

Woman Wisdom vs. Woman Folly

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 May 2020

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Proverbs chapter 9 verses 1 to 18 To him who lacks sense, she says, 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. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse. 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 be wiser still.

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.

[1 : 26] The woman's folly is loud. She is seductive and knows nothing. 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 our guests are in the depths of Sheol.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. As I mentioned earlier, chapters 1 to 9 is really a long prologue to the rest of Proverbs.

And up to this point, the chapters are made up of longer narratives, poetic narratives. But starting in chapter 10, the short and witty sayings that we've come to associate with the word proverb predominate.

So our passage for today then functions as kind of the conclusion of the prologue and a transition toward the rest of the book. Before we feast on the rich fare of wisdom's banquet in the rest of the Proverbs, we must first heed her call and humbly accept her invitation.

[2 : 41] That's what this passage is. And that's the main point of this passage, that only those who humble themselves and heed the call of wisdom will feast at her life-giving banquet.

We see woman wisdom's call in verses 1 to 6. And then woman's folly's call, which is kind of a mirror image, contrasting image in verses 13 to 18. And then we see in the middle, as a point of emphasis, verses 7 to 12, which talks about the responses of the wise and the scoffer.

And because it's intentionally structured in kind of this fashion to have mirroring images of woman wisdom and woman folly, and then in the middle, this how we ought to respond, we're going to look at woman wisdom's call and woman folly's call together, and then look at the response at the end.

Let's look at verse 1. It tells us, Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars. The word house also means family or household. The building metaphor is primary here, as we can see in the mention of pillars.

But woman wisdom's house building also foreshadows the building of households or families by her daughters. In chapter 14, verse 1, it says, The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down.

[4 : 04] Families thrive and homes flourish when there are wise women upholding them. That's why Psalm 144, verse 12, there also Psalm is praised, May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace.

Families are the foundation of society, and women are the pillars of those families. House building is not for the faint of heart. But while woman wisdom has built her house and hewn her pillars, we see in verse 14 that woman folly merely sits at the door of her house.

This contrasts woman wisdom's industry with woman folly's laziness, her lethargy. Read verses 13 to 14 with me. The woman folly is loud.

She's seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town. So woman folly is loud. That's the same word that was used to describe the seductress in chapter 7, verse 11.

She's loud and wayward is said there. Her feet do not stay at home. Now in the street, now in the market, in every corner she lies wait. The word loud means turbulent or restless.

[5 : 24] In contrast to woman wisdom who is busily working at her house, woman folly is an idle busybody, meddling in the affairs of others outside her home. She sits at the door of her house.

She takes a seat on the highest places of the town. Woman wisdom is an industrious homebody. Woman folly is an idle busybody. She's always sitting, sitting about here and there.

Woman wisdom, verse 2 continues, has slaughtered her beasts. She has mixed her wine. She has also set her table. So woman wisdom has finished building her house and has invited guests for a sumptuous feast, which represents the gourmet dishes of wisdom laid out in the rest of Proverbs. But this is contrasted with the description of wisdom, of woman folly in verse 13. It says, The woman folly is seductive and knows nothing. The word seductive, if you look at the footnote on the English Standard Version Bibles, if you have that, it says it can also be translated as full of simpleness.

A woman wisdom's table is full of the richest fears of wisdom, but woman folly's head is empty. It's filled only with simplicity and ignorance.

[6 : 38] She has prepared no meat. She has mixed no wine. She has set no table. She has made no diligent preparation for her banquet. And the way they issued their respective invitations also differ.

In verses 3 to 4, woman wisdom has sent out her young woman to call from the highest places in the town. Messengers have been formally sent out to invite the guests while woman wisdom completes her preparations at home.

This shows intention and care. The verb call is singular, which shows that the young women do not speak for themselves, but rather are their mouthpieces for the woman wisdom.

They speak for her. And these daughters of woman wisdom represent the messengers, the sages, such as the father and mother of this Proverbs, of the book of Proverbs, who relay Solomon's God-given wisdom to the future generations.

