

## LISTEN TO WISDOM'S INVITATION

Proverbs 8:1-6, 17-21, 32-36; 9:12-18

A group of kids was out having a good time and the guy who drove drank too much. One of the group refused to ride. Everyone told him that he was silly, but he still refused to ride. The drunken driver was speeding, a wreck happened and all the kids in the car were seriously injured. That really didn't happen that way. No. The kid who refused to ride eventually gave in and was in the car, also. He spent two weeks in the hospital and four months of rehab with limited activity. One of the other kids had a broken neck. The driver of the car was in a coma and had brain damage. How valuable is knowing and doing what is right? How can we put a price on WISDOM? Is that story true? Yes, it is. It happened several years ago to the son of a lady with whom I worked.

Each of you could relate stories that validate the value of doing what is wise. You have seen wisdom at work and you have seen folly that leads to trouble. Wise persons learn from what they observe but the foolish must experience it for themselves; that is, "learn it the hard way." The message of the Word of God that relates to interpersonal relationships and our daily conduct is one that calls us to do wise things. We relate Wisdom with the character of God. The writer of the Proverbs also saw Wisdom as being associated with God.

If you received invitations in the mail to attend two different parties or events that were happening at the same time in two different locations that would make it impossible to attend both events, then you need to make a decision of which party to attend and then respond to those who invited you. That is sort of like life itself. We have to make choices. Solomon used this idea in his teaching about the invitation from Wisdom and the invitation from Folly.

### Wisdom's Invitation – 8:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice? <sup>2</sup> On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand; <sup>3</sup> Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out: <sup>4</sup> "To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men. <sup>5</sup> "O naive ones, understand prudence; And, O fools, understand wisdom. <sup>6</sup> "Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things. Proverbs 8:1-6 (NASB95)

The invitation from Wisdom is posted for all to see along the paths that we take in the normal and typical activities of daily living. You can think of this invitation as being like a giant billboard along the road that is easy to see but it is not obtrusive. You may also notice the invitation being posted at the intersection of two roads, at the city limit signs and the entrance to various buildings. The invitation notice is everywhere a choice of alternatives is present. Some have compared the invitation from Wisdom to that in Isaiah 55 where those who are thirsty are invited to come and drink freely.

The invitation is extended to all mankind, but especially to those who are inexperienced and those who are not knowledgeable about how life really works. We could think of the invitation being cast in a way to appeal to those who are really struggling in life. The promise included in the invitation is like the promises of a seminar in managing your person finances by adopting sound practices and making good decision. The invitation of Wisdom includes a promise that those who accept the invitation will hear of a better way (nobler way) and can avoid mistakes by learning the "right things."

### RSVP Required; Consequences Confirmed – 8:17-21

<sup>17</sup> "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me. <sup>18</sup> "Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. <sup>19</sup> "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield *better* than

choicest silver. <sup>20</sup> “I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, <sup>21</sup> To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. Proverbs 8:17-21 (NASB95)

If we get a written invitation to an event, then we will respond to that invitation. The response may be to ignore it, to decline the invitation, or to attend the event. Many who see the signs and hear the call will simply ignore the chance to attend because of lack of interest or being too busy with other priorities. Some will notice the invitation and decide that they would prefer to attend another event because they don't value the outcome or results of attending the wisdom event. Some will actually appreciate the benefits of wise choices. Only those who love wisdom enough to look for it and find it will actually benefit from it.

The first part of verse 17 would seem to be a “less than divine” interactive response. It causes us to think in terms of human or worldly response. What we typically think of as a divine characteristic is found in a passage such as John 3:16 that tells us “For God so loved the world that He gave . . .” What verse 17 tells is that Wisdom is a lady and she will not force her favors (benefits) on those refuse them.

In His love, God has made wisdom and all the benefits of wisdom are available to everyone who will accept, own and cherish those benefits. The benefits include riches and honor which are important in interacting with people in this earthly realm of our present existence. We tend to think of riches as being money; however, true riches are good relationships with others, having pleasant surroundings, having a positive outlook on life, good health, good friends, peace of mind, and enough physical resources to meet the common physical needs. There are also benefits that go beyond the present and accompany us into the eternal realm. These are wealth that has spiritual value and being in a right relationship with God. We recall that Jesus advised us to “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven” since these will be there for us in eternity.

These “fruits of wisdom” are the things that produce happiness and joy in our lives and are far more valuable than silver and gold that those who have a worldly outlook seem to value. Silver and gold cannot buy happiness and joy, they cannot buy honor, and may actually be detrimental to having peace of mind and true friends.

If we are going to seek and find Wisdom, then we need to know where to look for her. Verse 20 discloses where Wisdom can be found. The locations are the paths of justice and the ways of righteousness. When we join Wisdom in walking these same paths, then we will benefit from true wealth that comes from wise decisions and appropriate actions. The only thing missing is knowing the locations of these paths and ways. The word of God, His commandments, and His precepts define the paths of justice and the ways of righteousness.

