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Proverbs 8 - 9



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg offers an in-depth analysis of Proverbs 8-9 in this insightful discussion. He explains that Proverbs 8 personifies wisdom as a female figure, and discusses the relationship between wisdom and God. He highlights the importance of receiving instruction and understanding, and notes that not everyone is teachable. In chapter 9, he explains the significance of the contrasting approaches of the wise and the foolish, and emphasizes the need for a meek and quiet spirit.

Transcript

Proverbs 8 is a well-known chapter. It's quoted a great deal because of its relevance to Christ. It is a song sung by wisdom about her own virtues and about her own desirability and inviting the sons of men to basically seek her and to obtain her.

We've had a shorter version of a similar kind of a thing in chapter 1, where wisdom also sang a song, a brief poem to the sons of men, to the simple and those who are not yet wise, to seek wisdom and obtain it, and shared that it will be very profitable for them if they do, and if they do not, the time will come when they will wish they had. And yet wisdom will be not found by them at the time they cry out for it, because they had not sought it, they had not desired to hear the words of wisdom, and they had not chosen the fear of the Lord. That was the way that chapter 1 of Proverbs ended, and now we have a longer song given to it, and many of the thoughts in it, of course, have been already brought up in earlier passages, so there's going to be repetition here, but also there are statements here which many people feel apply to Jesus.

And many times Christians who teach on this will cross-reference it with 1 Corinthians 1.30, where Paul says that Christ has become unto us, and then he lists a number of things, including wisdom, righteousness, and so forth, and wisdom. So, Christ has become our wisdom. I guess that's the closest thing we have in the New Testament to a statement calling Jesus wisdom, although much of what Jesus said, and what the New Testament says in general, indicates that following Christ is the path of wisdom.

Certainly, Jesus said at the end of his Sermon on the Mount, at the end of Matthew

chapter 7, he said, Therefore, he who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken to a wise man who built his house on a rock. And we know how that story goes. And then he says, But he that hears these words of mine and does not do them, I will liken him to a foolish man who built his house on earth, or on sand.

So, this illustration of the wise man and the foolish man who built the house on the rock or on the sand is a very familiar passage to us, so we don't need to go into the details. But, suffice it to say that this comparison of the wise and the foolish is hinged on those who hear what Jesus says and either do or do not follow it. If you do not follow what Jesus says, you're foolish.

If you do follow what Jesus says, you're wise, and therefore there is a connection, obviously, to Christ and wisdom. Wisdom here, however, is, as characteristically is the case in Solomon's treatment of the subject, personified as feminine. And some people, really wishing to apply all of chapter 8 to Jesus directly, have even suggested that maybe Jesus in the Godhead was the feminine side of the Godhead or something like that.

Certainly, that is not a conclusion that is justified by this particular information, and there's no other. This chapter is not identifying Jesus as wisdom. Certainly, many of the things that are said about wisdom are true of Jesus.

In fact, what John says about the word, in the opening verses of his gospel, that all things were made through him, through the word. Wisdom also can make the same claim, God made all things through wisdom. But that doesn't mean that just because Solomon personifies wisdom here, that he intends for us to see wisdom as a living being.

As, for example, John expects us to see the word as a living he. The word is a he, is a person. But wisdom is not really a person.

Wisdom may be, in fact, exemplified in a person or in persons. Jesus certainly would be an exemplar of wisdom, but the Bible is not encouraging us to see wisdom as a conscious, personal being, as John does encourage us to see the word. And the personification of wisdom is simply a literary device.

And we personify non-personal things a lot of times. We talk about the mother country, or hurricanes are given names like they are humans, but they're not. And it's not uncommon for non-personal entities to be personified for the sake of dramatic effect.

Now, for wisdom to be personified in a female form is no doubt because he's writing to his son, a son who obviously, Solomon feels, may have an attraction to women, if he's a normal man. It's clear that Solomon has warned his son about the wrong kind of woman, suggesting that he believes his son will be attracted to women and hopes he'll be attracted to the right kind of woman. And here, wisdom is personified as definitely the right kind of woman.