In contrast to this, look at verses 14 to 15. Tell us that woman folly takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way.

[7 : 52] She has no messengers. All she does is try to distract and derail passersby. Her evil intentions are exposed in the fact that she takes unwitting passersby, those who may otherwise be proceeding straight on their way, to veer aside, to go astray.

And notice also that both call from the highest places, the most visible location in town, in order to reach as many people as possible.

In the ancient Near East, which is the context in which this book is written, only one person has the right to dwell on the highest point of the city. It's either the God of that city, in the temple, or the king of that city, in the palace.

In the same way, in Jerusalem, the temple was at the peak of Mount Zion. And this confirms what we know from chapter 8 already, that woman wisdom stands for God, represents God.

She is the word of God, by which the world was created. And as God's people say of the Lord in Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 12, a glorious throne, literally a glorious seat, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

[9 : 12] Only God deserves to sit on His glorious throne, on the highest place, and that's where His people are to worship Him. And so woman wisdom issues her invitations from the highest places in the town.

The problem, however, is that woman folly also calls out from the highest places of the town. In fact, it says that she takes a seat.

That's the same word that's often translated throne, or the seat of honor. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town. Common people back in the day did not sit on chairs.

They would usually sit on floors. Or if they had extraordinary accommodations, they would sit on stools and benches. Only those in authority had chairs.

Only the teachers sat on chairs. This is the origin of the practice of giving, gifting a literal chair to a teacher who has recently been promoted to professorship.

[10:15] And Proverbs chapter 20, verse 8, mentions that a king who sits on the throne of judgment, the word throne, again, is the same word as seat. 1 Samuel 1, verse 9, says, Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord.

The seat by the temple from which the priests rendered their verdicts for God's people. And similarly, Matthew 23, verse 2, says that the scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. It's a place of authority, prominence, teaching. So the fact that woman folly takes a seat on the highest places of the town almost certainly represents a place of prominence and of idolatrous worship.

This brazen woman, despite the fact that she is full of simpleness and knows nothing, as verse 13 told us, presumes to sit on a seat on the highest places.

She presumes to judge. She presumes to teach. She is an imposter. Ecclesiastes chapter 10, verses 5 to 6, laments the situation.

[11:26] It says, there is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in many high places.

Ecclesiastes chapter 10, verses 5 to 6, says, folly is set in many high places. So don't believe something simply because someone in position of authority has said it.

Remember that woman folly takes a seat on the highest places of the town. From the state houses and white houses built atop many hills throughout the world.

From the ivory towers of academia, from the verified social media accounts of celebrities on Beverly Hills, from the high platforms and loud voices of Instagram and YouTube stars, from many of the highest places in the world, folly comes spewing forth.

Their views might have currency in the culture. Their views might sound plausible, but if they have no tinge of the fear of God, no sense of the wisdom of God, no tint of the righteousness of God, then it's all folly.

[12:46] That's why we must test everything by the wisdom of God revealed in God's word. 16th century theologian John Calvin calls scripture the straight edge to which we must be shaped.

Slice everything by the straight edge of God's word and discard the rest. Discard all excess. Let's look more closely at the respective invitations of woman wisdom and woman folly.

what they offer their provisions also are worlds apart. Verse 5, woman wisdom says, come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Now contrast that with the meager proportions of the woman folly in verse 17. Stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

Wisdom offers bread, but folly offers bread eaten in secret, forbidden bread. There's an Arabic proverb that says everything forbidden is sweet.

[13:50] That is precisely woman wisdom's tactic. Woman folly's tactic, sorry. Just as the crafty serpent in Genesis 3 enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit by impugning the goodness of God, she said, you will not surely die when you eat of that forbidden fruit, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

That's how the serpent tempted Adam and Eve. That's Satan's bread and butter. That boundary that God has placed around you, that's not there to protect you, that's there to restrict you, deprive you of good.

You know why that thing is forbidden? Not because it's bad for you, but because it's too good.

