.

# 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18

## Divisions in the Church

<sup>10</sup>Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,<sup>[d]</sup> by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." <sup>13</sup>Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God<sup>[f]</sup> that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

## Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

<sup>18</sup>For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

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**Proverbs 1:8; 2:1-15; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

**Wisdom and Foolishness**

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*“Once, long long ago... yet somehow, not so very long... when all the animals, and rocks, and winds and waters, and trees, and birds, and fish, and all the beings of the world could speak... and understand one another. There began... an argument.” (Douglas Wood, Old Turtle)*

This is the opening of one of my favorite children’s books, “Old Turtle” by Douglas Wood. Oddly enough, or maybe just as you suspected, the argument was about God, and what God is like. To the breeze, God is a wind who is never still. To the stone, God is a great rock that never moves. To the mountain, God is a snowy peak, high above the clouds. And to the fish in the ocean, God is a swimmer, in the dark blue depths of the sea.

I presume you see where this is going. The animate beings and forces in the world see God as mostly like themselves. Each longs for God to be just “like me.” We aren’t so very different than that.

Paul also describes an argument in the opening to his letter to the church at Corinth. The tattle-tales among Chloe’s people have reported quarrels and divisions in the church. So Paul calls it out, and then appeals to their better selves. “You should be in agreement with one another, with no divisions among you, united in the same mind and purpose.” That Paul – always the peacemaker of the Bible, right?

Not so much. Paul was known to be pretty hard-headed in his own thinking, and was known to pick a fight or two himself. We read him as the stubborn zealot he likely was, but he did try to point out certain differences in the church as superfluous. It doesn't matter WHO baptized you. You were all baptized in Christ – even if you want to claim to follow Apollos, or Cephas, or dear old Pastor Kum Ba Yah. The arguments about who baptized whom aren't worth having.

What about now? Have we learned anything from our many human arguments? Are we now division-less in the church? Environmentally united with all God's creatures? Peacefully of one mind even with those who vote for the other candidate, or seeking the same purpose as those who live on the other side of the planet and worship Allah? Again, not so much! I can't even stay argument-free in my own house, let alone on Facebook, or in the real world. The kids tease Chuck and me for having an "annual argument" – the blow off the doors, tension has reached code red kind. Most of the year we can hold it together, but when that build-up has reached too much back pressure and explodes, the kids have figured out to lay low until it's over.

Fortunately, the healing after the fact often brings us to better understandings of each other, but in the midst of our frustrations, disagreement, and multiple misunderstandings, the argument itself seems to develop a life and personality of its own.

So how do we get to a better place as human beings with an inclination to get on one another's nerves? How do we heed Paul's advice and model the wise instruction of the book of Proverbs? How do we ground ourselves in wisdom and begin to see God both in the dark blue depths of the sea AND in the snow-capped peaks reflecting the sun? How do we feel God's breath blowing by AND ground ourselves in God's stillness like a rock? Embracing paradoxical thinking can be difficult for us. We've come to like our dualisms quite a lot, thank you. We want to be on the right side, the winning team, and it makes us feel powerful to point out when someone else has

been wrong. We want our faith to be pure, our theology orthodox, and our actions consistent. But, alas, we are oh so very human. Rather than coming together in faith and love, we will still argue. But with any luck, we will be open enough to learn from our mistakes, and do better the next time.

The instruction to the proverbial child receiving wisdom as a gift is one of my favorite passages of scripture. It reminds us that wisdom is not inherent as our birthright. We have to learn it. Wisdom is also not the same as knowledge. We must understand how to apply what we've learned in multiple situations and with an eye toward mercy and justice for all people. Mere regurgitation of certain facts or figures isn't enough. Wisdom is a hidden treasure. It is a shield for those who walk blamelessly. It guards the paths of justice. It will save you from the ways of evil and keep you from getting hooked by liars. Wisdom is some pretty good stuff – so to learn it, perhaps it's best to start young – and expect to keep coming back to it year after year, after every annual argument, and after every story of hatred and division that we read or hear on the news.

Today, we are acknowledging that there is at least one such teachable child in our midst. Rebecca comes to us already loved and adored by God. She is one of the humans, and as Old Turtle says, she is part of “a new family of beings in the world that will be strange and wonderful, a reminder of all that God is.” In the book, as the creatures of the world reach the peak of their argument, Old Turtle says, “They [the humans] will come in many different colors and shapes, with different faces and different ways of speaking. Their thoughts will soar to the stars but their feet will walk the earth. They will possess many powers. They will be strong, yet tender, a message of love from God to the earth, and a prayer from the earth back to God.”

This is our inheritance, this is our gift - **To be wise.** This is the best that humanity has to offer, and therefore, we need the instruction to keep ourselves on the path of wisdom and understanding. It takes mothers and fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, church friends, teachers, and the community to raise a child in God's ways, and help her to treasure those commandments of God, not as restrictions, but as the clear pathway to a full and joyful life. We have a job ahead of us to teach Rebecca the gifts of a mature faith, a faith that is not mired in argument, but freed by love.

That really was Paul's point. He was willing to go at it for the right kind of argument. He put his life on the line multiple times to get out the message of God's love given to him by the risen Christ. But, when the arguments were silly and over power and control, he called them out. It doesn't matter who baptizes Rebecca – really. The Presbyterian Church approves whom we allow to baptize, and trust me, we've had our own arguments about who that could be in certain time periods. What matters is that we know in whom Rebecca is being baptized – that she is receiving this sacramental blessing today because we are affirming the story of Christ present in her. We say some really odd words when we baptize. We baptize her into Christ's death so that she can also be baptized into a new life. We welcome her back into our fold post-baptism as a full sister in Christ, this little baby now one of us on the path toward following our Lord and Savior. This wisdom – it has a foolish ring to it – the foolish ring that Paul is willing to bet his life on. The path to life, the real and full life, is not just found in following the rules, though we need those as our foundation. The path is found in following Christ, and that means that we share in his struggle that the way to new comes at the cost of carrying your own cross. It's a big burden to place on the shoulders of such a tiny baby. And yet, with the burden, come so many blessings, too many to count.

Today, I pray for Rebecca to be blessed with all the wisdom this church can teach to her because I know the wellspring of wisdom here runs deep. And I pray for her to be blessed in her life by the foolishness of the cross. That blessing, I'm sad to say, will probably be the one that feels more like pain and more like brokenness. Her cross will be uniquely her own, and she will feel its weight and heft and want to give it away like we all do, but in bearing her own pain in the world, she will be able to share and lift the pain of others, and will find peace. That's the foolish truth for all of us. We need wise teachers, but sometimes the wisest teacher of all is our own inner struggle, for that is where God can speak to us most directly.

Whenever any of you are witness to a baptism, I hope and pray you will be strengthened in the promises and vows you made or that your loved ones made on your behalf. In the celebration of this sacrament, we turn against evil, claim the story of Christ as our true story, and acknowledge that whatever we do in the world, we will try to do out of the love that God first showed us. Let us all remember our baptisms as we welcome Rebecca into our lives and into our hearts. Amen.