You should seek for wisdom as you would seek a woman, if you're a man seeking a mate. Not that he's really being literal about that, but in a sense, the immoral woman that he keeps referring to in this section, in chapters one through nine, may be seen as also almost the embodiment of foolishness. As a certain kind of a woman.

And wisdom is another kind of a woman. There may be some overlap between the idea of finding the right kind of woman and finding wisdom too. Certainly the right kind of woman would be a wise woman, but we don't want to take this literary device and run with it too much and try to make it a statement about Jesus directly.

It is a statement about Jesus, insofar as Jesus exemplifies wisdom, but Solomon's not thinking, and I have no reason to believe the Holy Spirit here is thinking of Jesus personally. And Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, love to make this chapter be about Jesus because it seems to talk about wisdom having an origin. And they like to say that Jesus had origins, that he was not eternal.

And this is applying the chapter in a way that I don't think Solomon or the Holy Spirit had any intention or that any of the New Testament writers would have understood it either. It's just another way of exalting the virtue of wisdom. And it's a literary way of doing so, making wisdom to be a very honorable and attractive woman, such as his son should be drawn to.

It says, does not wisdom cry out and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of a high hill beside the way where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates at the entry of the city at the entrance of the doors. Now she's making her appeal in public.

It must mean that it is not really hard to find wisdom if you wish to. Wisdom is speaking all the time everywhere you go. Where people travel in the marketplaces, wisdom is applicable to all these things.

And the person can always follow and heed the voice of wisdom wherever they are. Remember Solomon himself in a later proverb said that when he walked by the house of somebody who was a slugger, he knows the wall was broken down and the grass was overgrown. And he says, my heart received instruction.

Wisdom came to him, spoke to him just as he was walking down the street by a neighbor's house. And so anywhere that you are, wisdom is there crying out, appealing to you, asking you to heed wise ways rather than foolish ways in life, in the streets or anywhere else in the marketplace. And her call is expressed in these words.

Verse four, to you, O men, I call and my voice is to the sons of men. I hope you've been observing because it's helpful to do so. The parallelism in the Hebrew poetry I've observed, I've mentioned before.

Where one statement is made twice in different ways. And one reason to point that out here, obviously these two lines are identical in meaning. To you, O men, I call.

My voice is to the sons of men. It's just that sons of men, or in some cases in Scripture, the son of man, is just parallel like this to simply man or men. And that's important because for one thing, Jesus referred to himself as the son of man more often than he referred to himself as the son of man.

Not by any other designation. And when we consider what did he mean by that, certainly some of the most important data to use in Scripture is that son of man is almost always used simply as another expression for a man, an ordinary man, a son of Adam, a human. And he says, O you simple ones, understand prudence and you fools, be of an understanding heart.

Listen, for I will speak of excellent things. From the opening of my lips will come right things. For my mouth will speak truth.

Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness. Nothing crooked or perverse is in them.

Now, in other words, if you're going a crooked or perverse way, you're not following, you're not heeding wisdom. If you're being wicked, that's an abomination to wisdom. Wisdom will not advocate wickedness at all.

All of wisdom's words are with righteousness. When you choose a path of righteousness, you're being wise, you're following wisdom's counsel. If you choose sin, obviously it's saying you're on a crooked path, you're not heeding wisdom because her words do not incline that way.

Verse 9, her words, they are all plain to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge. Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.

Now, again, sometimes when I'm dealing with a verse, I feel the need to point out to you certain conventions of Hebrew expression, even if it's sort of a sidelight to the message of the passage. And this is a case of that. Verse 10, receive my instruction and not silver.

This would seem like it's saying you should never receive silver, you should just receive instruction. It seems like don't receive silver, but receive instruction only from wisdom. However, this is a case of a figure of speech that occurs in scripture a lot, which if you don't note it, you will misread many passages and I have heard this figure of speech referred to as a limited negative.

I heard years ago some teacher mentioned this particular figure of speech in the

scripture as a limited negative, so I've always used that term for it. And someone asked me about that years after I'd been using this term and I decided I'd better, I'll look it up, I'll Google it to find out about the limited negative and I could not find one reference in all of the internet to the expression a limited negative. So, I guess I have to deduce this is not an established term for this phenomenon, but it is a phenomenon and whether you have a name for it or not, it is something to observe.

