

PURSUING WISDOM

Proverbs 8:6-21

If we 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 we would need to make a decision regarding which party to attend and then respond to those who invited us. 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.

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 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 present everywhere a choice of alternatives is encountered. 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 (that could apply to each of us).

Valuable – 8:6-11

⁶ “Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips will reveal right things. ⁷ “For my mouth will utter truth; And wickedness is an abomination to my lips. ⁸ “All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing crooked or perverted in them. ⁹ “They are all straightforward to him who understands, And right to those who find knowledge. ¹⁰ “Take my instruction and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold. ¹¹ “For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things cannot compare with her. Proverbs 8:6–11 (NASB95)

These verses are presented in a way so that Wisdom is speaking in the first person and directly to the reader. 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.” Here we see that “noble things” are comparable or parallel to “right things.” In the time this was written, people of nobility were expected to conduct themselves in ways that were appropriate to their privileged position in life. It was almost as if those of nobility were expected to set the standard for people to follow. As we have seen in recent times, this expectation has fallen by the wayside as so many who were born into nobility have not lived up to the sterling character and behavior befitting their status.

There is actually a direct application of this expectation of those born into nobility and proper behavior to us as Christians and our behavior. As born-again believers we have a child-Father relationship with God and as such we are in a position of “nobility” being children of the King. From this privileged position we are expected to live our lives in ways appropriate to that relationship.

In these verses we can make the logical connection that Christ is the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24) and as Wisdom speaks to us, we are to listen as if these are words from Christ directly to us. The “noble things” are indeed the “right things” but they are also described as “truth” in the first part of verse seven and as “righteousness” in the first part of verse eight. We also find the contrasts of truth and righteousness mentioned here as “wickedness and perverted speech” which are to be avoided by those of us who are described as “kings and priests unto God.”

We find additional insight as we read that Wisdom's message is presented to us in a "straightforward" or direct way that does not have hidden meaning. The opposite of this is what is found when dealing with those who have hidden agendas and the words they speak can have double meanings which can be used to deceive people who are not well informed or knowledgeable. Those who actually do have knowledge and understanding will recognize the "correctness" of the voice of Wisdom and will be benefitted.

The reason why a person would not heed or follow the voice of Wisdom is because they are tempted with "desirable" outcomes if they choose the way of Folly. Things that do appeal to people are pictured in the above verses as silver, gold, jewels, and all desirable things, but such things without knowledge, understanding and wisdom are not satisfying and have no eternal value. What Folly fails to tell those who are tempted is that all the things that have lasting value in this life (and beyond) already belong to those who live wisely as we will see in the following passage.

Powerful – 8:12-16

¹² "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion. ¹³ "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate. ¹⁴ "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. ¹⁵ "By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. ¹⁶ "By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly. Proverbs 8:12–16 (NASB95)

In verse twelve we find Wisdom's alternative virtues to the improper characteristics mentioned in the second part of verse eight. In verse eight in the KJV we find the word "froward" which is an obsolete English word which has implications of "being shrewd with a wrong or twisted intent." The virtuous alternative found in verse twelve is rendered as "prudence" in most English translations. This word is closely related to the idea of being "crafty with good intent" which some might also describe as shrewd (but in a good way).

The parallel idea of "froward" in verse eight is translated as "perverse" which has almost identical meaning to "froward" but with more emphasis on the "crooked or twisted" meaning of the word. The alternative virtue found in Wisdom is "knowledge of witty inventions" as rendered in the KJV. Some of the more recent translations use the word "discretion" which is exactly what is needed when we encounter "perversity" in our interactions with other people.

The foundational basis and motivation for the characteristics of Wisdom are inexorably linked to honoring God who hates evil. Because God hates evil, then we are to align ourselves with God and we are also to hate evil. This was the position Wisdom took in hating four named examples of evil. These are pride, arrogance, a way of life contrary to Godly precepts, and speaking deceptively. While Wisdom hates or rejects such improper behavior, Wisdom embraces counsel or good advice and long-term success that come from sound and wise practices. These good virtues then become a part of the make up or essence of Wisdom so that understanding and effectiveness (power and ability) defines the person of Wisdom.

As we finish up this group of verses we come back to the idea of nobility in that those who are successful in roles of leadership (kings, princes, and judges) follow the path of Wisdom rather than an evil path that God hates. Those who are just and righteous in their reign are those who practice the virtues of wisdom and reject or hate the things that wisdom hates.

Obtainable – 8:17-21

¹⁷ "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me. ¹⁸ "Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. ¹⁹ "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield *better* than choicest silver. ²⁰ "I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, ²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. Proverbs 8:17-21 (NASB95)

Our response to Wisdom's invitation may be to ignore it, to decline the invitation, or to respond in an affirmative way. 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 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 in terms of money or material things; 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 have spiritual value and are on the path of 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 true 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 (or "substance" - KJV) 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.

The Hebrew word translated as "substance" in older translations and as "wealth" in newer translation actually means "being or existence." If we bring New Testament insight into this verse and remember that Jesus Christ is Wisdom personified, then "substance" or existence could be related to the new birth in which we become "new beings" in Christ. The second part of verse 21 "that I may fill their treasuries" then takes on a new perspective when we realize that it is God Himself who fills us with His Spirit and is our greatest "Treasure."

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.”)

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.

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 which is the source of wisdom. Choosing God’s way brings happiness and life and all of us want that.