

Proverbs 1-9 • The Three Calls of Wisdom

Introduction

In the course of this study we are going to specifically consider Wisdom and Folly, the two “women” who are out to seduce and win the hearts of every person. Scattered across the opening chapters are three calls from Wisdom and three from Folly. Whereas Wisdom calls one to God and life, Folly calls people to sin and judgment. We want to study these contrasts and comparisons of the two “women” and the three callings, but we also want to keep in mind that there is probably a deeper meaning where these two are concerned. In the New Testament we are provided with this definition of Wisdom:

*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
1 Corinthians 1:30*

In other words, the biblical definition of “Wisdom” and “Christ” is one and the same.

^{1:20}Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;
²¹At the head of the noisy streets she cries
out;
At the entrance of the gates in the city she
utters her sayings:
²²“How long, O naive ones, will you love
being simple-minded?
And scoffers delight themselves in
scoffing
And fools hate knowledge?
²³Turn to my reproof,
Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid
attention;
²⁵And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;
²⁶I will also laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
²⁷When your dread comes like a storm
And your calamity comes like a
whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon
you.
²⁸“Then they will call on me, but I will
not answer;
They will seek me diligently but they will
not find me,
²⁹Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.
³⁰They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof.
³¹So they shall eat of the fruit of their own
way
And be satiated with their own devices.
³²For the waywardness of the naive will
kill them,
And the complacency of fools will

[Read 1:20-33]

Q: How do things begin? Is this speaking of some kind of secretive or difficult to understand process?

A: It begins with an open call in the streets where everyone can see and hear.

Point: God’s calling is not a secret matter but everyone through the Spirit is invited to openly come to Christ.

Q: According to v.22, what are the three classes of people to whom Wisdom extends an invitation?

A: The “simple-minded”, “scoffers”, and “fools”.

Note: Discuss how these three groups differ from each other. What are the characteristics of each?

Q: What is Wisdom’s initial promise to anyone who responds according to v.23?

A: “I will pour out my spirit on you” and “I will make my words known to you”. It’s the promise of the implanting of the Word through the Holy Spirit.

Q: What is the result of NOT responding to Wisdom’s reproof?

A: “Calamity”, “dread”, “distress”, and “anguish” (v.27).

Q: How will Wisdom respond to those who find themselves in these situations?

A: “I will not answer” and “they will not find me”. (v.28)

Q: Is God simply being cruel, choosing to reject people when they need Him most?

A: It’s important to follow the sequence of events provided in these verses. First they dismissed God’s call, then they actually made light of it. In the end it’s a situation wherein such people reap what they sow: “So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way”. (v.31)

destroy them.
³³But he who listens to me shall live
securely
And will be at ease from the dread of
evil.”

^{2:8}Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly
ones

^{3:5}Trust in the LORD with all your heart
And do not lean on your own
understanding.

⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.

^{4:18}But the path of the righteous is like the
light of dawn,
That shines brighter and brighter until the
full day.

^{5:1}My son, give attention to my wisdom,
Incline your ear to my understanding;

²That you may observe discretion
And your lips may reserve knowledge.

³For the lips of an adulteress drip honey
And smoother than oil is her speech;

⁴But in the end she is bitter as
wormwood,

Sharp as a two-edged sword.

⁵Her feet go down to death,
Her steps take hold of Sheol.

⁶She does not ponder the path of life;
Her ways are unstable, she does not know
it.

⁷Now then, my sons, listen to me
And do not depart from the words of my
mouth.

⁸Keep your way far from her
And do not go near the door of her house,

⁹Or you will give your vigor to others
And your years to the cruel one;

¹⁰And strangers will be filled with your
strength

And your hard-earned goods will go to
the house of an alien;

¹¹And you groan at your final end,
When your flesh and your body are

Q: Why do such people not merely refuse God's offer but actually make light of it in the course of rejecting it?

A: According to v.32 they develop a false assurance that is based on other things.

Application: This isn't describing something like the happenstance missing of an opportunity, but the end result of willfully and consistently rejecting God's Word and ways.

[Read 2:8, 3:5-6, and 4:18]

Observation: The next three chapters following Wisdom's initial call present a detailed picture of the path to Wisdom. The words "path" and "way" are used more than a dozen times in these chapters.

Q: Based on 2:18, what is the theme of chapter 2?