I have chosen to continue calling it limited negative because I don't know of another name for it and maybe I'll be the one who goes down in history for having named it. I doubt it though. Someone else named it before me, I just don't know who.

I don't remember who it was. But, what's being called a limited negative here is when a sentence is structured so as to say, not A, but B. In other words, when it seems to be negating one thing and affirming another thing. But, what it really means in its context, the intended meaning is not only A, but also B. So, although it sounds like it's an absolute negative, do not seek silver.

It's really a limited negative. It really means don't only seek silver, but also seek my wisdom. Or maybe don't primarily seek silver, but primarily seek my wisdom.

The statement is made as if it's an absolute negative. Don't do this. But, it's actually more of a comparative relative kind of a limited negative.

And, you see this, for example, when Jesus says, do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Well, it sounds like he's saying, don't expect any peace from me.

I didn't come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword. It sounds like he's saying, I only came to bring a sword and not peace.

But, of course, he really means I didn't, don't think I'm only coming to bring peace. I did not come to bring only peace, but also a sword. You're going to have peace.

I mean, he did come to bring peace. That's the fruit of the spirit. He said to his disciples, my peace I give unto you.

Obviously, peace is something he gives. He's the prince of peace. But, he didn't come only to give peace.

Don't think it's all going to be roses. Don't think I only came to bring peace. I also came to bring a sword.

That's what that word means. And, there's many places in scripture where this kind of a device is used. I won't go into any other examples right now, but this is one of them.

It says, receive my instruction and not silver. It means not only, don't just seek silver. It's

not saying it's wrong to receive silver or whatever.

It's just saying that if you seek silver rather than instruction, that's not the right choice. Actually, when Jesus says, do not lay up treasures for yourselves on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven, I've sometimes wondered if that's another example. There's quite a lot of examples that you can find.

But, I wonder if he means do not lay up treasures only on earth, but lay up treasures also in heaven. I'm not sure. Because, it's possible that he's speaking to people who would only be mindful of laying up treasures on earth and not be mindful of laying up treasures in heaven.

So, you need to attend to that too. For example, in John chapter 6, Jesus said, do not labor for that food that perishes, but labor for that food that endures to eternal life. Does that mean it's wrong to labor for food that perishes? How are you going to get food that perishes if you don't labor, if you don't work? The Bible says, whoever doesn't work does not eat.

So, the statement, do not labor for food that perishes, sounds absolute, but it's a limited negative. It means don't only labor for food that perishes, also labor for that food that endures to eternal life. Those are the kinds of things.

This is not directly relevant to what wisdom is saying here, but it's a sidebar because you're going to run into this kind of structure of a statement a number of times in the scriptures. Verse 11, for wisdom is better than rubies and all things one may desire cannot be compared with her. This is almost identical with the statement that was made earlier on, I believe in chapter 3, the very same thing.

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence and find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth.

I hate, that is wisdom hates those things. If you happen to be tolerant of things like arrogance and evil ways and perverse mouths, then you aren't wise because wisdom hates those things. A wise person will despise that kind of stuff.

The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, is to hate evil. Now, that's an important note because the fear of the Lord is an important concept repeated often in Proverbs and Psalms and frankly throughout the scripture. Every genre of scripture has frequent references.

The prophets frequently, even the law, fearing the Lord and the New Testament does too. Here is a good nutshell definition of what the fear of the Lord looks like if you hate evil. For the right reasons.

You hate evil because you know it is against God and you know that's really dangerous

him. So if you lack wisdom, it's promised that it will be given to you.

It's available to everybody to be able to choose wisely if one chooses that. Those who seek it diligently, who ask God for it, can find wisdom. It says in verse 18, wisdom says, riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.

So again, if you're wise, it'll tend to be prosperous. You'll tend to prosper and you'll tend to be honored by people because of your wisdom. My fruit is better than gold.

Yes, then find gold and my revenue than choice silver. The same thought given in verses 10 and 11. Verse 20, I traverse the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of justice that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries.

