



Proverbs - Chapter Eight

II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father's Invitation to Wisdom (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Contrasted with sensual allurements are the advantages of divine wisdom, which publicly invites men, offers the best principles of life, and the most valuable benefits resulting from receiving its counsel. Wisdom's relation to the divine plans and acts is introduced, as in Proverbs 3:19-20, although more fully, to commend its desirableness for men, and the whole is closed by an assurance that those finding it find God's favour, and those neglecting it ruin themselves.

Many regard the passage as a description of the Son of God by the title, 'The Gifts of Wisdom', which the older Jews used and by which Jesus is alluded to: <<*Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute"*>> (Luke 11:49), and John 1:1 describes him as 'the Word'. However, the passage may be taken as a personification of wisdom: for:

1. Although described as 'with God', wisdom is not asserted to be God.
2. The use of personal attributes is equally consistent with a personification, as with the description of a real person.
3. The personal pronouns used accord with the gender (feminine) of wisdom constantly, and are never changed to that of the person meant, as sometimes occurs in a corresponding use of spirit, which is neuter in Greek, but to which masculine pronouns are often applied: <<*He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you*>> (John 16:14), when the acts of the Holy Spirit are described.

4. Such a personification is agreeable to the style of this book, whereas no prophetic or other allusions to the Saviour or the new dispensation are found among the quotations of this book in the NT.

Nothing is lost as to the importance of this passage, which still remains a most ornate and also solemn and impressive teaching of inspiration on the value of wisdom.

II.1 Proverbs 8:1-36 - Second Wisdom Appeal

This chapter begins with a personification of wisdom as a woman calling out in the streets (vv.1-3), followed by the very words of her appeal (vv.4-36). Her discourse consists of five main sections: an address (vv.4-5), a call to listen to her instruction and the grounds for doing so (vv.6-11), a description of her righteous character and purposes (vv.12-21), a description of her divine origin and use (vv.22-31), and a concluding appeal that again addresses the children and thus evokes all the preceding paternal appeals as integral to her instruction (vv.32-36).

As in Proverbs 1:20-33, Wisdom is personified as a great lady, which helps illustrate the central message of Proverbs: the origin, existence, and purpose of true wisdom are properly framed in relationship with the covenant Lord, who is also the maker of heaven and earth. As a result, the realm of wisdom encompasses every aspect of life in every corner of creation.

II.1.i Proverbs 8:1-21 - The Gifts of Wisdom

Wisdom cries out to those who need to acquire the knowledge and understanding they require. What she speaks is righteous and true, and is of far greater importance than any material wealth that can be gained. Wisdom teaches that to fear God is to hate evil. Good kings rule according to what wisdom has to teach.

- 1 Does not wisdom call,
and 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 out:

Proverbs 8:1-3

Does not wisdom call. As before in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote here of wisdom as if she were a person - a noble, beautiful, helpful woman in contrast to the immoral woman described in Chapter 7.

On the heights, she takes her stand. Wisdom personified cries out as widely and broadly as possible. She speaks to those beside the way and at the crossroads. She makes her call in the most public of places, beside the gates, at the entry of the city. Wisdom is not hidden - it cries out to all who will listen. Derek Kidner commented, "A chapter which is to soar beyond time and space, opens at street-level, to make it clear, first, that the wisdom of God is as relevant to the shopping centre (Proverbs 8:2-3) as to heaven itself (Proverbs 8:22)."

Adam Clarke saw something wonderful in wisdom's public proclamation, and something worthy to imitate. "There are, it is true, temples, synagogues, churches, chapels, &c.; but hundreds of thousands never frequent them, and therefore do not hear the voice of truth: wisdom, therefore, must go to them, if she wishes them to receive her instructions. Hence the zealous ministers of Christ go still to the highways and hedges, to the mountains and plains, to the ships and the cottages, to persuade sinners to turn from the error of their ways, and accept that redemption which was procured by the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ."

4 'To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

5 O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.

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

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 one who understands
and right to those who find knowledge.

