

Proverbs 9:1-18: Will You Choose Wisdom or Folly?

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Date: 02 June 2008

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[0 : 00] Proverbs chapter 9 And drink of the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abused, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will still be wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life.

If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you scoff, you alone will bear it. The woman folly is loud. She is seductive and knows nothing.

[1 : 22] She sits at the door of her house. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by who are going straight on their way. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.

And to him who lacks sense, she says, stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Let me open with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given us your word, that you chose to communicate to us within the richness of our own human experience.

You did not give us a dry instruction manual, and you didn't leave us with an indecipherable heavenly code, but you expressed your truths through the personalities of the authors, steeped in historical context.

We thank you for the beautiful poetry and wisdom literature that reach us at our creative core, giving us unique insights into your wisdom and truth. And now, as we sing in our opening hymn, we pray, Holy Spirit, rain down.

[2 : 34] Let your power fall. Let your voice be heard. Come and change our hearts as we stand on your word. Reveal your wisdom to us, that we may learn to fear the Lord.

In Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Many of you know that I was raised in Austria, and my parents are missionaries who started a couple churches a little bit south of Vienna, so that makes me a missionary kid, otherwise known as an MK.

There are some upsides and some downsides to being an MK. One of the downsides is you're always one of the poor kids on the block, as most Europeans are affluent and missionaries are not.

On the other side, everything in Europe is accessible by car, so I can say that I have spent many summer vacations on the Mediterranean beaches all around.

So that's one of the upsides. When I was 16, my family decided to take a trip to Barcelona, and we spent the time just by the beach on the Mediterranean there.

[3 : 34] During the days, we would take day trips into the city. In the evenings, one of the evenings, my dad decided to take us, me and my brother, that is, to explore the city by night.

We got to see the beautiful cathedrals lit up at night. We saw the floodlights reflecting off the ancient city walls, and we explored and we found our way to the restaurant district, where they also had all the boards hanging out front, announcing the flamenco dancers that were going to be performing that night.

At one point, we came across a strange side street that was just filled with life, though. We heard people laughing along with the clanging of glasses and bottles, but we couldn't see much because the narrow cobblestone street was dimly lit.

We decided to explore and realize pretty quickly that the noise was pouring out from a string of bars all the way down the side street. We could see the silhouettes of the patrons inside the dark bars eating tapas and drinking wine.

We also started to notice that occasionally a woman would call out to us from a darkened doorway. This would happen every four or five houses. Now, we didn't speak their language, but we knew what they were offering.

[4 : 47] My brother and I were not really tempted at this point, not only because we were with our father, who is a pastor, but it had more to do with the fact that our father had already taught us the lessons about the adulterous woman that Kevin spoke about in last week's sermon.

He had already passed on the wisdom from the scriptures like Proverbs 5.8, Do not go near the door of her house. And if you stumble across her like we did that night, Proverbs 4.25 encourages one to keep your eyes straight before you, or in 4.14 to pass on, just keep moving.

Not only did my dad teach us these lessons, but he also led by example. Although he knew what was going on, he did not acknowledge the women, and he kept his eyes straight before him and led us out of the situation as quickly as possible.

Now, our text uses this image of a seductive woman calling out to the passerbys to personify folly. It also gives us the image of a hardworking woman to personify wisdom.

They are set up as bookends at the beginning and the end of the chapter. There is a parallelism of both women, how they call out and invite the public to their banquets. And at the center of our text, in verse 10, we find the main point of the text, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[6 : 09] Now, chapter 9 is the epilogue to the past eight chapters. Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly are personifications of what the narrator has been teaching us in the first eight chapters of Proverbs.

In the first eight chapters, the narrator described wisdom, the origin of wisdom, the path of wisdom, the benefits of wisdom, and how to gain wisdom. At the same time, he introduced us to folly and warns the reader of the many expressions of folly, the temptations of her evil deeds, and the cost of following folly.

Over the past eight chapters, the narrator has presented the case for wisdom and against folly. Our text presents us with these two options and compels us to make a choice.

Which will you follow? Will you follow wisdom or will you follow folly? Will you choose to fear the Lord or will you choose to scoff at the Lord? So let's take a look and see how the narrator kind of recaps his arguments here.

We'll take a look at Lady Wisdom first. I want you to pay attention to the action verbs in the description in verses one through three. Built, hewn, slaughtered, mixed, set, sent.

[7 : 26] This is a woman of action. She is not idle. She is creating, serving, providing. She has put together a sumptuous banquet and there is room for all who accept her invitation.

In many ways, this is the woman who fears the Lord who is described in Proverbs 31 later on. Young men, this is the kind of woman you're looking for. Now, what she, what she's busy doing, sorry, so what she is busy doing, she has built her house with seven pillars.