A repeat of the same ideas we've come across a number of times. A wise way of living will tend to enhance your financial well-being, all other things being equal. The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way.

Now, some people think this should be translated, the Lord created me and this is where, as I said, the Jehovah's Witnesses like to use this chapter because they just take it for granted that this is speaking about Jesus. And in their translation it says, the Lord created me in the beginning of his way. And of course, it is the main bone of contention between Jehovah's Witnesses and the rest of Christianity that they believe Jesus is a created being rather than eternal God.

Whereas what's considered to be the Orthodox view of Christianity takes Christ to be uncreated, eternal God. So this verse becomes a linchpin in their case for their position about Christ. That if this wisdom is Christ, and if they're discussing this with you, they'll take you to this chapter.

And they'll say, now wouldn't you agree that wisdom is Christ? And if you're out of a blind loyalty to whatever you think you're supposed to say, if you say yes, then they'll take you to, in their Bible, verse 22 and have Christ saying, the Lord created me at the beginning of his way. Actually, as I said, this isn't necessarily supposed to be Christ speaking. Though wisdom speaks very much in the same manner that Christ could speak, that is not necessarily an identification that is being made here.

And even wisdom, it'd be strange to say that God created wisdom in the beginning of his way, since wisdom is an attribute of God. God is wise. He's the only wise God, the Bible says.

And therefore, since it's an attribute of God, it cannot be something he created. To say he possessed me is more accurate. God possessed wisdom.

God has always possessed wisdom. He's wise, and that means he possesses wisdom.

And in the beginning of his way, I'm not sure what the beginning of God's way would be, except perhaps in the beginning of his activities toward earth, creating the universe and man and so forth.

That's probably what he's intended. It's probably limited to that. Before his works of old, I, wisdom, have been established from everlasting.

From the beginning, before there ever was an earth. When there were no paths, I was brought forth. When there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth. Now, brought forth doesn't necessarily mean brought into existence. It may be brought into display.

You know, a person's wisdom is not on display at all times until they do something or say something wise. They possess wisdom, but their wisdom is brought forth to be seen by all by their actions. And so God, you know, behaved wisely and exhibited his wisdom before there were mountains and hills.

While as yet he had not made the earth or the fields or the primeval dust of the world, when he prepared the heavens, I was there. When he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above, when he strengthened the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limits so that the waters would not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside him as a master craftsman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his inhabited world.

And my delight was with the sons of men. Now, of course, wisdom is being described as if she was God's companion. As if God is a person and wisdom is a person and together they are enjoying the exhibition of God's creation coming into being and rejoicing over it, rejoicing over the creation of mankind, the sons of men.

But again, it's just poetry. It's just a way of saying that God acted with wisdom and wisdom was, you know, his companion, as it were, at all times. Now, therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.

But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul. All those who hate me love death. So the person is blessed who takes the time out to pause and say, now, what is the wise course to make to take in this decision I have to make? Waiting at wisdom's gates, waiting at wisdom's doors, waiting for wisdom to speak and to appear.

It's just basically saying a person should not act rashly, but they should pause, look

before you leap, consider what's wisdom and what's not wisdom before you act, before you speak. That's waiting at wisdom's doors, watching and daily at her gates for her to show up. And whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.

So to find wisdom is something God is pleased with you to do. And obviously the choice of wisdom as something that you will seek and find pleases God as we see in Solomon's own case. When he was young, God said, I'll give you whatever you ask for.

He said, how about wisdom? And God said, boy, I like that. I like that. I'm going to bless you for that.

I'm going to give you what you ask for. I'm going to give you more things you didn't ask for that you could have possibly asked for. So it pleases God.

You find favor from the Lord when you choose to be wise. And wisdom says, he who sins against me, that is a sin against wisdom, which would simply be a rash and foolish act, hurts himself, sins against his own soul. And those who hate wisdom love death.

So this is just another way of saying in another literary form what Solomon's been saying all the time. You'd be foolish. You reject wisdom.

You're going to shorten your life. You're going to bring trouble into your life. You're going to be poor.

