

Proverbs 8
A Love Affair with Death

Sunday, April 11, 2010

Chapters 8 and 9 present us with a personification of wisdom. She appears in the form of a beautiful woman. We may call her "Lady Wisdom."

Some years ago as another minister and I and a few other men were standing around and talking after church, the subject of Proverbs happened to come up. And Melinda, who was standing nearby listening to the conversation, said, "So do you think there's any significance in the fact that in the Scriptures wisdom is personified as a woman?" And by the look on her face we all knew that she was not asking a question but making a statement. She was playfully suggesting that perhaps wisdom is personified as a woman because women are on the whole wiser than men. However true that might be (and I'm pretty much ready to concede the point), I don't think it's the reason why wisdom is personified this way. It seems to me that it's for the purpose of setting before the eyes of Solomon's sons the *desirability* of wisdom. Wisdom is beautiful. She is attractive. She is desirable. And just as a young man's attention is drawn to a beautiful woman, so also it should be drawn to wisdom, because wisdom is beautiful. Wisdom is attractive. And so Solomon presents her in this fashion to his son.

As we shall see, Lady Wisdom stands in stark contrast to the Forbidden Woman of chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Chapter 7, which gives us the most extended treatment of the Forbidden Woman, ends with an admonition to stay far away from her (**7:24-27**).

In chapter 8, Lady Wisdom is introduced as calling out and making her appeal to all who pass by. Her appeal is similar to what we find in **1:20-21**. Likewise, chapter 8 begins:

- ¹ Does not wisdom call?
Does not understanding raise her voice?
- ² On the heights beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
- ³ beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud (8:1-3)

The Forbidden Woman and Lady Wisdom are both making an appeal—the Forbidden Woman in dark corners for nefarious purposes, and Lady Wisdom in the full light of day for good and honorable ones. This is one of several key points of comparison and contrast between them. Bruce Waltke says,

The unchaste wife moves covertly at dusk and speaks falsely; Wisdom moves publicly and speaks direct and authoritative truth. “Unlike the smooth, seductive, but deceptive speech of the strange woman, wisdom’s is ‘straight,’ ‘right,’ and ‘true,’ not ‘twisted,’ or ‘crooked.’” The foreign wife leads her victims to slavery, impoverishment, and death; Wisdom’s speech leads her followers to

kingship, wealth, and life. The foreign wife inhabits the earthly and mundane; Wisdom soars in heaven above space and time. Both rub shoulders in the city and appeal for the love of the uncommitted, gullible youth—the unchaste wife erotically, Wisdom, spiritually. The house of the unfaithful wife is a death trap; the mansion of Wisdom is the abundant life (see also ch. 9).¹

⁴ To you, O men, I call,
and my cry is to the children of man.

⁵ O simple ones, learn prudence;
O fools, learn sense.

⁶ Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right,

This stands in full contrast to the speech of the Forbidden Woman who speaks with smooth and seductive language of things that ought not to be mentioned. Wisdom, however, speaks of noble things. Her speech is guided by righteousness and prudence.

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

⁸ All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

⁹ They are all straight to him who understands,
and right to those who find knowledge.

Here we find what we have stressed many times before, that wisdom and righteousness walk together hand in hand. Where you find one, you find the other.

Lady Wisdom goes on to speak of the value of heeding her call.

¹ Bruce Waltke, NICOT, *The Book of Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), vol. 1, p. 392

8:10-11

8:12-13

Take note of what he says here: "The Fear of the Lord is the hatred of evil." We'll come back to this in a moment.

Wisdom says,

8:14-21

In verses 22-31 wisdom is represented as being the first of Jehovah's works, and his counselor, as it were, when he laid the foundation of the earth.

Many of the Church Fathers interpreted the passage as referring to Christ in his pre-incarnate state. The rabbis interpreted it as referring to the Torah. They're both wrong. There are too many problems with these interpretations to make either one of them tenable. Certainly the Torah is a written expression of divine wisdom, and Christ is the embodiment of divine wisdom, but the passage refers to neither.

The passage is simply designed to show that wisdom is very ancient. It was with God in the very beginning.

