

A Heart of Wisdom
Proverbs 9 (06/04/17)
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Before we plunge into Proverbs 9 to hear wisdom and folly's last call, listen to Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to you a heart of wisdom." Your days are clicking by like the national debt. I remember being 25, a junior in college. It would be a long time to 65. Now I wonder how I got past that mile marker so quickly. God gives us a certain number of days. And they go quickly! Why are we here? To make each day count in growing a heart of wisdom. That's what Moses prayed for and that's what you and I need to pray. Don't waste one day.

Proverbs 9 is a towering chapter in the Old Testament. It divides into three six-verse sections. In verses 1-6 Wisdom calls us into her grand mansion with majestic pillars enhancing the entrance. Inside there seems to be unending table settings loaded with sumptuous food and exhilarating wine. Then in verses 7 to 12 you have two kinds of hearts, the wise heart that actually enters her glorious doors and the scoffer who refuses to listen to her sweet appeal. Verses 13-18 ends the chapter with this woman representing folly calling fools and seducing gullible men and women with her sweet baits and damning hooks. Every man and woman's soul is in the balance here. You must choose. And you will live forever with your choice. This is a powerful chapter. Pray your way through it. Ask yourself, "What is God teaching me here?"

First we have this glorious invitation from Lady Wisdom – verses 1-6.

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."

Wisdom is God's magnificent plan for mankind in His Son Jesus Christ, personified as Lady Wisdom. Notice the verb tense "she has" six times in these verses. This shows completion; it has happened. All has been planned and prepared for sinners from eternity past. She "has" built her house. This is a magnificent edifice, spacious, grand, ennobling. No ancient or modern wonder of the world comes close to the magnificence of this building.

The seven pillars probably do not represent the seven days of creation or the seven-fold Spirit of Jesus Isaiah 11:2 talks about. No, seven is the number of perfection. These seven pillars picture perfection in strength and beauty. They represent the perfect, flawless supports of God's mansion of grace. Everything here is perfect. Her structure is perfect, her banquet is perfect, her message of grace is perfect, and she perfectly fulfills the sovereign plan of redemption. Ultimately, as we'll see, no one will be missing from this banquet. Every chair, every setting will be occupied. Jesus assured us in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will absolutely not cast out."

Isaiah 25:6 describes this lavish feast. "The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine." Watch as people from every tribe and tongue, from Adam and Eve to the last sinner God saves, thousands upon tens of thousands of the peoples, pouring in past those perfect pillars, amazed and dumbfounded by divine grace, knowing none deserve this! And there are seats for every person whom Jesus purchased with His own blood. It will be a celebration of sovereign grace. Are you at one of the settings? Is there a meal for you? Are you hungry for God? Luke 6:21, Blessed are they who hunger, for they shall be filled!

In verse 3 she sends out her maids to call us, to invite us, even to compel us. Come to Wisdom's feast! God isn't silent. He is calling sinners to Himself using prophets and teachers and preachers and parents and friends and missionaries and evangelists, even mass media. He could have written His invitation in the sky, in the clouds; but no, He sends these human maids. God is still speaking. He uses voices like

Jim Elliott's and John Paton's and Colton Allen's. This is the great commission, sending out voices throughout the world to call poor lost sinners to the gospel.

She comes to us, the naïve and ignorant of God's truth. We weren't looking for her. We didn't figure it out. We were all going our own way. Don't think you deserve this feast. You're naïve, simple. You don't know what you need. You lack judgment. You were born dead to God and alive to your own self-obsessed sin. You thought you knew what life was about, but you didn't.

Here's the call in verse 5. "Come! I have food and drink you don't know a thing about, but it is what you desperately need. Come!" Isn't that what Christ cried out? "Come to Me all who are weary and burdened. You need Me." John ended Revelation with the same call, Revelation 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes, take the water of life without cost."