You're going to cause problems in your relationships. I mean, you're wronging yourself when you choose to be foolish. So choose wisdom as you would choose a desirable woman as your companion.

Now, chapter nine, we're going to be hearing again about the wrong kind of woman by the end of this chapter, but we have wisdom continuing to be discussed, but not speaking. In chapter eight, wisdom was speaking for the whole time. Now we have Solomon speaking about wisdom again.

In chapter nine, wisdom has built her house. She has hewn out her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat.

She has mixed her wine. She has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, sent out her maidens.

She cries out from the highest places of the city. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine, which I have mixed.

Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding. Now, you know, wisdom has built a house, laid out a table, prepared the food. It's just saying that there is a place that you're invited to dwell in the house of wisdom.

You can feast at wisdom's table. You can enjoy all the hospitality, all the companionship of wisdom. There's an open invitation, and it's even given out, especially given out to those who are not already wise.

Whoever is simple, that means simple-minded, verse four. Whoever lacks understanding. Those are the ones particularly that are being invited to stop being simple-minded and stop lacking understanding, but to choose to come and eat of the table that wisdom has laid out.

This is all very poetic, of course, but the idea is that just as you'd be drawn to a woman, you'd be drawn to wisdom. Just as you'd be drawn to a lavish feast, if you're invited, well then, you should come to wisdom's feast and partake of her dainties. Now, verse seven.

He who reproves a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets himself a blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you. Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will still be wiser. Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. Now, a scoffer is here parallel with a wicked man, in verse seven, and is contrasted with a wise man throughout this whole triplet of verses.

Scoffers apparently refers to people who mock at God's standards, who mock at God's laws, who mock the righteous. People who think that it's foolish or that it's naive or a waste to follow God, and they laugh at people who do follow God. That person is the wicked person in mind here.

Now, that person, because he is a cynic, because he is scoffing, he's set himself to ridicule the things of God. If you rebuke him, he's not of a mind to receive it at all. Actually, he'll just lash out at you.

You rebuke him, and he doesn't appreciate it. He's a proud man. That's why he is a scoffer.

He's prideful. He's too proud to submit himself to the wisdom of God, and he thinks he's wiser than God, and wiser than righteousness, and wiser than the righteous people. Therefore, if he is ever rebuked by someone who is wiser than he is, he doesn't appreciate it.

You'll get shame to yourself in the sense that he'll mock you the worst. He'll embarrass you. He'll humiliate you if he can.

He'll blemish your reputation if he can. In other words, he'll not respond thankfully for the rebuke. He'll instead do all he can to lash out and harm you back, and he'll hate you, it says in verse 8. But a wise man, by contrast, will love you if you rebuke him.

If you give him instruction, he'll be wiser, and a just man will increase in learning. So, Jesus said, you know, he that has, more will be given to him. And he that has not, even that little of which he seems to have, will be taken from him.

Jesus said that about those who, when he's explaining the parables, he's telling the disciples when they said, why do you speak in parables? He says, well, because I'm doing that so that they won't understand what I'm saying. He says it's not given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. It's given to you, disciples, to know that.

Why? He says, because those who have will be given more. The disciples apparently already had something of a piety, something of a reverence for God. They were part of the remnant of Israel.

They already had a thirst for God and faith in God. And, therefore, they'd be given more. But those who did not have that, those who were not part of the Jewish remnant, who were just secularistic in their thinking and had no interest in God, he wasn't going to give them anything.

In fact, they're going to lose even what little they seem to have. Those who already are wise will increase in wisdom and will be seeking an increase in wisdom. When they hear a rebuke, they'll weigh it and say, is this something I need to hear so that I can be wiser? Maybe this person speaking to me is the voice of wisdom speaking to me.

If so, I'm glad to hear it, even if it's telling me I'm doing the wrong thing, even if it's telling me something that kind of embarrasses me at first to hear it, because it's kind of finding fault with me. If I'm a wise man, I don't like it any more than anyone else does to have someone find fault with me. But on the other hand, I'm glad they did.

I don't count them an enemy. I'm not going to try to ruin their reputation because they embarrassed me by pointing out my error. I'm going to love them.