8:22-31

In verses 32-36 we find a concluding exhortation.

8:32-36

“All who hate me love death.” All who hate wisdom and wisdom’s ways have a love affair with death. Literally.

Now I told you a moment ago that we would come back to verse 13.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
And perverted speech I hate.

We should understand that wisdom not only resists evil, but *hates* it as well. Listen, you can not live faithfully as a Christian in an age as unfaithful as ours unless you cultivate a hatred of evil. If you don’t, you’re going to be overwhelmed. You’re going to be swept up in the tide and carried along to perdition.

The time is long past for a weak and effeminate form of Christianity that is afraid to call evil “evil,” that is afraid to confront evil, that is too timid to stand up and say to the purveyors of evil, “No, you’re wrong.”

Somehow we have gotten the notion into our heads that the essence of the Christian faith is to be nice, as if this is the sum and substance of it all—to be nice. And nice people go along to get along. Nice people never contradict. Nice people never say no. Nice people never pass judgment on others.

You know, it's funny. The *one* verse that everyone knows—and the favorite verse of every unbeliever—is, "Judge not, lest you be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Of course they have not a clue what in the world this means; and they don't know the context; and they have never read the saying, "Judge with right judgment" (Jn. 7:24).

"That's in the Bible?"

Yes, that's in the Bible. And it also was spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact of the matter is that we *are* to make judgments, which is to say, we are to make moral distinctions—moral distinctions concerning behavior *as well* concerning people. How else is Solomon's son going to recognize the forbidden woman, for instance, unless he makes a moral judgment about her behavior? And in making a moral judgment about her behavior, he is necessarily making a judgment about her character. If she's *dressed* like a whore and *talks* like a whore and propositions him like a whore? Guess what...she's a whore.

Solomon is telling his son to recognize her for what she is, and stay far away from her. But he can't do this if, "Judge not lest you be judged," means what people say it means.

How is Solomon's son going to avoid evil men, unless he judges them to be evil? When they say to him,

Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us ambush the innocent without reason...
we shall find all precious goods,
we shall fill our houses with plunder (Prov. 1:11, 13)

When he hears this, he is to pass judgment. He is to judge with right judgment. He is to judge them to be evil men precisely because they are plotting evil deeds.

Furthermore, how is Solomon's son going to be able to resist the lure of ill-gotten gains, or resist the seductions of a beautiful but immoral woman, unless he has cultivated a hatred for evil?

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate. (v. 13)

Psalm 15:1-4

The Lord here commends those who despise the wicked. He rewards them with a greater disclosure of himself. This is the essence of friendship, isn't it, that you disclose yourself. You tell your friends things about yourself that you don't tell just anyone. There's an openness between friends that doesn't exist among mere acquaintances. And God says that those who do the things mentioned here, including "despising a vile person", will abide in his tent. He will welcome them and invite them into his tent to have fellowship with him.

We find that when David wishes to commend himself to the Lord, he says, in Psalm 139,

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies (Ps. 139:21-22).

That's in the Bible? Yeah, that's in the Bible. There is such a thing as a righteous hatred. It's not a hatred borne of malice; it is not malevolence. It's a hatred borne of righteous indignation toward those who practice evil. It is a revulsion at the ugliness of evil and evil deeds.

It is said of the Messiah, "The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness" (Heb. 1:9).

There cannot be a true love of righteousness without a corresponding hatred of evil. Not only is it not *improper*, it is *imperative* that we cultivate a hatred of evil—a loathing of it, a disgust with it, to see it as ugly and repulsive. If we don't—if, under some mistaken notion of Christian piety, we fail to make moral judgments of this sort—then not only are we being unfaithful to God, but we are in danger of being swept away by the tide of evil that is flooding our culture.

