

Wisdom and Folly

Proverbs 9:1-18

Life is full of choices.

We make thousands of small decisions every day.

We decide whether or not to get out of bed, what to have for breakfast, what to wear, what to read, whether or not answer the phone, what to say, and on and on it goes.

We also make big decisions in life.

Where to go to school, what job to work at, who to marry or not marry, where to live, and so on.

If you were to ask me twenty five years ago which is more important the big decisions in life or the small ones, I would have said the big ones.

I mean they are called big decisions for a reason.

If you get locked into a job for twenty, thirty, or forty years that determines a huge part of your life.

Signing a mortgage, for many people, determines the place you are going to live for a long period of time.

Committing your life to someone in the covenant of marriage is a really big deal that impacts every day for the rest of your life.

Because these decisions are so life defining it is easy to see why we might say they are more important than all the thousands of smaller decisions we make every day, but the more I read my bible and the more I observe in life the more I am convinced that the thousands of seemingly minor decisions we make are more important than the few bigger ones we make in life.

The reason I am convinced of that is because I believe the little things, the words we speak, the feelings we have, what we wear, what we eat, and how we act are revealing the condition of our hearts.

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 6:45, He says, *“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”*

Big decisions in life are really important, but they don't reveal the condition of our hearts nearly as much as everyday life.

[This is what the book of proverbs is so deeply concerned about. It is the proper application of God's Word to everyday life. That is what is meant by the word wisdom. The opposite of wisdom is what Proverbs calls folly which is the failure to apply God's word to everyday life. Our text this morning **Proverbs 9:1-18** describes wisdom and folly as two women that are calling out to people going along the pathway of life and the question that Solomon is setting

before us is which invitation will we accept? We first hear about lady wisdom and from what is written in verses 1-6 we learn that...]

Point #1 – Wisdom invites people to abundant life. (Verses 1-6)

Everyone who chooses to put themselves under the authority of God’s word will find meaning and satisfaction to the fullest possible degree.

Listen to the word picture that is painted for us in verses 1-3.

Notice that all of the things described in these verses are put in the past tense.

These are things that have already happened.

The house of wisdom is a completed building. That is emphasized with the phrase ‘she has hewn her seven pillars’.

It is a picture of wholeness, completeness, perfection, and magnificence.

The house of wisdom is no little shack on a shaky foundation, but it is an awe inspiring building built to stand the test of time.

In such a house there would be a great banquet hall with the capacity to seat a large number of guests and here the table has been set.

The picture of multiple ‘beasts’ being prepared for the table is one of an enormous meal.

When you come to lady wisdom’s table you will be able to eat your fill and there will still be plenty leftover.

The ‘mixed wine’ according to scholars is wine mixed with water and spices making it enjoyable but also protecting the one who drinks it from drunkenness.

The table is set, you can come into lady wisdom’s banquet hall and begin feasting right away.

She has sent her servants to the ‘highest places in the town’, the place where they are most likely to be seen and heard to invite guests to her feast.

Let’s listen to the invitation in **verses 4-6.**

The invitation is to those who are ‘simple’ and those who ‘lack sense’.

These are people who are easy led in one direction or another because they cannot tell the difference between right and wrong.

John MacArthur describes them as, “An open door, they don’t know what to keep in or out of their mind.”

These are people who know little if anything of God’s word and have no capacity to apply it properly to their lives.

Everyone starts out that way and so this invitation is for everyone.

The one who accepts the invitation is welcomed into the house of wisdom, seated at her table, partakes in the feast, leaves behind simplicity, and gains life.

[The bible uses the illustration of food for God's word a number of times. Just think for a moment about how our bodies use food. When we eat our bodies break down the food and use it for energy, to build tissue, and repair cells. It becomes a part of our body, hence the old saying you are what you eat.]

That is the idea here.

The one who accepts wisdom's invitation sits down at her banquet table and feasts on the word of God.

Over the course of time the scriptures become a part of the fabric of who we are.

They get worked into our hearts and minds and when they govern our thinking and feeling and that is displayed in what we say and do.

The more we do that, the more we enjoy the fruit of the bible's life giving power in the present the more sure our future hope of eternal life becomes.

[The invitation has been set before us, the question we have to answer is what will our response be? Will we come into the house of wisdom and sit at her banquet table, or will we live in ignorance? If we are going to come and feast upon the meal that wisdom has prepared we need a very important character trait. That is what we see here in the next few verses. We see here that...]