In her day, a house with three pillars was considered a large house. A house with seven pillars is considered extremely large house. So where lady wisdom dwells, there is perfection and there is room for all who are invited.

Not only has she prepared the meal, but she went out and slaughtered the beast, something normally considered to be Ben's work. She mixed the wine, she didn't water it down, she added honey and spices to make a rich, luxurious concoction for her guests.

And then, she set her table. She sends her young women out to call. This would imply that she is a woman of means and has young women assisting her.

[8 : 38] Again, it echoes the Proverbs 31 woman who has maidens that are under her care. They call out from the highest places in town. It's a public invitation. Why does the narrator include this detail specifically?

The poetic imagery gives us the image of a stable, productive woman of substance. She offers invitations to a magnificent banquet that promises to satisfy and not disappoint.

Wisdom is someone that you want to listen to when she speaks. You can't wait to be invited to her banquet. So who is she speaking to and what does she say?

In verse 4, Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. To him who lacks sense, she says. She calls to the simple. Throughout Proverbs, the simple are often lumped in with the youth who are inexperienced or gullible or lacking in education or lacking in sense, as it says.

There is still hope for the simple people. They can still be taught. They can still be swayed. They are not fools who have already made their bad decisions. They are not scoffers who have rejected wisdom.

[9 : 48] In fact, Proverbs tells us that if the scoffer is punished for his deeds, the simple will learn from that and will become wise.

The simple have not yet committed to the way of wisdom, but they have also not committed to the way of folly either. They are undecided. They are sitting on the fence.

They could go either way. Wisdom is calling to them to offer them wisdom, understanding, and insight. Wisdom calls out and says in verse 5, Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. She is offering something of substance, something life-sustaining, something that will cause the simple to learn, to grow, to live.

There is a sense of repentance in this verse as well. Leave your simple ways and walk in insight. It is not quite the repentance that Jesus calls us to, but it is a call to commitment to a better path.

[10 : 54] The language shifts in verses 7 through 12. The narrator is no longer quoting wisdom, but is teaching some of the lessons of wisdom using some of the typical correlating couplets that are used in wisdom literature.

And we'll see a lot more of those starting next week. Verse 7, Whoever corrects the scoffer gets himself abused, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will still be wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.

We see two different responses to instruction and to correction in this text. The scoffer lashes out, abuses the one offering correction, causes injury, hates him, hates correction.

The wise man will accept correction and loves learning. He will love wisdom. He will become wiser and increase in learning. So let me give you two biblical examples of different responses to instruction and wisdom.

[12 : 06] The Pharisees, Herod, the soldiers, all scoffed and mocked Jesus for the wisdom of his teachings. They mocked him. They put a crown of thorns on his head and hung a purple robe on his shoulders and struck him with their hands and whipped him.

And Jesus made no answer, as it says. He did not correct the scoffers. Peter, the disciple, was always eager to learn. He was the first one to jump in with both feet to learn and experience things, literally when Jesus invited him when he was walking on water.

He embraced Jesus' instruction with a passion. He was always the first to defend Jesus. Even when he betrayed Jesus the night he was arrested, Peter got back up and clung to Jesus' teaching in his sorrow.

The joy that we read when we read about Peter's transformation at Pentecost, who now boldly preached the gospel with power, authority, insight, knowledge, resulting in thousands of conversions.

Peter was righteous and embraced wisdom and through the power of the Holy Spirit increased in his learning. How do you respond to correction? Are you a scoffer or do you embrace instruction and correction?

[13 : 22] Young people here today, how do you react when your parents teach you or correct you? Do you bristle at their words or do you embrace their instruction? Let's move on to verse 10.

Here we get to the heart of it all. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. At the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

This is the theme of our text today. It's the theme of the first nine chapters and more broadly the fear of the Lord is the overall theme of the Proverbs altogether. I looked at the word fear and the original language does actually mean fear, to be afraid.

When man is faced with the awesome power and glory of God, he is struck with fear. Abraham fell on his face when God spoke to him. Moses was afraid to look at God when he heard him speak.

Joshua, David, many of the prophets all fell on their faces when they encountered God. Yes, we ought to fear the Lord. Fear is the proper response when we encounter the creator of the universe, when we encounter God himself.

[14 : 34] But we've also learned in our series that there are many nuances to this fear of God. Pastor Jackson talked about how fear can mean having respect for our Heavenly Father. It can mean living a life that brings him glory and honor as a way of expressing that fear.

In a sense, the night that we walked the streets of Barcelona, one of the primary motivators of my brother and myself, was to honor and to respect our Father who taught us the truths of the Bible, who instructed us about snares of the adulterous woman, and who led his life as an example to us.