I'm going to be glad that they did that. I'm going to welcome that. It's like the wounds of a friend.

Nobody really likes being wounded, but if it's a friend who's wounded in you, then you have to assume that this is a wound you needed to get. It's contrasted in Proverbs with the kisses of an enemy. Kisses are obviously overt signs of affection and friendship, but the enemy who kisses you has something up his sleeve, like Judas who kissed Jesus.

That was certainly a treacherous thing. If a person is an enemy, when they're kissing you, they're obviously not kissing you sincerely and they've got something they're trying to do to harm you more. But the wounds of a friend are more to be desired, and a wise man knows that.

You give him instruction, he'll get wiser. He won't reject it because he is a wise man. Teach him and he'll increase in learning because he is a wise man.

A wise man wants to increase in wisdom. That means, of course, a wise man does not think he knows it all because a man who thinks he knows it all will not increase. You can instruct him.

I mean, his basic attitude will be, well, what do I need to hear from you? I'm right already about everything. I know it all. And so, one thing that Solomon is pointing out is the man who thinks he knows it all is not really as wise as he thinks.

He's wise in his own eyes, but the man who will not receive further instruction because he doesn't think he has anything else to learn, that man is not the wise man that Solomon is talking about. He's actually a fool. That's the man who actually resents it if you prove him wrong, if you correct him, if you instruct him, because it's an insult to him that you would suggest that he doesn't know everything.

He's the one who will be angry to who's the scoffer and so forth. The wise man has, in other words, a teachable spirit because he wants to know. Everybody who is teachable will be aware that some things that they need to be taught are not comfortable to hear.

If we were perfect people, we'd never have to hear a just criticism of ourselves. But we're not perfect people and therefore many criticisms of us might in fact be just and deserved and needed. But if we're proud, we're not going to have an interest in hearing those needed criticisms.

We don't want to be improved. We feel like we know enough to get by, maybe enough to show everyone else off. All you have to do is know more than the others and then you don't have to learn anymore because you're superior.

But that's a fool's position, a fool's attitude, not a godly or wise attitude. The wise man knows he's not perfect. He knows he doesn't know everything and he's eager to improve and he'll accept improvement from wherever source it comes from.

That's a major teaching of Proverbs, an important teaching for the believer. I remember once when a younger Christian man was speaking counsel for me, he specifically asked, is there anything particular that I as a young Christian could do to speed up my maturity? Or is that just something that God just does in his own time? Is it all of God to accelerate my Christian growth? Is that just something God will do as he sovereignly wishes to do it? Or is there something you could recommend that will do that? And just as I heard that, I'd never really been asked to distill into a single statement before what a person ought to do to increase their growth. But it seemed to me that the answer was to just be teachable.

Something not everybody is, not everyone wants to be. When you decide that you know

enough to get by and you want to camp out there and you want to, instead of learning more, you want to have a reputation of knowing everything, then you will not grow any further because you're not ready, you're not open to any new information or any correction to what you already hold to. But if you're always teachable, and I guess that must be a function of just humility, I suppose, that if you're humble enough to realize that you need to hear correction, then you'll continue to grow.

The things that you need to change on, you'll hear them, you'll receive them, and you'll move forward. And I've often thought, when people have been talking about the difficulty of finding a church that they agree with, that I would rather be in a church that I agreed with 50% only, if they were teachable, than to find a church that I agreed with 95% and they're not teachable. Because if I agreed 95% with them, but they're not teachable, they don't want to be teachable, then it's never going to get any further than 95%.

But if they're 50% in agreement and teachable, then there's no limit to how much, we might be in 100% agreement someday. In any case, it's more profitable to be with people who don't think they know it all, who are willing to change, and to be that way yourself. That's definitely an environment for rapid improvement, compared to the opposite, of just thinking you know it all.