10 Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;

11 for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Proverbs 8:4-11

To you, O people, I call. Here, Solomon spoke for wisdom personified. This is the message she presented to men and women, all who would listen to her.

O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it. Again, the simple ones are not stupid, but are inexperienced and gullible. Wisdom does not give up on the simple ones. The simple man described in Chapter 7 seems like a lost cause, but he does not have to be. The ways of wisdom can be learned and that learning can be benefitted from. Although the simple ones, such as non-Christians today, have not embraced the covenant, they are still invited to do so.

Wisdom describes the righteous character of her speech, i.e. noble things, right, righteous, nothing twisted or crooked, in contrast to the speech of the forbidden woman described in Proverbs 2:16, 5:3, 6:24, and 7:5, and of those who use their words for wicked purposes, e.g. the one who sows discord among others in Proverbs 6:12 and 6:19. In proclaiming the upright character of her speech, Wisdom also indicates that the ability to recognise it as such requires a heart that has embraced wisdom, i.e. they are all straight to one who understands.

My mouth will utter truth. When wisdom speaks, it is the truth: <<*The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*>> (John 1:17), <<*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*>> (John 14:6), <<*When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf*>> (John 15:26), <<*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come*>> (John 16:13), <<*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*>> (John 17:17), and: <<*Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice'*>> (John 18:37). When people use lies they should not be trusted to communicate wisdom, ultimately they are serving the devil: <<*You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*>> (John 8:44). Wisdom says of her words that there is nothing crooked or perverse in them. Because of this the words can be understood; they are plain to those who can understand them. There is clarity and a straightforward character to wisdom, one that contrasts with elaborate so-called hidden truths and mysteries.

It could be said of the Scriptures in general, they are all straight to one who understands. Of course there are deep and occasionally complicated passages,

even to those who were closest to Jesus: <<*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him*>> (John 12:16), <<*Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand’*>> (John 13:7), <<*They said, ‘What does he mean by this “a little while”? We do not know what he is talking about’*>> (John 16:18), and: <<*Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures*>> (2 Peter 3:14-16), but the fundamental truths of the Bible are plain to those who trust God and honour his word. As the American author Mark Twain was reported to have said, “It’s not the parts of the Bible I cannot understand that bother me; it’s the parts that I do understand.”

All that you may desire cannot compare with her. Wisdom’s value is above silver, gold, and valuable jewels. Without wisdom, one may have the riches of this world and a miserable life. Early in his reign Solomon desired wisdom above all riches and was greatly blessed because of it: <<*It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you*>> (1 Kings 3:10-13).

¹² I, wisdom, live with prudence,
and I attain knowledge and discretion.

¹³ The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.

Proverbs 8:12-13

I, wisdom, live with prudence. Where prudence, i.e. self-control and good judgement, is found, there wisdom will be found also. A life given to impulse and extremes will not gain, appreciate, or display wisdom. Clarke observed, “Prudence is defined, wisdom applied to practice; so wherever true wisdom is, it will lead to action.” According to Solomon, this was a key purpose of his proverbs: <<*For*

learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young>> (Proverbs 1:2-4).

One of the main purposes of the fear of the Lord in Proverbs is to align a person's heart with what the Lord loves. Describing what wisdom hates, and therefore what the Lord hates, calls a person to examine his or her heart, to guard it from such things, to walk in accordance with what the Lord loves, and to seek wisdom for all relationships and interactions, which is the similar function of Proverbs 6:12-19. Whether a person's heart and path are aligned with wisdom is a recurring theme of this chapter; refer to v.17, v.21 and v.36.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Reverence for God and the wisdom that comes from it is not neutral towards evil. Like the God it respects, it hates evil, along with the pride, arrogance and perverted speech that often express evil.

- 14 I have good advice and sound wisdom;
I have insight, I have strength.
- 15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
- 16 by me rulers rule,
and nobles, all who govern rightly.
- 17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.