#### Acquiring the Fruits of Wisdom – 8:32-36

<sup>32</sup> “Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. <sup>33</sup> “Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect *it*. <sup>34</sup> “Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. <sup>35</sup> “For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the LORD. <sup>36</sup> “But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.” Proverbs 8:32-36 (NASB95)

Given that Wisdom is eternal and is a part of the character of God and is valued by God, we ought to heed the words of Wisdom. There is an element of faith in responding to Wisdom's invitation. We have to believe that the promised blessings will be a reality. The blessings are for those who “keep Wisdom's ways.” There appears to be two actions on our part that are required to produce the beneficial outcome. The first is to “heed” instruction or discipline. The idea of the word “heed” goes beyond just listening and hearing, but involves “doing” or putting into practice the concepts that are taught. This is the same message that Jesus taught His disciples about “hearing and doing” what He taught them. We remember that passage in terms a house

built on rock and a house built on sand. The wise hear and do (rock foundation) and the foolish hear and do not follow through (sand foundation). The frightening thing about this allegory is that both persons had the same information (knowledge) available to them. Just knowing is not enough.

The second requirement is to be persistent and faithfully follow the “hearing and doing” in all situations no matter where or what is happening. Is there anything that we do in life that is not worth doing well? Do we practice discipline in even the simple and mundane parts and events of our everyday lives? Most of us, will put forth the effort and the disciplined behavior in the high profiles things we do, but we tend to be less than diligent in the things that are out of sight and out of mind. (It was said of Jesus in Mark 7:37 “He has done all things well.”)

Another element of this faithfulness that goes beyond wherever and whatever is whenever. Notice in verse 34 that we are to be in tune and alert to hearing wisdom by watching daily at Wisdom’s gate and waiting (daily) at her door. This “way of living” is not a “one and done” situation.

We could make the argument that one of the rewards of wisdom is being wise. This is like the motto of MGM Studios: “Art for the sake of art.” I knew an atheist who made the argument that he always obeyed the law since it kept him out of problems and he did not need the hassle and complications of breaking the law. However, the ultimate reward of wisdom is not just wisdom but is life and favor from the Lord. It is important to keep this “longer term, bigger picture” of life because there may be times when we experience persecution for doing what is right and undergo a “Job-like” experience. In such times, there could be a temptation to wonder if it was worth the discipline and the hard work.

The other side of that coin is that those who do not value and actually disrespect wisdom will eventually wind up hurting themselves in this life and missing out on life eternal. There are other alternatives to the invitation from Wisdom.

### Folly’s Invitation – 9:13-18

<sup>13</sup> The woman of folly is boisterous, *She is* naive and knows nothing. <sup>14</sup> She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city, <sup>15</sup> Calling to those who pass by, Who are making their paths straight: <sup>16</sup> “Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,” And to him who lacks understanding she says, <sup>17</sup> “Stolen water is sweet; And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.” <sup>18</sup> But he does not know that the dead are there, *That* her guests are in the depths of Sheol. Proverbs 9:13-18 (NASB95)

In the initial verses of this ninth chapter, we find that Wisdom’s invitations which are displayed along the roads of life, at the intersection of highways and entrances to building is carried out by her attendants identified as young maidens. This action is one of taking initiative in a pleasantly inviting way.

Folly’s actions are presented in contrast with Wisdom’s behavior. Wisdom is presented as pleasant and inviting while Folly is boisterous and loud. In this setting Folly knows that she doesn’t need to take any initiative but to be available in places that are frequented by those who are searching for something.

Wisdom is associated with knowledge and mature understanding, while Folly is portrayed as undisciplined, and ignorant. She is attractive but unruly. Here, as elsewhere, Folly offers immediate gratification whereas Wisdom offers long-term satisfaction. Therefore, the appeal is to the young and naive. If you offer a child one piece of candy right now or promise him or her five pieces two hours from now, what do you think the child will choose?

Unlike Lady Wisdom, who prepared for and searched out her guests Folly merely sat at the door and called out from the high places of the city. In other places in Scripture, high places

are associated with locations where people go to worship. So in her arrogance, we find Folly seated like a queen on a throne in an effort to appeal to those who passed by. Notice that her appeal is to those characterized as naive or unknowing.

Some commentators see this as the appeal of false religions that would entice those who are seekers but are not well grounded in the truth of the Scripture to be sidetracked into the false religion's cult-like practices. The ultimate picture of Folly is seen in the picture of the prostitute in John's description of false religion presented in the seventeenth chapter of Revelations.

The appeal from Folly to illicit relationships and improper behavior is in stark contrast to the appeal from Wisdom to do what is right and pleasing to God. The chapter closes with a quick glimpse of the prostitute (Folly) as she calls to the same simple ones and invites them to her house. But if they accept her invitation, they'll be attending a funeral and not a feast – and it will be their own funeral!

### The Choice is Ours – 9:12

<sup>12</sup>If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it. Proverbs 9:12 (NASB95)

Life is made up of choices. We make the choices and we reap the problems or rewards that are the results of those choices. We might reject Wisdom; however, that does not hurt Wisdom. It only hurts us. We do not invalidate wisdom simply because we do not practice it. It may seem that way in that we can often do something foolish and not suffer any immediate consequences from our actions; however, events will finally catch up with foolish actions and the price is always too high. The best thing for us to do is to always choose the path of wisdom. It would be what God would do and since we have been created in His image, then we should acquire His character. The way we accomplish that is to listen to the Word of God that is the source of wisdom. Choosing God's way brings happiness and life and all of us want that.