It surprises me sometimes, people who have views that I used to have, but I don't have anymore, and they've held on to them for 40, 50 years. I think, well you know, it's hard for me to remember that people still believe that, rather, what strikes me as a rather naive approach to certain subjects in the Bible, that they should have gotten past if they'd just been a little more thoughtful about it, and just looked at it a little more carefully. I think, why have they never changed, on things that I couldn't help but change my opinion on long ago, for the simple reason that it's not like I wanted to change, it's just that I saw things more clearly, and had to change my view than I had before.

And other people who still hold the views that I felt compelled to change from, I think, well why haven't they seen these things? They're right there, they're kind of obvious, they're right there in the Bible, and these people do read the Bible. And I have to think, in some cases, maybe, and I don't want to make a judgment of individuals, that one thing that could explain it, would maybe they're not really open to correction, maybe they don't want to change. Maybe they've decided that their reputation as a Christian leader or teacher, depends on giving the impression that they know everything, and no one will respect them if they don't give that impression.

No one will listen to them. Why would anyone listen to you if you don't know everything? And so, they feel compelled to build up walls around the thing they already believe, because that's what they've gone on record as, it might even be what they're paid to teach in a particular denomination. And so, teachability is out the window, they really

can't be, with their present attitude, they can't be teachable, they can't really change.

And so, they can end up believing one thing for a very, very long time, which they should have seen around, and seen through, and modified in the years that they've had, to study the Word of God. But you can say the Word forever, without a teachable heart, and never change at all, never learn a thing. Never grow.

But if you come like a child, when Jesus said, you have to come like a child, what did he mean by that? Well, I think the primary thing about a child that is to be imitated, is that a child knows it has everything to learn. A child's full of questions, not answers. You know, why is the sky blue? Where do babies come from? Where is God? Is God, you know, everywhere? I mean, all the questions children ask, they're guileless, they don't claim to know.

They know they don't know. They're just full of inquiries. They're teachable.

And they grow much faster than adults do, over a comparable period of time. You notice how children pick up a language, you know, and become fluent in a language in a year or two. Once they start learning their first words within a few years, a couple of years, they're fluent.

And you try to pick up a new language, it'll take years and years and you'll still probably be less than fluent. Children just, they increase in their knowledge so rapidly. And it's, I believe, because they're not holding on to a whole bunch of presuppositions they think they already know.

If you think you already know, you're not really, there's no vacuum for new knowledge to come into. And so becoming like a child, humble like a child, Jesus said, is to be at the place where you figure, I've got everything to learn, or at least a great deal still. And I'm not sure what parts have to change.

So I have to be teachable. I have to listen to all criticism. I have to listen to every one who brings a review.

It doesn't mean they'll be right or that I have to accept the legitimacy of what they say, but I have to listen and weigh it. It doesn't mean that you become infinitely malleable and anyone who suggests something changes your mind and you're tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine that comes along. It means that you're managing your knowledge in such a way that you're taking in knowledge from anywhere you can and considering that any source of information might possibly contain something that you need to know, but you weigh it, you judge it, you prove all things and hold fast to what is good.

And thus, of course, you'll end up spitting out a lot of bones with the meat that you end up consuming, but you will grow as a child grows. Verse 10, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Knowing God

is understanding.

Now, it begins with the fear of the Lord. That's the beginning. And when you begin with the fear of the Lord, you eventually find the knowledge of God.

These two things are put together in a similar way back in chapter two, as we saw in the first five verses. That's where Solomon was talking about the urgency and the zeal with which a person should pursue these very things, the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God and wisdom and all that. Because in chapter two, verses one through five, he said, My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, if you cry out for discernment, if you lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge of even of the knowledge of God. And so chapter nine, verse 10, joins these again. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of God, the knowledge of the Holy One.

That is understanding. It's very important that we don't mistake the knowledge of God for knowledge about God. And this is where I think organized religion often will take a wrong turn.

What starts out as a movement of people who know God, as the apostles did, or as people in a revival often come to do, they actually have a personal encounter with God and know him and walk with him. They pass along to the next generation the information about God, because you can't readily pass along acquaintance with God. That's personal.

You can tell somebody about the information about the God with whom you hope they will become acquainted, but they have become acquainted for themselves. But yet many times, the next generation, having heard the knowledge, thinks they have the acquaintance. They actually do not realize there's a difference in knowing all about God, knowing the facts, knowing the theology.