Proverbs 8:14-17

By me kings reign. Many gain power, stay in power, and exercise power through gaining and using wisdom. What wisdom offers to the simple is the same insight used by kings and rulers when they govern nations rightly.

Adam Clarke had an interesting thought on the phrase 'I have strength', "Speaking still of wisdom, as communicating rays of its light to man, it enables him to bring everything to his aid; to construct machines by which one man can do the work of hundreds. From it comes all mathematical learning, all mechanical knowledge; from it originally came the inclined plane, the wedge, the screw, the pulley, in all its multiplications; and the lever, in all its combinations and varieties, came from this wisdom. And all these can produce prodigies of power, far surpassing all kinds of animal energy, and all the effects of the utmost efforts of muscular force."

I love those who love me reinforces the calls to seek wisdom, e.g. as in Proverbs 2:1-4 and 4:5-7, for she will show favour and then grant multiplied benefits.

Those who seek me diligently find me reinforces the promise that the Lord will give wisdom, for example as in Proverbs 2:5-11 and James 1:5, and its benefits (vv.18-21 and v.35). Those who love and pursue wisdom will find themselves rewarded. They will find wisdom and the blessings wisdom brings, i.e. <<**Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity**>> (v.18). It could even be said that wisdom seeks out her followers to bless them: <<**endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries**>> (v.21).

- 18 Riches and honour are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
- 19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
- 20 I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
- 21 endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.

Proverbs 8:18-21

Riches and honour come with wisdom, as often happens when a society is functioning justly, but also something even greater: an unspecified kind of enduring wealth and prosperity, a fruit that is better than gold and silver, and an abundant inheritance (v.21). These are the things that God gave to Solomon when he asked for wisdom: <<**God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life'**>> (1 Kings 3:11-14). While this description would include any material blessings that come to those who seek wisdom, these things cannot compare to the greater value of what is promised here: life and favour from the Lord (v.35).

II.1.ii Proverbs 8:22-36 - Wisdom's Part in Creation

Wisdom was the first thing that God created. Therefore, all who listen to wisdom and live their lives accordingly will be blessed by God and will have life, as Jesus has promised to those who follow him: <<*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*>> (John 10:10b).

- 22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
- 23 Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
- 25 Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth –
- 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
- 27 When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
- 28 when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
- 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
- 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
- 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs 8:22-31

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work. God used wisdom and intelligence in the design of the universe. If wisdom is represented as a person, then it can be said that wisdom was with God in creation. At the first, before the beginning of the earth, God used wisdom in making something out of nothing.

The phrase The Lord created me at the beginning of his work became a key support for the teaching of an influential heretic in the early church because the verb *qanah* can mean either ‘possess’ or ‘create.’ Bishop Arius of Alexandria (circa AD 256-336) spoke for and promoted the idea that Jesus Christ was not God, much in the way modern Jehovah’s Witnesses believe. Arius used this verse from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, which puts the phrase like this: ‘The Lord created me at the beginning of his way.’ Arius argued that Jesus is the wisdom of God, and this verse spoke of his creation. If he was created, then he had a beginning and was not eternal, and if not eternal he was not God. The errors of Arius were many. On this particular passage, he exaggerated the way that wisdom in Chapter 8 is Jesus Christ. It is wonderfully true that Jesus is the wisdom of God, especially in his work on the Cross: **<<Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God>>** (1 Corinthians 1:20-24), and that Jesus became wisdom from God for all of humankind: **<<He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’>>** (1 Corinthians 1:30-31), and in Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom: **<<I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge>>** (Colossians 2:2-3). Yet it is a mistake to say that Chapter 8 describes Jesus in a sort of direct correlation. Because Jesus is God he has, expresses and demonstrates the wisdom of God; but the woman of Chapter 8 does not directly describe Jesus. A second and perhaps more fundamental error of Arius on the passage was to translate the Hebrew word *qanah* as created or birthed instead of possessed. While there is some case to be made for the idea of created or birthed, on balance the best translation is possessed, unlike the choice given in the NRSVA. It could be said that, “Chapter 8 does not directly speak of Jesus in the sense Arius meant, and if even if it did, Proverbs 8:22 does not say that the God the Father created or birthed the Son of God.”