God's withholding it from you. He doesn't have your best interest in mind.

that's Satan's tactic. That's woman folly's tactic. She says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

And actually, that much is true, isn't it? Sin is often pleasurable. the problem, however, is that it's only half true.

[15:08] And a half truth masquerading as a whole truth is a whole lie, as is often said. Notice the contrast between what woman wisdom promises up front in verse 6 and what woman folly fails to disclose in verse 18.

Woman wisdom makes her offer up front in verse 6, leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. She promises life. That's the end, the goal of wisdom that that's what you're in for when you accept her invitation to join her banquet.

You'll be given life abundant, eternal life. Now contrast that with verse 18. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Woman folly, stolen water and secret bread lead to death. Her house is a foyer that leads to the chamber of death. Her guests are in the depths of Sheol, the realm of the dead.

But that's the thing, woman folly does not disclose that fact. It's not, there's no disclaimer. It's not in the fine print.

[16:17] It's the author of Proverbs that discloses this hidden fact to us. Woman folly's invitation is a deceptive half-truth and he who falls for her does not know this.

This whole section on woman folly begins and ends with the phrase does not know. Verse 13 says the woman folly knows nothing, literally does not know anything. And verse 18 says that her dull subjects does not know.

This is the deficiency that Proverbs is trying to correct. Sin is pleasurable for a time, yes, but like a drug that is enjoyable at first but enslaves and kills at last.

Sin has a bitter end. Consider this parallel from Proverbs chapter 5 verses 3 to 5. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil.

But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps follow the path to shield. The beginning of sin is sweet, but its end is bitter.

[17:24] The beginning of sin is smooth, but its end is sharp and cutting. It makes you feel alive for a moment, but it makes you dead forever. And that is what is ultimately at stake.

Wisdom is not merely something that is expedient for us to have to navigate life. Folly is not merely an inconvenience. It's a matter of life and death.

Woman wisdom said at the end of chapter 8, whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself. All who hate me love death.

If you spurn wisdom, if you despise wisdom, you're not merely embracing a hard life, making life hard for yourself. You are loving death. And the language of wisdom and folly are commonly used in our culture, newspapers and news anchors often describe a crime as senseless.

They use the word to refer to the fact that this crime had no rhyme or reason. It lacked sense. But in reality, all sins, even the sins that are celebrated in our culture, are senseless because they lead to death.

[18:42] A politician caught in a consensual extramarital relationship will never admit to sin, but they will admit that they were short sighted or inappropriate, that it was a lapse in judgment.

But we must not let such euphemisms hide the ugliness and the morbid consequences of sin.

Cornelius Plantinga puts it this way in his book, not the way it's supposed to be.

A sinner will often not concede that he has been a knave, but he feels obliged to concede in effect that he has been a fool. And in so doing, ironically, he enters the mainstream of biblical thought and paves the path to sin.

The Bible speaks of foolishness, folly of rejecting wisdom. sin. That's in the mainstream of how the Bible speaks of sin.

And the bad news is that we have all sinned. We've all been fools. Note well that woman wisdom and woman folly are competing for the exact same crowd.

[20:00] Compare what they say in verse 4 and verse 16. It's the only part of the contrasting sections that is exactly identical. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.

The address him who lacks sense. The simple are those who have not yet turned toward the path of wisdom, but those who have not yet settled into the path of folly either.

And there is good news embedded in this passage. It's fitting that woman folly would target those who are simple and lack sense, isn't it? That sounds like her kind of crowd, the kind of people who would be duped by her half truth.

But what is remarkable is that woman wisdom also reaches out to the simpletons and the senseless. You would think that woman wisdom would leave the fools to woman folly and invite only those who are wise and full of understanding to come to her banquet.

But she doesn't do that. She says in verses 4 to 6, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. To him who lacks sense, she says, come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

[21:13] Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. What a gracious and lavish invitation. Though we have all sinned, though we have all had our share of godless foolishness in our lives, wisdom invites us to partake in her banquet.

