

Proverbs 9

Wisdom's Feast and Folly's Famine

Sunday, April 25, 2010

Introduction

In chapter 9 we have what we might call the *conclusion* of the *introduction* of the book. We have the epilogue of the prologue. Remember what I told you before that chapters 1-9 contain introductory material for the book as a whole. The individual proverbial sayings that we normally associate with the book of Proverbs don't actually begin until chapter 10. Chapters 1-9 are all introduction. So you see, when I preach for 20 or 30 minutes just to set up the sermon, just to introduce the subject, I'm being biblical! I'm following in the footsteps of Solomon.

Well, today we're not going to be spending a lot of time setting things up. There are a couple of things, however, that I do want to point out as far as the literary structure of the passage goes, because they are instructive.

The passage can be broken down into three main sections. We have:

- I. Lady Wisdom making her appeal to the simple (vv. 1-6)
- II. An interlude: a contrast between how a wise man and a fool receive correction (vv. 7-12)
- III. The Woman Folly making her appeal to the simple (vv. 13-18)

Each section contains six verses. The verse divisions are all very natural divisions of the text. There's nothing at all artificial about them, or about the threefold division of the chapter. Sometimes scholars and preachers like to find these nice, neat little units so that their readers or listeners will think them clever or something, or because they're trying come up with a mnemonic device to help people remember the material, or the preacher needs a three point outline because that's what he's been taught to do at seminary; but it's all an imposition on the text. But here, there is, in the original composition as given to us by Solomon, a symmetry and a balance in the material that are really quite artfully done.

The whole chapter is a summary of everything that went before. There are two invitations, one given by wisdom, the other by folly, both of whom are competing for the attention of the young and those who are simple or naïve. Wisdom is presented as laboring diligently to prepare a beautiful and well-built home and to provide a rich and delectable feast for whoever will listen to her.

Folly also has made preparations and invited guests to a feast, but it's the fellowship of the wicked, and it ends in death. But listen first to what is said of wisdom.

1 Wisdom has built her house;
 She has hewn her seven pillars.

It's a beautiful home. It's a mansion. It's well-built. It has seven pillars. And all who would be wise are welcome to enter.

2a She has slaughtered her beasts;

Notice the plural—beasts. There's an abundance of food. She's preparing a lavish feast. There's going to be more than enough food to satisfy everyone there.

It's likely that the plural implies not just several of the same kind of animal, but of different kinds. In other words, there will be variety: rib eye steaks, fillet mignon—cooked however you like them; there's venison and mutton, too, poultry and wild fowl, pork chops...wait a minute, *not* pork chops. This is before Christ; the kosher laws are still in effect. But there is every kind of meat that anyone in Israel could desire.

The imagery is that wisdom itself is desirable, tasty, satisfying. Wisdom has slaughtered her beasts...

2b She has mixed her wine;

A hearty merlot to go with the beef. A Cabernet for the leg of lamb. A Chardonnay for the fowl.

He mentions *mixed* wine. This is a reference to wine flavored with various fruits and spices, which was considered a special luxury. In the Song of Solomon, the bride says to her beloved,

I would lead you and bring you

into the house of my mother—
she who used to teach me.
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
the juice of my pomegranate (Song 8:2)

So Lady Wisdom has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;

2c She has also set her table.

Do you see? Everything is ready to be enjoyed.

3 She has sent out her young women to call
from the highest places in the town,
4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"
To him who lacks sense she says,
5 "Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Leave your simple ways, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

Wisdom is calling out, inviting everyone to come taste of her feast.

There is now an interlude of sorts before we get to the corresponding section that deals with Folly's invitation. In this middle section we have a contrast sketched between how the wise man and the fool responds to wisdom's invitation, and it has to do in large measure with how one receives correction.

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

I'm telling you, you are playing with your *life* if you attempt to correct a scoffer! A scoffer is someone who is consciously and willfully perverse, one who knows the right way of the Lord, but prefers to do evil.¹ And he mocks at God and at the things of God.

Understand that it's not simply that he doesn't choose God's way. It's not that he is simply indifferent. He *hates* God's way. And in order to strengthen his self-justification for rejecting God's way, he mocks it. If he can make light of it, if he can mock it, and even mock God himself, and if he can bring other people to do so as well, then he can drown out the voice of his conscience.