A: Wisdom **protects** our path.

Q: Based on 3:5-6, what is the theme of chapter 3?

A: Wisdom **directs** our path.

Q: Based on 4:18, what is the theme of chapter 4?

A: Wisdom **perfects** our path.

Application: Wisdom is supremely concerned with our keeping to God's path in order that we might be delivered to heaven in eternity, whereas those adhering to an alternate path find that it leads to nowhere beyond what is received in the course of this life.

[Read 5:1-23]

Q: Whereas Wisdom in the chapters leading up to this offers people salvation, what is it that Folly offers them?

A: Condemnation.

Point: Wherever God gives His gracious invitation, Satan is there with an alluring offer of his own. Do you see how this might parallel the Parable of the Sower?

Q: What does Satan try to do with the wicked woman from an earthly perspective?

A: Satan tries to make Folly appear attractive.

Q: But in spite of her external appearance, where does she ultimately lead that is diametrically opposite of Wisdom?

A: "Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol". (v.5)

Q: What is God's personal warning to us in v.7-8?

A: That we should keep far away from her and not even come near her door.

Q: What are the consequences of not heeding God's warning?

A: We will lose our best opportunities (v.9), our possessions (v.10), our health (v.11) and in the end, our very life (v.22-23)

Application: The "cords of sin" bind slowly but surely until one day the sinner discovers – too late – that it is no longer possible to escape.

consumed;
¹²And you say, “How I have hated instruction!
And my heart spurned reproof!
¹³I have not listened to the voice of my teachers,
Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!
¹⁴I was almost in utter ruin
In the midst of the assembly and congregation.”

¹⁵Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.

¹⁶Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?

¹⁷Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.

¹⁸Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.

¹⁹As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love.

²⁰For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress
And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?

²¹For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD,
And He watches all his paths.

²²His own iniquities will capture the wicked,
And he will be held with the cords of his sin.

²³He will die for lack of instruction,
And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.

^{8:1} Does not wisdom call,
And understanding lift up her voice?

²On top of the heights beside the way,
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

³Beside the gates, at the opening to the city,

At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:

⁴“To you, O men, I call,

And my voice is to the sons of men.

⁵O naive ones, understand prudence;
And, O fools, understand wisdom.

⁶Listen, for I will speak noble things;
And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.

⁷For my mouth will utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

⁸All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.

[Read Chapter 8]

Q: Who was called during Wisdom’s first call in chapter 1?

A: The “simple-minded”, “scoffers”, and “fools”.

Q: Who is called now at Wisdom’s second call?

A: According to v.5 the call is to simple and fools, but there is no mention of “scoffers”.

Point: *When hearts become so hardened that they no longer listen, God passes them by, as in the case of the scoffers who laughed and mocked (Prov. 1:25-26), making an outward show of their rejection of God’s Word and ways.*

Q: According to v.10-11, how would you characterize the nature of this invitation by Wisdom?

A: It’s a calling to true wealth, something far more valuable than silver, gold, and precious jewels.

Q: According to v.15-16, what is it like to know God’s Wisdom?

A: It is to reign as a king, an allusion to being in spiritual control of everything around you.

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⁹“They are all straightforward to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.
¹⁰Take my instruction and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choicest gold.
¹¹For wisdom is better than jewels;
And all desirable things cannot compare with her

¹²“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And I find knowledge and discretion.
¹³The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverted mouth, I hate.
¹⁴Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, power is mine.
¹⁵By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
¹⁶By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge rightly.
¹⁷I love those who love me;
And those who diligently seek me will find me.
¹⁸Riches and honor are with me,
Enduring wealth and righteousness.
¹⁹My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
And my yield better than choicest silver.
²⁰I walk in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice,
²¹To endow those who love me with wealth,
That I may fill their treasuries.

²²“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
²³From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;
²⁶While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
Nor the first dust of the world.
²⁷When He established the heavens, I was there,
When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became fixed,
²⁹When He set for the sea its boundary
So that the water would not transgress His

Q: What kind of riches is specifically mentioned in v.18-19 as being a result of Wisdom?

A: Righteousness. It's further confirmation of how spiritual riches are much more important than physical riches.

Application: *The very definition of someone who is “simple” or a “fool” is someone who does not know the true value of things nor what is truly important. The difference between the wise and the foolish is often self-evident by the value they place on material things versus spiritual.*

Q: What is the greater teaching in v.22-31?