Derek Kidner commented, “The Arians (who denied the deity of Christ) appealed to LXX’s ‘created’, to prove that Christ, the Wisdom of God, was not eternal. But our concern must be with the word’s normal meaning, and with the general sense of the passage.”

The first of his acts of long ago. The same wisdom that makes this invitation is the wisdom that was present with God when he created the world and established it as a coherent system, for Wisdom (personified) says, I was daily his delight (v.30), and: <<*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew*>> (Proverbs 3:19-20). The wisdom that enters the lives of the faithful actually enables them to participate in the rationality at the heart of things. This is why the impious are called foolish or even stupid: <<*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid*>> ((Proverbs 12:1); they are self-haters (v.36). On the question of whether the personification of Wisdom here goes beyond personification and describes an actual person, refer to Introduction: Personified Wisdom and Christ.

Before the mountains had been shaped. With poetic beauty Solomon considered many different aspects of creation and how God used wisdom to design and arrange them all. Wisdom could say, “I was beside him, like a master worker.”

Rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. The created world is so marked by God’s wise and good design and arrangement that wisdom rejoiced in it. Especially, wisdom was happy with God’s creation of man. It is sometimes thought that the creation of humankind was a problem with the design and creation of the world; in a sense, man was the purpose of creation.

Introduction to Proverbs 8:32-36

By using the address <<*And now, my children*>>, this section not only concludes Wisdom’s appeal in vv.1-31, but also draws together all of the paternal appeals as sharing her overall purpose: to extol the benefits of wisdom for faithful covenant living. The reasons given for heeding Wisdom’s call also extend to those given in the preceding appeals: they will be blessed (Proverbs 3:13 and 3:18), find life (Proverbs 2:21), and obtain favour from the Lord (Proverbs 3:4 and 3:32-33). The final statement that <<*all who hate me love death*>> presents previous warnings in stark terms: those who practice what wisdom hates (v.13) show by their affections that they are on the way that leads not to life and favour (v.35), but to injury and eventually death.

³² ‘And now, my children, listen to me:

happy are those who keep my ways.

³³ Hear instruction and be wise,

and do not neglect it.

Proverbs 8:32-33

And now, my children, listen to me. Having given her impressive résumé, now Wisdom can make a reasoned appeal that everyone should listen to her.

Happy are those who keep my ways. In sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways, the world, the flesh, and the devil want people to think that they will somehow lose by listening to wisdom and keeping her ways. The truth is that there is great blessing when her ways are kept.

Happy or, more commonly, blessed translates the Hebrew word *esher* meaning also contentment. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favour and blessing. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matthew 5:3-11; as confirmed by: <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12). The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word beatitude.

Hear instruction and be wise. Given that wisdom has proven herself to be good and reliable, and that she brings many blessings with her, people should give wisdom their attention and never disdain or neglect it.

- ³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
- ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favour from the Lord;
- ³⁶ but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death.'

Proverbs 8:34-36

Blessed or happy is the one who listens to me. This blessing comes to those who not only listen to wisdom, but are willing to inconvenience themselves to seek her. They are willing to watch daily at her gates and wait at the posts of her doors. Their pursuit of wisdom is intentional, not accidental. Clarke commented, "Wisdom is represented as having a school for the instruction of men; and seems to point out some of the most forward of her scholars coming, through their intense desire to learn, even before the gates were opened, and waiting there for admission, that they might hear every word that was uttered, and not lose one accent of the heavenly teaching. Blessed are such."

For whoever finds me finds life. Wisdom here presents two incomparable gifts, life and favour from the Lord. To love true wisdom is to receive these; to reject wisdom is to wrong one's own soul and to love death. As the apostle wrote concerning those who follow Jesus: <<***We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death***>> (1 John 3:14).