He taught us out of love, and in response, our desire was to honor and respect our Father because of his loving instruction. Now, this is just a dim example of what it means for us to fear the Lord.

And as verse 10 tells us, as we seek to live a life that brings him glory and honor to fear the Lord, we will continue to grow in the knowledge and insight. Note how the beginning of wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the foundation to wisdom. The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of learning, starts when we submit to the highest authority, our Lord, our God.

[15 : 51] Those of you in the academic community, how would your colleagues respond if you told them that the beginning of wisdom, that all that you believe, know, and understand, all of your expertise, finds its roots in your submission to the authority and wisdom of the Lord?

My guess is that the scoffers who have rejected true wisdom will show themselves pretty quickly. So what are the benefits of following wisdom? Verse 11, For by me, your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life.

In practical terms, if we follow wisdom, we will live longer. Very straightforward. You can study the medical journals, the psychological and social research to find the data that backs this up.

A healthy diet, daily exercise, based on the knowledge of nutrition, all help maintain a healthy body that will prolong our lifespan by a couple of years or maybe even decades.

From a psychological perspective, clean living, having a high ethical standard in our business dealings, forgiving others rather than holding a grudge, living in peace with our neighbors, all lower our stress, adding years to our lifespan.

[17 : 07] Following wisdom does lead to a longer life. In verse 12, we learn that you alone reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of your actions and decisions.

Verse 12, If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you scoff, you alone will bear it. As we just mentioned, if you eat a healthy diet, you may live longer.

If you hold a grudge and hate someone your entire life, it will gnaw away and you will probably decrease your lifespan. You alone reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of your actions and your choices.

Now that you've heard the narrator's argument for wisdom, how will you respond to wisdom and correction? Will you accept it and grow in your learning or will you scoff at it?

The simple person has not yet committed to the path of wisdom and may be considering Lady Folly's offer. If you have not yet committed to the way of wisdom, let me show you the consequences for those who follow Lady Folly.

[18 : 13] So we'll take a look at Lady Folly starting in verse 13 now. The woman Folly is loud. She is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house.

She takes a seat in the highest places of town, calling to those who pass by who are going straight on their way. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. And to him who lacks sense, she says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

There's an obvious parallelism here between wisdom and folly. The descriptions follow similar patterns. The descriptions start with the women at home. They both call out from public places.

They both call to the same passerbys, the simple and those who lack sense. And they both give us a glimpse of what awaits the guests when they enter the homes.

As you look closer, the description of folly turns out to be a mere shadow of the description of wisdom, though. Wisdom is industrious, busy, working hard.

[19 : 18] Folly is loud, seductive, and sits in her doorway. They both call to the same people in the streets, whoever is simple, those who lack sense. But Lady Folly appears to have a special interest in the simple who are going straight on their way.

It's almost as if she's trying to sway them to follow her as they're on their way to following Lady Wisdom. While Lady Wisdom offers a meal of substance, she is busy working hard to prepare an inviting place where she serves her sumptuous meal and satisfying drink.

Lady Folly is lazy as she sits in her doorway. She invites the simple to a banquet, but she didn't actually prepare anything. Lady Folly offers stolen water and bread eaten in secret.

She has nothing to offer, nothing of her own to offer. She didn't bother to build a house. She didn't slaughter a beast. She didn't mix the wine or set a table.

There is nothing of substance here. Stolen water is most likely a reference back to last week's text, Proverbs 5, 15. Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

[20 : 31] This is a reference to marital fidelity. In a sense, she is promising opportunities to steal something that belongs to someone else's marriage. It's an offer to adultery.

In a broader sense, she offers water in comparison to the rich, full-bodied, aromatic wine that Lady Wisdom offers. What Lady Folly has to offer is watered down.

She promises pleasures and benefits derived from anything stolen. Crooked business deals lead to big houses and big boats, but often lead to living in fear or time in prison.

Stolen ideas in the academic world can lead to bigger grants, better teaching positions, and higher status, but it may gnaw at you for the rest of your career. Fabricated stories on a college application or resume may lead to the admission into the prestigious college or career path that you are looking for, but it may resurface 20 years later when you are running for political position.

Lady Folly also promises pleasure derived from things that one would only want to do in secret. While there are moments of privacy in everyone's life, I don't think there are many things that one can do in secret that lead to good.

[21 : 45] I suppose wrapping presents is one of those things that you could do. But if you find yourself compulsively looking for solitude to read something that you ought not be reading, to watching something suggestive on pay-per-view or view images online that you know you should not, you are succumbing to Lady Folly's seduction.