And the reason is because our culture is very comfortable with calling evil good and good evil, and very adept at making evil appear attractive—and not only attractive, but wise as well. It is now the enlightened thing, it is the position of the intelligentsia, the cultural savants, and all those who hope to be regarded as such, to advocate for things that not so long ago the whole civilized world deemed unthinkable. Who would have thought a mere generation ago, that elective abortion (abortion on demand) would come to be regarded as a fundamental human right? Who would have thought a mere generation ago, that we would today be debating not simply homosexual practice, but homosexual *marriage*? Who would have thought that we would be talking openly about making decisions about medical treatment from a cost-analysis perspective with euthanasia being one of the options on the table for discussion? Who would have thought that we'd be discussing what it means to be a "person" in terms of what a person can *do* instead of what a person *is*? Peter Singer argues, as did Joseph Fletcher before him, that

personhood consists of rationality and self-consciousness, so that some human beings (like newborn infants and people with advanced Alzheimer's disease or other severe cognitive disabilities) are not persons. Therefore they are not entitled to the rights of persons, and killing them can be justified.

Not only this, but we are told that some animals show signs of rationality and self-consciousness (including whales, dolphins, monkeys, dogs, cats, pigs, seals, bears, cattle, sheep, and possibly all mammals), so that killing them should be considered immoral. Killing a healthy dog, we're told, is worse than killing a newborn infant or grandma with Alzheimer's.²

Richard John Neuhaus explained how this sort of things happens.

Thousands of ethicists and bioethicists, as they are called, professionally guide the unthinkable on its passage through the debatable on its way to becoming the justifiable, until it is finally established as the unexceptional.³

And this has happened over and over and over, with many different issues. We keep extending the limits of what we think is acceptable. Where one generation stops short because it has reached the edge of its comfort zone, the next generation pushes still further.

² See Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2000), pp. 14-15; Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Immorality* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966); Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

³ Cited in Wesley J. Smith, *Culture of Death*, p. 8

Robert Lewis Dabney spoke of this tendency. He said, "In our day, innovations march with so rapid a stride that they quite take away one's breath. The fantastical project of yesterday, which as mentioned only to be ridiculed, is to-day the audacious reform, and will be to-morrow the accomplished fact."⁴

This is what happened with abortion. We didn't move in one full jump from abortion being illegal to abortion on demand. It was by degrees. It was rather quick, but it was by degrees. First it was allowed in the first trimester when a woman's health was at risk. Then the definition of health was broadened to include mental and emotional health. Then it was extended into the second trimester, and then into the third, and finally up to term with the gruesome procedure of partial-birth abortion. But it didn't happen overnight. Once we got comfortable with one form, under limited circumstances, it became easier to consider another form under broader circumstances. But it was inevitable from the beginning that we would end up with full abortion on demand. If you grant the premises of the pro-abortion side, that the unborn child is not a person, you necessarily grant the conclusion of abortion on demand. There were those who saw it coming—those who were adept at tracing out the consequences of ideas. But the majority of people were asleep.

⁴ Robert Lewis Dabney, *Discussions*, vol. IV, *Secular* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1994), p. 489

We find the same sort of progression with respect to the acceptance of homosexual practice. First came the decriminalizing of homosexual acts. Then came laws preventing discrimination in hiring and renting. Then came the granting of health benefits to the partners of homosexual employees, as if the partner was a spouse. Now there is the move to legalize homosexual marriage. Some states have already done so. Mark my word, other states will be required to do so also, because of the full faith and credit clause of the Constitution. State officials will not have the will to resist. They will offer some token resistance, but they will eventually give in. As a culture we have already accepted the premises upon which the argument for homosexual marriage is built. The conclusion necessarily follows.

The same is true with respect to practice of euthanasia.

We have a love affair with death. "All who hate me," wisdom says, "love death." These are all life and death issues. Abortion ends in the death of the baby, and the death of the mother's conscience. Homosexuality by its very nature is unproductive of life, and its practice literally leads to death. Studies have shown that the average lifespan of homosexuals is 24 years shorter than heterosexuals.

Solomon tells us,

Let your eyes look directly forward,
and your gaze be straight before you.
Ponder the path of your feet
then all your ways will be sure (Prov. 4:25-26)

But instead, as a culture, we are like a fool stepping over the edge of a cliff, blithely unaware of our danger.

We must have our minds trained to think biblically about good and evil. We must take God's definitions as describing the way the world really is.