

Sophomoric Faith **(The Faith of a Wise Fool)** **By Ethan R. Longhenry**

The word “sophomore” tends to bring high school to mind, since the 10th grade is often described as one’s sophomore year. A “sophomore” is one who has acquired some skill; one understanding of the word’s origin suggests it derives from the Greek *sophos*, meaning “wise,” and *moros*, meaning “foolish, dull,” and therefore, a sophomore is a “wise fool.”

A sophomore as a “wise fool” is an apt description of a person during the adolescent period of life. Such people have gained some knowledge but have yet to gain the perspective which comes from greater experience and wisdom. The common complaint regarding teenagers is how they think they know everything. According to their perspective, they do: they do not yet understand how much is unknown on the periphery of their knowledge base, and are thus likely to come to foolish conclusions and engage in unwise behavior. It is only after enduring failures and being forced to come to terms with their limitations through painful experiences that they can learn just how little they truly understood in their sophomoric phase of life.

As it is in our physical lives, so it is in our lives of faith as well. When we first come to the faith, we often maintain the humility of little children, understanding our limitations and seeking to learn about Jesus and the truth of Scripture (Matt. 18:1-6; 1Peter 2:1-3, 1John 2:1-5). After some growth through learning, however, it is easy to lose some of that humility and feel more confident in one’s knowledge of the truth. This type of faith can rightly be called “sophomoric faith,” the faith of the wise fool: a person who has gained some knowledge regarding what is true without comparable gains in love, wisdom, and experience, leading back to humility.

In the first century, the church in Corinth exemplified sophomoric faith and the challenges it produces. The Corinthian Christians were divided into different groups following after different preachers, believing themselves wise when they really were still thinking in worldly ways and acted foolishly (1Cor. 1:10-4:21). They were puffed up on account of their toleration of sexual deviance, requiring a strong rebuke from Paul (1Cor. 5:1-13). They had knowledge regarding the non-existence of idols but showed no concern for the consciences of weaker Christians (1Cor. 8:1-13). They enjoyed using spiritual gifts because of the supernatural power, not to edify in love (1Cor. 12:1-14:40).

The Corinthian Christians manifested all sorts of indicators of sophomoric faith. They did not consider other perspectives or ideas and were convinced of their own spiritual superiority and excellence. They were supremely confident in their own spiritual insights and understanding. They did whatever they felt they could do without considering whether it should be done or how it could be done in order to build up in love. They were convinced that they had all the right answers and had everything figured out.

There are good reasons why the church in Corinth is historically considered a “problem church”: Paul has to exhort and rebuke the Corinthian Christians strongly because they seem blissfully unaware of their failures and sinfulness. The Corinthian Christians blinded themselves through their sophomoric faith, full of knowledge, but lacking in love, humility, wisdom, and experience. Such is why Paul tells them, “we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth” (1Cor. 8:1). Knowledge is not to be an end to itself; any knowledge we gain must be directed toward love.

We all go through a period of sophomoric faith in our lives; even as we mature, we discover aspects of our faith which remain quite sophomoric. It is a part of the growth and maturation process, but it is imperative that we grow beyond it. Through practicing the faith we learn how we do not have perfect understanding and must entrust ourselves to the God who does (Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 3:23). By focusing on how we can be of service to others we learn how knowledge makes arrogant, but love builds up (Rom. 15:1-4; 1Cor. 8:1; Phil. 2:1-11). We also

learn that having authority is only the first concern, and we must be just as concerned about the value and profitability of what we are doing and how we do it (1Cor. 8:1-13, 10:23-33). We knew that we just had to get through the sophomoric phase of our lives; the same is true with the sophomoric phase of our faith. Let us grow into mature disciples of Jesus Christ, humble and loving servants of the Master!

It's a Tough Job

One TV personality looks for the most dirty and grimy jobs he can find. Then he does those jobs on camera so we can all be grossed out. The surprising thing that usually comes out of his forays in filth is that the people who do these unpleasant chores for a living seem happy to be doing them and take pride in their work.

I wonder if that's the way it is among the people of God. In the church and in the community, there are hard and even dirty jobs that must be done. For instance, where is the glamour in coming out on a work day to spread tar and sealer on the parking lot? Where is the joy in walking into a hospital room to visit a patient who has just received bad news from the doctor? How can it be easy to take responsibility for the care of someone with an emotional or mental disorder? How much fun is it to visit and talk with someone who has decided to abandon the faith or who is currently practicing immoral behavior?

Imagine how the crowds gasped when Jesus reached out and touched the leper. He was not afraid of hard and dirty jobs. Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was "moved with compassion" for the lame, the ill, the downtrodden (Matt. 9:36). Let's follow His lead and with love tackle the tough tasks around us.

No task will be harder for you and put you more at risk than to sit down with your children, parents, spouse or best friend and talk directly and clearly about their soul. It's a tough job, but someone has to do it. The end result will be worth it. Work well done for Christ will receive a well done from Christ. May we learn to say: No matter what my daily work might be to earn my livelihood, still may I see that my job, the real position I hold, is bringing others to the Master's fold.

A Moments Wisdom on Change

The most powerful agent of growth and transformation is something much more basic than any technique: a change of heart.

Some people change when they see the light; others when they feel the heat.

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but very few think of changing themselves.

Nothing is easy to the unwilling.

We want the facts to fit the preconceptions. When they don't, it is easier to ignore the facts than to change the preconceptions.

If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.

When you blame others, you surrender your power to change.