Come and eat. It's all free. You can't buy it. Isaiah 55:1, "Come, all you who are thirsty. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Throw your money away. It will do you no good here. This banquet with rich foods and exhilarating wine is free grace. It's a feast of forgiveness, a righteousness not your own, adoption by the eternal love of God Himself, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, regeneration, the power of the Spirit to bring you love, joy, and peace. Are you starved for these things? Then come and eat!

But there is a condition in verse 6. Turn from your folly or from the gaggle of fools you've lived to impress, and follow, proceed. Repent and follow! That's the condition to enter through these beautiful pillars and sit and feast and truly live. You must forsake your own ego, your pride, your lust for other people's admiration. In Matthew 22 Jesus talked about that one fellow who tried to come in to the banquet without meeting the king's simple condition. He refused to submit and wear a wedding garment. When the king asked him how he got in, he was speechless. Just before the meal began he was thrown out because he refused to forsake his folly and he was cast into outer darkness.

But listen. Only God can free your heart from your attachment to your own idols. If you come, God must change your heart. You naturally love your own way. Will you forsake folly? As C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* put it, "Will you let the burning angel crush the red lizard of lust and folly on your shoulder to free you from yourself so you too can run with a new heart into the mansion of grace and mercy and glory?"

God distinguishes two kinds of hearts – the scoffing heart and the wise heart – verses 7-12.

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.

THE SCOFFING HEART - Everything depends on the kind of heart you have. Let's cut into the heart of this scoffer, and ask, "Could I be this scoffer?" There are many of them in this world. Are you one? How do you know? Remember, count your days so you might present to God a heart of wisdom. You don't want to exit this world with a scoffing heart. You don't want them to lay you in the grave with the epitaph "Here lies a scoffer."

Verses 7-8a reveal the marks of a scoffer. When someone tries to correct or reprove a scoffing man or woman, there's a price to pay. If you have tried to do any evangelism, you have been here. I remember trying to witness to my cousin shortly after I was saved. He coldly shivered me and told me to never talk to him about that again. When I went to work for a construction company in 1990, word got out that a preacher was coming to work. Dear Mitch, one of the workers and a guy I really liked, assured the other fellows that he was bound and determined to get that preacher to sin on the first day of work. Scoffers are out to get you. They may dishonor you, insult you, and actually hate you. They don't always react like this outwardly, but inside they may.

But God knows how to turn a scoffer into a humbled, hungry soul. God is patient and changes hearts. Recognize there are times when you should not cast God's gospel pearls before scoffers, but be careful and very patient with the unsaved around you. Charles Bridges says, "Avoid irritation. Await the favorable opportunity." Dave Harvey in *When Sinners Say I Do* describes reproving another like this, "This is a soul you're slicing open. Go very slowly. Cut very gently." Don't go in there slashing and slicing.

There's a time to be bold and a time to speak the truth, even if it wounds. We trust God to do the heart work because only He can change a scoffer into a wise heart like that thief on the cross who said, "Remember me!" So love the guy or gal whom God put in your life. Be available and kind. But until you can speak to his heart, it is useless to push. How many parents have lived with this: We can't tell him anything; he thinks he knows it all. Sadly those who continue in their hard-hearted scoffing will never taste the heavenly feast. But the wise will.

THE WISE HEART - In verses 8b-9 you have the marks of a wise heart. Notice how the wise heart responds to reproof and instruction: he'll love you, he'll be still wiser, and he'll increase in learning. Ask yourself, "Do I have a wise heart? Is my heart humbled and teachable." When you minister to a wise heart, he will love you: "I am so thankful you told me the truth!" My pastor friend Kevin was talking about counseling a brother. His approach was to ask, "May I have access to your heart?" That's wise in itself. Rather than pontificating toward someone about what he needs before he has opened his heart, request permission. Go gently. But go truthfully.