You know, it's a funny thing. The scoffer is created by God, and created in the image of God. And he lives in a world that God has made, which is governed by laws that God enforces. He can't escape God. Everywhere he turns, he bumps into him. There are reminders of God everywhere. And with every reminder of God there is a pang of conscience. And he doesn't like it. And so, to encourage themselves, the wicked band together and they play a game. The game is called, "Let's pretend." Let's pretend there's no god. Let's pretend there is no law but the law we make for ourselves. Let's pretend we're in charge. This game was John Lennon's inspiration, although he called the game by a different name. He called it "imagine".

Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us

¹ See Soncino Books of the Bible, *Proverbs*, p. 53

Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today (THIS IS THE VERY *ESSENCE* OF FOLLY!)

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

If you imagine hard enough, and if enough people around you are imagining it too, it helps silence the voice of conscience. This is why scoffers surround themselves with others who are just like them, in order to reinforce their convictions, or should I say their *anti*-convictions. This is why they seek legitimacy by having laws recognize and protect their behavior. In their mind, that's the ultimate measure of legitimacy, to have the laws of the nation endorse their behavior—that their behavior be accorded a protected legal status. Think about it. Why would homosexuals want the right of marriage? The legal status of marriage is largely for the purpose of safeguarding the legitimacy of the children born to the union and providing a basis for the bequeathing of wealth from one generation to the next. But gays and lesbians are not capable of having children. Their union is necessarily barren. It's unfruitful. It has no future.

No, they seek the right to marry, not for the sake of safeguarding their children's inheritance, nor to safeguard the inviolability of their union—studies have shown that homos are far more promiscuous with or without marriage than heteros—not that heteros have done much to protect the sanctity of marriage by the way. We have trashed marriage by legalizing no-fault divorce and by jumping in and out of marriages right and left. If marriage were actually something held sacred, nobody would take the move to legalize gay marriage seriously. There would be no move. It's only because we've trashed it; it's only because we've already destroyed marriage, that there's a move to legalize gay marriage.

Christians sometimes ask me, "Do you think God will judge America if we legalize gay marriage?" No, gay marriage *is* God's judgment on America for our treating hetero marriage like it's a big nothing.

But scoffers scoff in order to silence their own conscience, and in order to silence *you*. Someone once asked, "How do you refute a sneer?" How indeed? If you correct someone and he tries to excuse himself by pleading extenuating circumstances, or he denies that what he did was wrong, or he tries to find some rationalization for his behavior, you can reason with him. But if he just laughs at you, if he just scoffs at the truth, what can you do?

The attitude of the scornful, to jest over serious matters, makes them impervious to correction and reproof. A popular adage states: One scornful word wards off one hundred reproofs.²

But it's worse than this. It's just as Jesus said, "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" (Matt. 7:6).

"Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury" (v. 7). Look out! He's coming after you!

8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you,
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Do you see the difference between wisdom and folly? A fool hates those who correct him. He doesn't want to admit he's wrong. He doesn't want to change his thinking or his ways. He wants what he wants and he doesn't want anyone interfering with it.

A wise man, however, will listen to reproof; and he will love you for giving it to him. Why? Because a wise man is interested in gaining wisdom, not in projecting the illusion that he is always right.

The essence of a fool's folly is that he is unteachable. He *will* not receive instruction—at least nothing that is not in accord with what he wishes to be the case.

² Soncino Books of the Bible, *Proverbs*, p. 53

Here's a question for you: can you take correction? Can you take correction, or when someone offers correction, do you take offense instead? Are you humble enough to admit it when you have done wrong?

Proverbs has a great deal to say about these things.

19:25

25:12

27:6

Let us look also at **Ecclesiastes 7:5**. A rebuke is not a pleasant thing at the time at which it is administered, is it? But when heeded, it yields blessing.

Listen also to what David has to say in **Psalms 141:5**.

"Reprove a wise man, and he will love you." He goes on to say,

- 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
- 10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
- 11 For by me your days will be multiplied,
and years will be added to your life.
- 12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

Then comes the way of the Foolish Woman... vv. 13-18

Lady Wisdom and the Woman Folly Contrasted

Lady Wisdom	The Woman Folly
<p>¹ Wisdom has built her house she has hewn her seven pillars. ² She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. ³ She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town,</p>	<p>¹³ The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. ¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house, she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, ¹⁵ calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way,</p>
<p>⁴ "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, ⁵ "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."</p>	<p>¹⁶ "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense 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.</p>