Her banquet is not a high-browed, high-nosed affair. It's not an exclusive party for those of righteous and noble bearing.

It's for simpletons and the sinners like us. And wisdom's banquet prefigures the heavenly banquet that Jesus speaks of in Luke chapter 14.

There in Jesus' parable of the great banquet, the master of the feast says to his servants, go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame. In that day and age, the poor and the disabled were precisely the kinds of people that people omitted from their guest list. But Jesus seeks out precisely such people.

[22 : 30] that's because Jesus, when the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled at why he was dining with sinners and tax collectors in Luke chapter 5, Jesus answered them this way, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

That's the heart of God for sinners like you and me. we often superimpose on God the characteristics that we see in sinful humanity.

In our world, beautiful people despise ugly people. In our world, sophisticated people despise simple-minded people. In our world, wealthy people despise poor people.

Successful people despise failed people. And so we think that since God is so holy, and since God is so wise, he must despise us and want nothing to do with sinners and fools like us, but this cannot be further from the truth.

Woman wisdom, her target audience, are the simpletons and the senseless of this world, and the wisdom of God beckons us to come to her banquet.

[23 : 50] And so we're faced with a choice. whether to accept woman wisdom's invitation or woman folly's invitation, and this is the most consequential decision we make in this life.

So verses 7 to 12 seek to guide us by giving us examples of how the wise and the scoffer respond to woman wisdom. verses 7 to 8 warn us, whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. The scoffer refers to someone who is too prideful to listen or to submit to anyone's instruction.

He has an over-inflated ego. He is immune to correction and is never known to change his mind.

Three times the sage tells us that it is no use to try to correct the scoffer because when you do, you will get yourself abuse and injury and hatred.

The scoffer will heap abuses on you and berate you. In trying to help him, you only earn his hatred. It reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 7 verse 6, Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

[25 : 16] The wise man is a study in contrast. It says in verses 8 to 9, Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser.

Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. This threefold affirmation of the wise man's teachability contrasts the scoffer's incorrigibility.

If you prove a scoffer, he hates you, but if you reprove a wise man, he loves you. If you correct a scoffer, you get abuse, but if you correct the wise man, he increases in learning.

The word learning in verse 9 is a noun form of the verb get in verse 7, so it highlights the contrast even more. When you instruct a scoffer that bounces off, he repels instruction, it bounces off and strikes you.

But if you instruct the wise man, he gets wisdom, he learns. It's ironic, the scoffer who needs wisdom most rejects it, and the wise man who already has a measure of wisdom receives it eagerly.

[26 : 24] The wiser you get, the humbler you get. This is because, as verse 10 says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

To know God is to fear Him, to revere Him. It refers not merely to knowing God in a just knowing about Him, but rather personally knowing Him, experientially knowing Him.

And when you know and relate to God rightly, you revere and worship Him, you obey Him. To have the fear of the Lord is to live in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the glory of God.

And that, the fear of the Lord is the beginning, not the end of wisdom. When you fear the Lord, you cannot be slothful, because you live under His watchful eye.

When you fear the Lord, you do not gossip or slander, because you know He hears you. When you fear the Lord, you do not boast, because you know how indebted you are to Him, and how dependent you are on Him.

[27 : 32] When you fear the Lord, you do not grumble or complain about your life circumstances, because you submit to His superior wisdom and sovereignty. When you fear the Lord, you do not oppress the poor, the widows, and the orphans, because you know that He will judge justly.

When you fear the Lord, you do not fear what man can do to you, because you trust in His sovereignty and power. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of Holy One is insight.

And then verse 11 provides further incentive for acquiring wisdom. For by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life. Once again, wisdom promises life, and verse 12 lays the responsibility squarely on the individual's shoulders.

If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you scoff, you alone will bear it. This doesn't mean that your wisdom or folly doesn't affect anyone else in your life.

Human beings were created to be social beings, and for better or worse, we live in an interconnected world. And so everything you do affects other people. If you choose wisdom, it will affect those around you.