Point #2 – Wise people are teachable. (Verses 7-9)

Experiencing the good results of applying God's word tend to make a person's heart receptive to hearing more.

Now that Solomon (the king who wrote most of the book of proverbs) has laid out wisdom's invitation for us, he gives us a few proverbs to help us recognize a wise person.

One of the ways we can recognize whether or not someone is wise is by the way they receive correction.

In **verses 7-8a** he tells us about the reaction of unwise people.

A scoffer is someone who says mean and untrue things about God.

These are people who think the Bible is silly and make fun of those that believe it.

Solomon tells us here that if we try and correct or reprove/rebuke people like that they are going to respond in mean and hurtful ways.

For the kids working on this word search, you are looking for the word 'rebuke' for question nine.

It means to correct someone for doing something wrong. Scoffers don't like that.

Does this mean that we should always keep quiet when people are doing ungodly things?

I think that would be taking these verses the wrong way.

The point is that there will be times when standing up for what is right will be costly. Jesus told us to expect that.

There are also times when correcting someone will serve no good purpose and knowing when to say something and when to remain silent is a big part of becoming wise.

Now, look at **verses 8a-9** and see how different the response of a wise person is.

Rather than responding with hate a wise person responds with love.

Rather than getting angry and trying to hurt the one bringing truth, the wise person receives what is said and grows in his wisdom and his learning.

One of the most important aspects of being teachable is the ability to listen well.

The wise person considers carefully what is being said and the source of the rebuke.

If the content of the rebuke is motivated by selfishness and sin, the wise person will listen and disregard it.

If, however, the content is based in God's word the wise person will listen and take it to heart and be grateful for the one pointing him to what is right.

[We see examples of this in the bible. When Jeremiah sent God's word to king Johoiakim, the king burned it and tried to arrest the prophet. On the other hand when a young king named Josiah hears God's word he takes it to heart and does all he can to lead his people into godliness. One is teachable the other is not.]

If we have accepted wisdom's invitation into her banquet hall and if we are regularly feasting upon the word of God, then we will be teachable.

Not someone easily influenced and easily led in different directions from one day to the next, but someone who listens carefully to the teaching of God's word and is willing to change their ways based upon what the LORD says.

Let's all ask ourselves an important question.

What is our first reaction to correction?

When someone tells us we are doing something wrong how do we respond?

Anger? Is our default to say something like, “Who are you to tell me what to do? Get out of my face!”

That’s the way of the scoffer brothers and sisters.

What we need are open ears and humble hearts that are willing to listen to correction from God’s word.

[If we want to sit at the banquet table of wisdom, then we need to be teachable. That brings us to a very important aspect in the discussion of accepting wisdom’s invitation to her life giving banquet. From what we have heard so far it is clear that some choose to enter the house of wisdom and some choose ignore her invitation. Because that is true Solomon wants us to know this very important lesson, that...]

Point #3 – People are responsible for choosing between wisdom and folly. (Verses 10-12)

No one else can be wise for us and no one else can keep us from wisdom. Everyone must decide for themselves which course to pursue in their life.

Having invited us to the house and banquet table of wisdom and having shown us the importance of being teachable, we are reminded here of what causes someone to accept the invitation and what inclines us to be teachable. (Verse 10)

I like how Franz Delitzsch defines the fear of the LORD, he writes, “*The fear of the LORD is reverential subordination to the all-directing, One God, Creator, and governor of the world who has given His law to humanity.*”

It is a trembling at the holiness of God and an appreciation for His unequalled goodness that results in the desire to listen to what He says.

Here is the thing, no one can fear God for you! That is something you have to feel for yourself.

If you have that you will want to come into the banquet hall.

When you have that you will seek and grow in ‘the knowledge of the Holy One.’”

That means how you think about God will be correct.

No one can think right thoughts about the LORD for you.

To that he adds this in verses 11-12.

Listening to God leads to abundant life which is especially true if we think in terms of eternity.

No one else can receive the gift of eternal life for you.

If we govern our lives by God’s word it will surely be good for those around us.

If we act justly, if we treat people fairly, if we are honest, generous, patient, kind, and alike it is good for all those who interact with us,

but the fruit of living a wise life in Christ cannot by itself make other people wise.