Wise people aren't necessarily smart or brilliant or knowledgeable people; folks with these characteristics are often the Class A Scoffers. Wise people want to know more about God and how to apply God's Word to their lives. Their humble responses may include: "I don't know. I need God's wisdom. I may be wrong. How can I improve? How can I make better use of my time for God's glory? I need to read that book, memorize those verses, spend more time in prayer." These are the people sitting at the feast in wisdom's palace, savoring every tasty morsel of grace and mercy.

Verse 10 takes us to the heart of the heart of wisdom. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* There is no relationship with God without the fear of the Lord. If you have been born again and regenerated, you have the fear of the Lord. Jeremiah 32:39-40 – "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always.... I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, so they will not turn away from Me!" Isn't that so good? Bridges says, "The child of God has only one dread – to offend his Father; only one desire – to please and delight in Him."

This is the one entrance to wisdom. Without the fear of God, there is no wisdom from God. You may know how to split an atom, or understand $E=mc^2$, but without knowing God you don't understand life. Who are you? Where did you come from? Why are you here? Who's in charge here? What is your identity?

This section of verses ends with a strong warning. If you beg God for a wise heart and are humble and teachable, you may not live long but your years will be full of life. On the other hand, if you continue as a scoffer of the truth of God, you will reap what you sow. You alone will bear it, unless God opens your eyes to see that Jesus bore your scoffing on that cross!

God warns you about the final and fatal invitation from Woman Folly – verses 13-18.

Proverbs 9:13-18 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.

This is the saddest part of the Bible. Sin has cursed us. We are born with original sin. We are totally depraved of any good, of any true and sincere desire for God. And this woman of folly, representing the world, the flesh, and the devil, is always there to seduce naïve, ignorant souls, even those who are trying to live right and trying to make their paths straight.

This woman of folly is loud and full of bluster. She drowns out any serious considerations of the purpose of life with her noise and lack of any conscience before God. Isn't this the world? The louder the world can clamor, the more outrageous she can be in denying God, mocking God, slandering Christ and Christians, yelling protests against the truth of God and His Word, calling Christians names and doing it loudly. And the naïve and fools listen and are sucked in.

In verse 16 she appeals to the naïve and ignorant calling, "You are a youth. You don't know what life is all about. I have a lot to teach you. I can bring great fun and fulfillment into your life. Don't let anyone tell you what to do. Be your own person. Be true to yourself. Don't let other people tell you who you are. Be your own god. Do what you like."

Verse 17 is her bait and verse 18 the hook. There's something in the heart of man that makes sin look sweet. We think we'll feel so much better if we get angry, get drunk, get irritated, get critical, get high, get bitter, get miserable, get immoral, get profane, get cocky, get revenge. Sin can be sweet, but only for a fleeting time. Augustine said he stole pears for the sheer thrill of stealing pears. He had plenty of better ones. Verse 17, if stolen water were not sweet, no one would steal water. "Take the bait," she says. But it will only please you for a few moments or a split second.

Verse 18 is her hook. Here is the saddest thing, because hidden in every sweet and pleasing sinful bait is a damning hook. This naïve, ignorant sinner who thinks he's got a good handle on life doesn't realize that his path is leading to the place where all the giants of Noah's day and all the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the other lost people, all the scoffers who simply reject or neglect Christ through all history, are now in their agony and torment. Poor John Lennon was so wrong when he dreamt about a world with no heaven above or hell below. *Imagine*, a sweet, but deadly tune.

Back to Psalm 90:12. Your days are clicking off, one by one. Number them. Realize God is giving you every day as a day to grow a heart of wisdom. Be humble and teachable, repenting of every sin that raises its alluring face. Sit down at that wonderful feast of God's grace, loving God for it, trusting Christ and rejoicing in the mansion that wisdom built! Turn from fools and enter wisdom's house through the door of the cross, and sit down to feast on Christ Himself, His grace, mercy, and kindness to every sinner who repents. "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, through that door of the cross, and whoever comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out!"

Let's go out with those maidens as God's voice and be ever ready to call the naïve and those without understanding to come to the rich banquet of salvation! The bride, that's us, says, "Come" (Revelation 22:17).