

Two Women from Proverbs

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Introduction.

- A. Life is filled with choices. Every day, we are given countless opportunities to pick between God and Satan, to take a step closer to heaven or take a step closer to hell. Decisions that we make that will never appear in the pages of the local newspaper may well have eternal significance for us. Of course, Satan doesn't want us to realize that. He doesn't want us to carefully consider the consequences of our actions and make decisions with eternity in view. If we think that way, we're certain not to serve him. What Satan wants, then, is for us not to think, for us to drift toward Niagara Falls with everybody else, not thinking about what we're doing, not contemplating where we're headed. The more thoughtlessly we choose, the happier the devil is.
- B. That means, of course, that God takes the opposite perspective. He doesn't want us to live unexamined lives. Every hour of every day, He wants us thinking things through, carefully weighing all the options presented to us, considering pros and cons. The more we lead thoughtful lives, the more likely we are to go to heaven.
- C. That's an easy concept to grasp, but it's a hard one to put in practice. Just like our minds can be apt to wander when we're singing together in the assembly, they're apt to wander in life too. We forget to think things through, or worse yet, choose not to think things through, and all of a sudden, we find ourselves in all kinds of spiritual messes. That's why God in His word lays the potential consequences out as vividly as possible. Sometimes these vivid descriptions are historical; sometimes they are not. Sometimes, like the vision of the statue in Daniel, God uses imagery and visions to get His point across. We see some of the most compelling personifications of the choices that we make in the story of two women from Proverbs.

I. Wisdom.

- A. The first woman to appear in the text of Proverbs is Wisdom. We see her most vividly presented in Proverbs 9:1-6. Solomon describes her as a woman who has built her own feasting hall and prepared a banquet for anyone to eat. Then, to make sure that as many people as possible will take advantage of what she offers, she sends out messengers to invite them to her feast and goes and appeals to still others herself. The food that she promises, though, isn't food that will fill our bellies. It's food that will fill our minds and make us wise.
- B. The point of this description is to show us how readily available wisdom is to us. Of course, there is no actual little wisdom woman who scampers into our heads and teaches us things, but it is true that if we desire wisdom, wisdom is there for the taking. We often hear people talking about learning in the school of hard knocks and how experience is the best teacher, but our search for wisdom can be much shorter, easier, and more pleasant than that. If we learn from the mistakes of others, that saves us from the misery of repeating them on our own. Better still, if we all just listen to God, that saves everyone from going through misery at all.
- C. The promise that wisdom makes is the promise of **UNDERSTANDING**. Solomon explains this in Proverbs 2:6-10. There are two main things that we need to get out of this. First, it tells us what the immediate effects of becoming wise are. Wisdom is what gives us discernment, the ability to study two choices and figure out which one will yield the best earthly result and please God as well. It teaches us to deal rightly with the people in our lives, to avoid the disastrous mistakes that many people make, and to be righteous. Without wisdom, all of these important and beneficial things won't be present in our lives, and we'll suffer for it.
- D. Second, this tells us that true wisdom is given by God, and the only understanding that truly matters is the understanding of His will. It's extremely important that we see this, because in the world around us, there are many different entities that claim to be sources of wisdom. I can remember, back when I was going to law school, the big Scientology bookstore right across the street from the UT campus, where presumably people went to learn about L. Ron Hubbard's insights into life and happiness. Now, it's a free country, and I guess people have the right to search for wisdom wherever they want, but they're only actually going to find wisdom when they seek it from God through His word. Any other source of wisdom is going to let us down.
- E. Once we gain this understanding, it will have two main effects in our lives. First, wisdom will bring us **HONOR**. Look with me at Proverbs 4:7-9. The image that Solomon uses here is of the lady Wisdom putting a crown on our heads, and if we pursue wisdom in our lives, it will surely crown our efforts with success. Wisdom is what trains us to make good decisions, and those good decisions will yield good fruit. Very often, that happens because wisdom points us to courses of action that lead to our long-term best interest rather than our short-term pleasure. This is true in something as prosaic and everyday as procrastination. Back when I was in high school, I was a terrible procrastinator. I can remember one English class in particular that I took. In that class, you could turn in essays late for a grade penalty of two percent a day. After a week, the teacher would no longer accept them. Because I was lazy and foolish, I turned in every essay the entire year late, on the last day on which it would be accepted, and as a result, I got grades in English that were a full letter grade below what I should have gotten. Young folks, don't do that! That's dumb! Now that I'm older

and a little bit wiser, I know not to procrastinate on my sermons like that. Because I work them up a week or more in advance, I can make sure that they're as good as they can be, and I'm as successful as I can be.