[28 : 52] If you choose folly, it will affect those around you. Nonetheless, the primary beneficiary will be you. You're not choosing wisdom primarily for the benefit of others.

This is for yourself. It will benefit you. It will impart life to you. It's therefore all the more urgent that you choose wisdom for yourself. It's your responsibility and yours alone.

And this digression, or this centerpiece of the responses of the wise man and the scoffer serve as a warning to woman wisdom's target audience.

This simple. Will you be a wise man or a scoffer? That depends on how you respond to the call of woman wisdom. If you heed her call, you become a wise man.

If you ignore her call, you become a scoffer. A modernized alternative title for the book of Proverbs could be God's wisdom for dummies or life skills for dummies.

[30 : 01] I've never owned any of the books in the four dummies series. You guys know what I'm talking about, right? The popular four dummies series. I think they have one for everything that I can imagine. But if I owned one of those books, I think I'd be embarrassed to read it in public.

Because in my pride, I want to be seen reading the book for experts. I want to be reading the book for smarty pants, not for dummies. And that's precisely the point.

Acquiring the wisdom of God requires humility. Wisdom calls out the simple. We must acknowledge that we are simple, that we do lack sense, that we need correction and learning.

Only then do we diligently seek the wisdom of God. As woman wisdom invites us to do in verses 4-6, we must turn and leave our ways.

Leave our simple ways. In order to walk in the right path of wisdom, it's no use insisting that you're on the right path anyway, or that the sins that you commit in your life are tolerable, that they're okay.

[31 : 09] That doesn't get us anywhere. In order to walk in the right path of wisdom, we must first admit that we're going in the wrong direction and turn. That's what it means to repent of our sins and to believe in God.

It is then and only then that we become wise because that's the way that God has chosen to save sinners. As I mentioned earlier, woman wisdom prefigures Jesus Christ and her promises ultimately point to and are fulfilled by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christ. This is why Jesus is described in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 as the wisdom from God. Jesus has prepared for us a banquet that imparts eternal life.

But in order to enter, we must humble ourselves and heed his call. We have all eaten the secret bread of woman folly.

We have all drunk her stolen water. and as her guests, we were destined for the depths of Sheol as verse 18 says, but God did not give up on us even then.

[32 : 20] He sent his only son, Jesus Christ, the wisdom from God to rescue us. Jesus, left the glory that he had with the father from before the world began, took on human flesh.

He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Jesus, the very incarnation of the wisdom of God, endured the penalty of folly that we had incurred.

He takes our place and instead of us, he descends to the dead so that from there he might be raised from the dead to impart his eternal resurrection life to all those who turn aside to him and heed his call.

That's the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ. And this wisdom confounds the world. Who would have thought of a God who takes on human flesh?

Who would have thought of a crucified king? But it was God's pleasure to confound the wisdom of the world, the shallow and empty wisdom of this world in order to reveal the depth and fullness of his divine wisdom.

[33 : 38] And so 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 18 to 31 say this, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

[34 : 46] Thanks be to God. Are you discouraged that you are weak and foolish? foolish? Do you hesitate to come to the banquet of Jesus in your filthy sin-ridden rags?

Remember, woman wisdom, she calls out to the simple and addresses those who lack sense. She invites us to come eat hover bread, drink of the wine she has mixed.

Wisdom calls out from the highest of places to the lowest of sinners. sinners. Consider what God says in Isaiah 57 verse 15.

I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit. To revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

This verse tells us that there are two places in the world where the presence of God is especially manifest. First is the high and holy place, God's dwelling place, a heavenly place.

[35 : 59] Second is within the heart of the contrite and lowly. That's where God dwells.

The admission of your lowliness, the admission of your unworthiness, your weakness, your sinfulness, forgiveness is not a hindrance to coming into the banquet of the kingdom of God.

It is a prerequisite for entry into the banquet of the kingdom of God because only those who humble themselves and heed the call of wisdom can feast at her life-giving banquet.

Let me close by reading the first verse of an old hymn, Come, ye sinners. sinners. Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power. Amen. Amen. Amen.