A: This is an Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God.

Q: How is this section summarized in the New Testament?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John 1:1-3

Application: *To have Wisdom is to have Christ, which is to have the One who brought all of creation into being. In other words, it's a picture of how absurd it is to pursue earthly wealth when everything in the universe belongs to Christ to begin with.*

command,
 When He marked out the foundations of
 the earth;
³⁰Then I was beside Him, as a master
 workman;
 And I was daily His delight,
 Rejoicing always before Him,
³¹Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
 And having my delight in the sons of men

³²“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,
 For blessed are they who keep my ways.
³³Heed instruction and be wise,
 And do not neglect it.
³⁴Blessed is the man who listens to me,
 Watching daily at my gates,
 Waiting at my doorposts.
³⁵For he who finds me finds life
 And obtains favor from the Lord.
³⁶But 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;
²She has prepared her food, she has
 mixed her wine;
 She has also set her table;
³She 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.
⁶Forsake your folly and live,
 And proceed in the way of understanding.

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

¹³The woman of folly is boisterous,

[Read Chapter 9]

Q: How does this third calling of Wisdom differ from the first two?

A: The first one was extended to the simple, foolish and scoffers, the second to just the simple and foolish, and this final one to only the simple.

Point: *The scoffer was the first to fall by the wayside because of his outward rejection and open derision of God's Word and ways; the fool made the choice to follow Folly, so the only one now left is the simple.*

Q: What is the inevitable end awaiting each of these three types of people?

1. The scoffer rejects Wisdom and meets destruction. (Prov. 1:24-27); he listens to Folly and receives destruction. (Prov. 6:32)
2. The fool rejects Wisdom and is led by Folly to death (Prov. 8:36); he listens to Folly and receives death. (Prov. 5:22-23)
3. The simple rejects Wisdom and winds up in hell (Prov. 9:18); he listens to Folly and ends in in hell. (Prov. 7:27)

Q: What is the obvious lesson where the choice of Wisdom or Folly is concerned?

A: There is no middle ground. To reject Wisdom is to accept Folly.

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

Matthew 12:30

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Matthew 6:24

Point: *It's a choice to either follow Wisdom or Folly, either Christ or sin.*

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She is naive and knows nothing.

¹⁴She sits at the doorway of her house,
On a seat by the high places of the city,

¹⁵Calling 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.”

¹⁸But he does not know that the dead are
there,

That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Q: What is Wisdom doing in v.1-6?

A: Preparing a wonderful banquet.

Point: This alludes to the many “banquet” parables of Christ (Luke 14:15-24) which portray salvation as a feast, not a funeral.

Q: How does this contrast to Folly?

A: Chapter 7 is actually about Folly inviting people to her banquet, but to accept her invitation is to go like an ox to the slaughter. (Prov. 7:22) It's the difference between pleasures for a season and righteousness for eternity.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

James 1:13-15

Overall Application:

We can listen to Wisdom and enjoy salvation, true wealth, and life or we can listen to Folly (aka temptation and sin) and experience condemnation, poverty, and death. There are several practical lessons which can be gleaned from this study:

1. **We cannot avoid decisions.** *Either we choose the path of Wisdom or the path of Folly – the decision cannot be postponed or avoided. To choose one is to reject the other. Which decision have you made?*
2. **Sin is always alluring.** *Folly does everything possible to make sin attractive. Never revealing her true nature, she hides the fact that the way to her house is actually the way to hell. Those who walk with Wisdom – those obedient to God's Word and ways – will not easily be tricked by Folly. (Prov. 2:10-22)*
3. **It takes time for judgment to fall.** *When the simple, the fool, and the coffer each rejected Wisdom they thought they had it made because nothing immediately befell them. But bear in mind Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap”.*
4. **Satan appeals to the flesh.** *Proverbs makes it abundantly clear that the wicked woman is appealing to one's appetites, but to allow her to provide temporary pleasure is to allow permanent, tragic results. This is why it matters when we make choices about things that appeal to the flesh not only in terms of sexual relationships, but even the kinds of television, books, and movies we allow into our life.*
5. **God continues to call.** *God continues every attempt as long as people will hear, but when they refuse to obey and become deaf to God's Word, it is time to beware. Hebrews 3:7-8, “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...’”*