Maybe it's things you are saying in secret or things that occupy your mind that you would be embarrassed to say out loud. Are you being lured by Lady Folly's seduction as her words drip with honey?

Have you tasted the hollow feeling that comes after you engage in these secret pleasures? Lady Folly's invitation to her banquet offers watered-down pleasures and the ache of hollow emptiness.

If the emptiness of her offer is not enough to deter you, then let's take a look, let's consider the results of giving in to her. Verse 18. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

As she convinces the simple to cross her threshold into her room, the simple lose their youthful naivete and become one of the fools who have rejected wisdom.

[22 : 59] Their conscience becomes seared. They lose interest in learning. They become ones who scoff at correction. They are among the dead. They enter the shadowlands of unfulfilled desire and longing.

When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit that was so enticing, their eyes were opened. They became the first to enter death. They chose the watered-down, twisted truth of Satan in place of God's satisfying wisdom.

Now you may choose. Do you choose wisdom or do you choose folly? The narrator of Proverbs has presented you with the evidence. In the first eight chapters, he has built a case for wisdom and against folly.

If you are simple, if you have not committed to the way of wisdom, if you are sitting on the fence, if you still walk straight on your way but you flirt with folly as you pass by her house, then it's time to make a choice.

It's time to get off the fence and commit to one path or the other. Before you do, let me up the ante, though. Because we have the benefit of reading this text from this side of the cross, we can grasp the meaning and the depth and extent of the lessons more fully.

[24 : 12] So let's turn from the shadowlands of sin and death in Lady Folly's home and look back up at Lady Wisdom's table that is set with bread and wine. Lady Wisdom offers a life-sustaining meal.

Jesus, on the other hand, offers a life-giving meal. Jesus invites those who believe to eat his bread and drink his wine in remembrance of his death on the cross.

Now this is a life-giving banquet. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate expression of a son who feared the Lord. Jesus laid down his life to honor and glorify his Father.

Jesus lowered himself to become fully human to walk among his creation for the sole purpose of giving up his life on the cross in obedience to his Father. Because he was also fully divine, he was the only possible offering for the forgiveness of our sins so that he might restore our relationship with God the Father.

Through his sacrifice, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ made it possible that we may all approach God as our Father. He makes it possible for us to fear the Lord.

[25 : 23] Ladies' wisdom calls the simple to turn from their simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. Jesus calls us to repentance, to turn from our sinful ways and walk in the light.

Those who believe and accept that God so loved us that he gave his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be offered up as a ransom to pay for our sins will fear him.

We will be compelled to respond with a deep longing to bring him honor and glory and to grow in him. This is a true message of Proverbs. We are faced with the decision of following Lady Wisdom or following Lady Folly.

With the benefit of reading this text from this side of the cross, we have just upped the ante. The path of wisdom will add years to your life. The path of wisdom that is found in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life.

Those who follow Lady Folly will die. Those who reject Christ will die, but they will also be eternally separated from God, always yearning, never being satisfied.

[26 : 30] It's time to choose which will it be, wisdom or folly. Young people, those of you in the youth group who are here today, you are not too young to choose your path.

Most of you probably have given your lives to Christ, but are you flirting with things that you should not be? Do you bristle when your parents correct you and instruct you, or do you love learning?

Are your friends seducing you to follow Lady Folly's invitation? University students and young adults, are you hiding in grad school to postpone growing up and making decisions?

I'm not saying that everybody in grad school is doing that. But if you are, or if you are just delaying the decisions in general to give yourself to follow your wisdom, you'll be flirting with Lady Folly's temptations and not stepping across.

You might still be flirting with her temptations and not stepping across the threshold, but maybe you're just peeking in her window, not yet ready to commit to a path of wisdom.

[27 : 34] For some of you, it's time to grow up. For most of you, it's time to commit to wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord. Or maybe you're like me.

We're older and settle into our grown-up life with established patterns based on years of hopefully learning and wisdom. You're walking straight on the path, but there are still things that you cling to, the guilty pleasures that you're not quite ready to give up.

We all have decisions to make. Will you choose the seduction of Lady Folly and her watered-down pleasure that in the end leads to death?

Will you choose to follow Lady Wisdom? Are you ready to surrender every aspect of your life to the authority of our Lord and Jesus Christ? Are you ready to follow Jesus' example and lay down your life like he did so that the Holy Spirit may dwell within you and teach you and lead you in the way of wisdom?

It's time for us to choose. Let's pray. Our Lord, search our hearts and reveal to us any area in our lives that have not yet surrendered to you.

[28 : 46] May we turn from our sinful ways and turn to the path that honors and glorifies you. May you bless us and have mercy on us. And may you, through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us enable us to follow the path of wisdom that begins and continues in the fear of the Lord.

In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.