

Proverbs | The Spirit of Wisdom for Daily Life

Invitation to Wisdom (II) – Torn Between Two Lovers

Proverbs 8.32 - 9.18

7.8.18

"Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. ³³ "Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect it. ³⁴ "Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. ³⁵ "For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the LORD. ³⁶ "But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death."

^{9.1} Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; ² She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; ³ She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: ⁴ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, ⁵ "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. ⁶ "Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."

⁷ He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. ⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you. ⁹ Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning. ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you. ¹² If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

¹³ The woman of folly is boisterous, She is naive and knows nothing. ¹⁴ She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city, ¹⁵ Calling to those who pass by, Who are making their paths straight: ¹⁶ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here," And to him who lacks understanding she says, ¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant." ¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Last week we begin a new series on the *Book of Proverbs*; we hope to continue this series for the rest of the summer. And we introduced *this section* of the book (CHs 1-9) where the writer is setting the table for a banquet.

At the end of this intro (CH 10), he offers his son 375 sayings meant to enhance life, *protect life*, navigate life and this meal is so sustaining and valuable that the father has know that it's going to be savored... He has to know that his son has a taste for wisdom. So for nine chapters, very creatively, persuading and illustrating and enticing, convincing, *the wise father is provoking his son to want wisdom*.

Today we explore a device used by Solomon to engage his son's imagination and awaken him to the value of wisdom. This rhetorical device is called personification - an abstract quality or idea

or entity is represented in human form. For instance, on or around Independence Day you may have seen the U.S. federal government personified as a character called Uncle Sam.

The writer personifies wisdom and folly two women. There are five major passages for Woman Wisdom and five for Woman Folly. And they come together in this final comparison of the two in CH 9. It's the culmination/finale of this long invitation to wisdom.

I want to sort of draw on all the ten passages that personify Wisdom and Folly and draw our attention *to one point IN the comparison* that's prominent (comes up repeatedly) *AND that I think is particularly relevant to our modern situation*. Then I want to see how this comparison of two women is a major device used in the entire Bible...and what it means for daily life.

If you take all the passages that personify wisdom and folly... *if you compare the two women using all ten passages*, one of the main points of contrast between wisdom and folly (maybe THE point of contrast) is that WISDOM WAITS and FOOLISHNESS rushes in, restless and hurried and promising shortcuts and get-rich-quick schemes and ways to cut corners and still get what you want.

Chapter nine is symmetrical in three parts – six verses for Woman Wisdom, then six verses (7-12) where the theme of the book is reiterated and six verses for Woman Folly. Both women are inviting the naïve to eat... two women, two banquets and the main difference is that one waits and the other...doesn't ...'cause ...she doesn't have to...waiting is a drag.

Chapter eight introduces THIS final comparison with the words (printed at the top, v.34) of Woman Wisdom, "Happy is the man who listens to me, WATCHING daily at my gates, WAITING at my door."

The Woman Wisdom is a careful builder – (v. 1) – she takes time, "she *built* her house".

She's a skilled worker – real artistry in her labors – "she has *hewn out seven pillars*." Again, the picture is of care, quality, skill, TIME. Her house is spacious and strong – "seven pillars" (completeness).

She prepares a meal – it's not just thrown together but "prepared" with fine wine and place-settings for her valued guests. *She takes time* to send her maidens with invitations and she calls from "the tops of the heights of the city" – announces from a tower.

Her house is big enough to welcome all comers so she invites everyone who owns up to the name: "Whoever is naïve and whoever lacks understanding COME and eat my food and drink my wine..."

All you need is NEED. There are no seats for people who "know it all" – only for people who can admit they NEED understanding – that they don't "get it." And the price of admission? "Forsake

your folly and live and proceed in the Way of understanding.” Just be willing to leave what’s destroying you and take what will make you ALIVE and SKILLFUL for life!

Then after these six verses – there’s a six-verse interlude *warning against* the deadly “know-it-all” posture... “we can’t help you if you need no help.” This is one way to know how you’ve been choosing.

Then the theme is repeated – v. 10 the hinge/cruc – “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

Then another six verses (see the symmetry) where we hear one last time from “the Other Woman” – not Lady Wisdom but (v.13) Woman Folly speaks. She’s boisterous (like a barking dog or a storm) – she’s loud and impatient. She is herself simple/naïve so she has nothing to offer the simple/naïve.

That word means “open” – as in open minded but in the worst sense that the naïve are *uncommitted*. She knows nothing and yet she has all the answers.

She sits or lurks at her door – open door/open mind, (all her options are open). She competes with Lady Wisdom and tries to divert those who are making progress (“on straight paths” 15). She speaks like Wisdom: “whoever is naïve or lacks understanding...” but she has nothing to offer... Well, not NOTHING: actually she has bread and water – Blah! Bland!

But she has a way of spicing it up – she confides in her guests, “Pssst! This is *stolen* water and *stolen* bread...” and THAT makes it exotic and exciting!

This is perhaps her main *strategy* – short-cuts, immediate gratification and get-rich-quick schemes.

Why work for it when you can have it for free? And when you get what you want by trickery or artifice or by “beating the system” – when others have to work but YOU get it for free...you feel... exceptional.

Now, if you read all the five passages on Woman Folly you’ll see that she is also the immoral woman... she’s presented, *in some texts*, as a prostitute or adulteress (all of CHs 5 AND 7 present her this way)... BUT it’s really this SHORT-CUT thing that most distinguishes her...defining attribute.

And THIS brings me to our own society – what happens when you apply short-cuts and haste and a get-rich-quick mentality to sex and intimacy and erotic love and relationships and friendships?