- F. More importantly, though, wisdom brings us **LIFE**. We see Solomon's discussion of this in Proverbs 3:1-4. Even aside from the immediate success that wisdom brings, it generates long-term success too. As we make wise decisions, they'll protect us from death. Sometimes, this death is physical. My grandfather was a lifelong smoker, which was a foolish decision for him to make. Predictably, he got lung cancer and died before he turned 70. I don't smoke, and though I don't know how many days I'll have on the earth, I don't have to worry about any of the deadly long-term consequences of smoking. Even more importantly than that, wisdom gives us spiritual life. As we avoid all the things that God has told us in His word are unwise, not only do we have better lives here, we please Him and inherit the promise that He makes to the righteous of eternal life.

II. Folly.

- A. Of course, Wisdom is only one of these two metaphorical woman. The other one is Folly. We see her described in Proverbs 9:13-18. As we compare Wisdom and Folly in Proverbs, though, there's one immediate difference that leaps out. Wisdom has no real-world counterpart, but Solomon means for Folly to stand for real-life women who tempt men to sin sexually. The early part of Proverbs is filled with story after story about the foolish young man and the adulterous woman who lures him in to his doom. Of course, this isn't a type of woman that has vanished from the earth. Everywhere from the classroom to the office to the Internet, we see evil women in various forms who tempt men to sin in various ways. However, sexual sin is not all that Folly is about in Proverbs. She also stands for the foolishness that allures men and women alike to evil.
- B. Notice too that just like Wisdom is actively seeking the young and naïve to educate them, Folly is actively seeking them to destroy them. This too is all around us. We certainly don't live in a temptation-free world. Nobody says, "I want to sin, but I just can't think of what to do wrong." Instead, Satan is very quick to present us with every allurements that he thinks will lead us to violate God's law. Folly is everywhere.
- C. The big lure that Folly uses to entice men is **PLEASURE**. The sales pitch of the adulterous woman is vividly illustrated in Proverbs 7:16-20. No man was ever seduced by a woman who presented herself as unlovely and adulterous as dangerous and unfulfilling. Instead, from the devil on down, those who are intent on leading us to sin do the best to polish up that sin as much as they can. Sexual sin in particular can seem alluring, especially to those who are young and inexperienced. Modern American culture presents fornication as glamorous and inevitable, and it implies that those who don't sin are losers who are missing out.
- D. Even adultery, which used to be so universally despised, is beginning to pick up a little more glamour. The other day, Lauren had the radio on, and it was playing a fairly new song that I hadn't heard before. I thought it was pretty and told her so, but she asked me if I was joking. After I listened to the words a little bit more, I realized that this pretty, lyrical song was about a man trying to seduce a married woman.
- E. Nor is illicit sex the only sin presented in this light. We are constantly bombarded with messages that tell us that we can find satisfaction in covetousness, dishonesty, false religion, and every other work of the flesh that we can imagine. That's just Folly's same old appeal to pleasure that has been around since the beginning.
- F. Of course, when Folly attempts to ensnare us in all of these various evil things, she doesn't mention the price. If we listen to her and go where she wants, she will lead us first of all to **DISHONOR**. Solomon warns us about this in Proverbs 6:32-35. When we give into sexual sin, that sin isn't going to take us anywhere good. I can't imagine what it would be like to cheat on my wife and then have to face her and tell her about it. I can't imagine what it would be like to look a friend or a brother in the eye and tell him that I had wronged him with his wife. For any disciple of Jesus, it doesn't get much lower than that. What a shameful experience!
- G. Nor are the body blows to our pride and our reputation the only consequences of the foolishness of sin. Financially speaking, divorce is the worst thing that can happen to us. Our bank accounts come through life-threatening illnesses better than they do divorces. Even more prosaic sins, like laziness, can have terrible financial consequences. I heard a story once about a man who got so caught up in playing computer games that he just stopped showing up for work on time and got fired. Regardless of what the temptation is, we can be sure what Folly will give us. She might promise short-term pleasure, but we'll end up with long-term pain.
- H. Folly won't stop there, though. In fact, if we become disciples of Folly, we will inherit **DEATH** for our foolish mistake. Consider Solomon's words in Proverbs 7:24-27. Sometimes, this is quite literal. During the Civil War, a Confederate general named Earl Van Dorn was shot to death. However, the man who pulled the trigger wasn't a Union soldier. It was a jealous husband. Through the centuries, lots of adulterous men have lost their lives in just the same way. Even more have died as a result of drinking, hot tempers, and so forth.
- I. However, even if we escape the physical consequences of our foolish sin, we can be certain that we will not escape its spiritual consequences. On the day of judgment, every one of us must stand trial before God. There won't be any need of evidence or witnesses, because God will already know everything. There won't be any need of a jury, because God will be the Judge. Without fail, he will give to every man what he has earned. If we have lived our lives in unrepentant folly, His word promises that He will give us death.

Conclusion. If you've been living a foolish life, now is the time to repent and return to your Lord.