Everyone must choose for themselves whether or not they will accept the invitation to wisdom and sit at her banquet table.

Something similar is true for the scoffer.

If someone lives a life disregarding God's word that will surely have a negative impact upon those around him.

Anger, jealousy, bitterness, gossip, adultery, deceit, selfishness, coarse language, and alike are all bad for people, but none of those things can keep someone else from becoming wise.

No one will stand before the LORD and be declared innocent by blaming their foolishness on someone else.

Everyone is responsible for his/her own choice.

[We see that time and again in the Bible. How many times does Israel have a judge, prophet, or king who is genuinely seeking after the LORD and within a generation the people are chasing after false gods? The opposite also happens, the people have a corrupt leader or king and his son chooses to follow the LORD instead of the corruption of his father.]

The same thing is true for us.

I want to do all I can to teach people the word of God correctly, but I cannot force anyone to believe or make better life choices.

I want you to know that there is hope despite the fact that you, like me, have broken God's laws.

I want you to know that Jesus died for you to make you right with God and that He conquered the grave to give you eternal life to the praise of God's glory forever.

I want you to turn from your disobedience and trust in Christ, but you have to make that decision yourself.

[I know full well that is an uphill battle in our day. That has always been the case as we are reminded in these last few verses of Proverbs chapter nine. Having told us about lady wisdom and her invitation to life, Solomon turns our attention to Folly and her invitation. He wants to show us this very important lesson, that...]

Point #4 – Folly is tempting but destructive. (Verses 13-18)

The invitation to disobey God's Word promises delight, but it always leads to death.

Listen to how folly is described in verse 13.

Folly is loud, she goes out of her way to get attention.

Imagine walking down the street and someone pulls out a megaphone to announce something are you going to look over and listen to what is being said? Probably, because loudness is an attention getter.

Folly is seductive, that is she makes herself look attractive or inviting, but notice 'she knows nothing'.

That is the exact opposite of wisdom. Another way to say that would be folly has no connection at all to wisdom, it is all about breaking God's law rather than keeping it.

Verses 14-17 tell us where she is and what she is doing.

Like wisdom folly also has a house, like wisdom folly is 'calling' from 'the highest places of the town.'

There is a competition happening for the people's attention.

Folly does not want you to go into wisdom's house, she wants you to come into her house instead.

Just like wisdom she is calling to 'the simple'.

I take that to mean that those who have entered into wisdom's house and feasted at her table are not easily taken in by the appeals of folly.

She is also inviting people to a meal, one of stolen water and secret bread.

Matthew Henry points out the difference between the two meals.

Wisdom has meat, mixed wine, and bread in abundance, whereas folly only offers bread and water.

The meal itself is meager and unsatisfying, but it is being sold as something that will bring delight.

That is so often the case when it comes to disobeying God's word. The lie promises something better and you end up with something far worse.

That is the so called sweet water that folly offers.

The 'secret bread' is the lie that you won't be found out.

Go ahead, give into temptation disobey God you will get away with it and no one will know.

Is it any wonder verse 13 says folly 'know nothing'.

God sees what we do, and more often than not He makes sure other people find out what we are doing.

Folly does all she can to make breaking God's laws look attractive and sadly the temptations are often successful.

People often enter into her house and sit at her table, but here is what they don't realize **verse 18.**

Instead of the satisfaction and delight that was promised there is only death and despair.

[This is like when scam artists call people and say, “A distant relative has passed away and left you \$100,000.” That sounds pretty good right. They go on, “All you have to do is send us a small administration fee and we will send you the money.” If you agree they take you through a process that gives them access to your bank accounts and they clean you out.]

Promising something good that causes a great deal of pain and ultimately leads to eternal destruction is how the way of folly works.

It is a terrible end, but praise the LORD there is a way to avoid falling for the spiritual scam of folly and that is to listen wisdom’s invitation.

That begins with the fear of the LORD.

If you begin to have a sense of Who God truly is, His holiness, and His justice it won’t be long before you end up at the cross of Christ turning from your foolishness and finding forgiveness in His death and resurrection.

It won’t be long until you end up at the banquet table of wisdom feasting on the Word of God and growing in wisdom.

So the choice is before us.

Will we choose folly and make one bad decision after another until we are destroyed or will we choose wisdom and seek to shape our lives increasingly according to God’s commands?

Lady Wisdom has built her house, prepared her table, and says “Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live.”