Madame Folly can help you get stuff without paying for it, without waiting for it, without working for it...without all the normal messy, baggage and tedium of conversation, spending time, and giving up your options... She promises a shortcut...instant intimacy!

But is that really possible when it comes to intimacy, erotic love and friendships...to have these immediately?

And I think if we listen... we can hear the voice of Folly calling out from the high places (the airwaves and the leading voices) in our own day... She's promising wealth without work, intimacy without binding relationships and friends I've never even seen.

I think we can all see how our culture is very vulnerable to the voice of Folly maybe because we love efficiency/time-saving/labor-saving and that can easily devolve into cutting corners. "Stolen water is sweet and stolen bread is pleasant (See? Folly has her proverbs too...).

And I'm really not here to whine about our society or be alarmist about social-media (I have a Facebook account...though I will admit after about five minutes on FB I feel depressed and sort of disgusted).

But for whatever reasons WE in this fast paced generation are very, very susceptible to promises of relationships and friendship and sex without the difficult work of binding relationships.

The promises of the sexual revolution combined with the ease and SPEED of technology... and we are facing a national crisis... And it's being discussed in some of the strangest places. *Vanity Fair* did an article in 2015 called, "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse'" – about how on Wall Street, among young professionals working in finance, its widely known that romance is dead.

In 2016 Pamela Anderson (of *Baywatch* fame) and an Orthodox rabbi joined forces in an editorial in the Wall Street Journal to call internet porn a national crisis, To summarize: "Look people, sex without commitment is killing our society and it's a matter of national self-interest to address it."

The simple/naïve go into the house of Folly and then when it's too late they realize, "That her guests are in the depth of Sheol (realm of the dead)." And that's the really creepy thing about Folly...whether for a person or a whole culture... it's like a horror movie... once you've given yourself to her...when it's too late, you realize that you're surrounded by death.

Now, the "two-woman motif" is NOT unique to Proverbs and George reminded me a few weeks ago about what our friend Warren Gage wrote about how prominent this theme is in the whole Bible.

The writer of the Proverbs, Solomon himself, after he became king and prayed for wisdom, HE had to choose between two women who were arguing over a baby... and Solomon proposed cutting the baby in two...he did that to determine which woman loved the child and was therefore the real mother.

Just to isolate ONE example of many in the whole Bible – Abraham’s choice between Sarah and Hagar. God promised to give Abraham and Sarah a child even when they were way past child-bearing-age.

And after they grew tired of waiting...and wanted NOT to trust God and His promise (not to take God seriously – not to live in the fear of YHWH *and not to depend on God’s loyalty to His own covenant* – hesed) then Abraham opted for a shortcut, immediate gratification... He slept with Hagar and made a baby NOT relying on God’s promise but... “do-it-yourself”.

And the NT interprets this allegorically in *Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*. (Gal 4.24) “*This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants...*”

A choice between two women – one stands for God’s promise and the other stands for the flesh – i.e. our own human ingenuity and impatient effort...

And this is always the choice before us – to go the way of trust (which is always uncomfortable and requires us to be patient with God – to “wait on the LORD”) OR to go the way of instant gratification (“DIY”) where WE know best, where WE are in control and where WE make it happen on our schedule.

The way of trust and the way of effort. The way of Wisdom and the way of folly. The way of MY weakness when I have to admit that I don’t have the right stuff *and I am naïve* (uncommitted, uncertain) *and where I have to humble myself and forsake my folly and the way of the boisterous woman calling me from the straight path* to wallow around with stolen water (isn’t this sweet?!) and stolen bread (isn’t this pleasant – AM I NOT EXCEPTIONAL!)

Jesus Christ comes to us...and He is not only a literary device, a personification of Wisdom – *HE actually IS the Mind of God made flesh* and the perfect manifestation of Wisdom.

To trust Him is uncomfortable... we would rather do it ourselves than to depend on His life, death and resurrection as my only hope and standing before God... I would rather make myself exceptional than to have God simply declare that I am His and that’s what sets me apart – I’d rather have something you can see...some flash/glitz like the boisterous woman Folly.

But doing things my way...with all the short-cuts and schemes IS the way of Folly and it leads to death... and it’s been the ruin it’s been the ruin of many a poor boy.

What keeps us from the clutches of Woman Folly is the hope, the trust...that as Wisdom was there at the beginning when God created all things...so Jesus Christ, the Truest Expression of wisdom will be there at the end...for a New Creation... He who lived, died and rose for me will also re-create me... The way of the world (and all its schemes and shortcuts) can't do that for me... Only Jesus Christ can turn the naïve into wise-men and women, pillars in the House that He is building made of living stones...

You know, if you are NOT a believer in Jesus Christ, you MIGHT think I'm saying, "Slow down and do careful work...don't cut corners, earn it, wait to have sex until your married, don't look for instant gratification..." AND that WILL indeed be in your own self-Interest-- Wisdom speaks again, *"For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it."*

But there is a higher form of self-interest here (*Piper: Christian Hedonism*). This passage is whisper of a banquet of well-prepared food and the finest wine in a House that's solid and secure... and full of JOY.

Wait on Jesus Christ – put all your hope in Him... We slow down NOW, we take our time; we eat together and waste time together (Isaiah 28.16 KJV "he that believeth shall not make haste.") ...because we know that He who loved us and gave Himself for us has secured a place for us at His Table... I can rest in that.... It's not all up to me. And Wisdom Himself will remake all things...and I will be there!

So...daily (v. 34) we watch and wait...we walk in the way of wisdom...with its delayed gratification...living by faith in the Promise of life, life, eternal life.