On the one hand, and actually having a relationship with God. On the other hand, those are different things. I remember when I was in my 20s and I first discovered A. W. Tozer's writings, that I resonated with his writings.

Actually, many of the things he was saying that I had never heard another person say were things I had thought. And so I felt like I'd found a real kindred spirit in A. W. Tozer. I remember as a young man, foolishly thinking that Tozer and I were pretty much on the same level because he and I thought the same.

And I think I've always realized that I'm not even in his league a little bit. You know, the fact that we have the same thoughts doesn't mean we have the same character and the

same reality. You know, I mean, his depth with God, I believe, is far in excess of mine.

And just agreeing with him doesn't make me have the experience with God that he has. Agreeing with the facts about God and about even the facts about a walk with God isn't the same thing as having that walk with God and having that God who is described in those facts. Tozer himself made that point when he talked about how many evangelicals think that they are the spiritual descendants of Paul, because when they read Paul's theology, they agree with Paul.

But he said they're as far from the spirit of Paul as, you know, day is from night. That you can deceive yourself into thinking you know God or that you are in a certain spiritual place because you happen to have the information and agree with the information. And I believe this is what has happened in organized religion.

In fact, as I say, most denominations begin with a revival. There are hundreds, thousands even of denominations now. And most of them started, I don't know about most of them, but a lot of them, the main ones, started when there really was some kind of a move of God.

And some people began to be moved by God and meet God and walk with God and started a new movement. Usually it didn't fit in well with the organized religion they were already in. So they had to, sometimes they were kicked out.

Sometimes they left voluntarily and they started a new movement of others who knew God that way. But their children and grandchildren simply institutionalized it. And so to be part of a denomination many times just means that you read their statement of faith and say, do you agree with that? Yes, I do.

Okay. You can be a member here because you're one of us. One of us, because you have the same thoughts about God, because you know the same things about God that we profess to know.

And yet you can sign on to the statement of faith and never have been born again. Never even know God at all. Finding the knowledge of God is something that it takes more than reading a book of theology and memorizing it like you'd memorize a history book or a philosophy book or something else in college.

It's not just mastering the information, it's managing a relationship with God. In Jeremiah chapter 9, there's a very powerful passage that brings this back out. It says in verses 23 and 24, Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24, it says, Thus says Yahweh, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.

Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am Yahweh, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I

delight, says the Lord.

In other words, you need to know me, the kind of person I am. What I take delight in. How just and merciful I am in my behavior.

To know me as a person. This is what you can glory in. If you happen to know me and understand me, then you've got something to glory in.

Not in wisdom, not in intellectual knowledge or wisdom. Remember the rebuke that Jesus gave to the Pharisees in John chapter 5, on this very point. He said in John chapter 5, verse 39, You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.

But these are they which testify of me, but you are not willing to come to me, that you may have life. Now they want eternal life, and they think they find it by searching the scriptures and mastering the text. And he says, but actually those have a function that you're not taking advantage of.

Those are there to direct you to me. And you are coming to the scriptures, but you're not coming to me. You think that the scriptures themselves are going to give you life, but they are teaching you how you can have life by coming to me.

And you can come to me and have life. So you search the scriptures thinking that in them, you have eternal life. But in fact, they testify me and you won't come to me to have that life.

This is the irony of, you know, religious pursuit is that you can actually stop short of finding the life, of finding the God that it's all about by simply becoming content with the knowledge about it. Knowing the scriptures is not the same thing as knowing God. And the wisdom of which Solomon speaks is clearly that wisdom that begins with the fear of God and ends up with the knowledge of God.

If you have wisdom, but it doesn't lead you to the knowledge of God, it's not really wisdom and you've fallen short of its goal. The goal is this knowledge of the holy. That's understanding of the holy one.

Proverbs 9, 11, for by me, wisdom says, your days will be multiplied and years of life will be added to you. This is not the first time we've heard that. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself.

In other words, it'll be good for you to be wise. If you scoff, you alone will bear it. You're not really hurting, injuring God that much.

I mean, certainly it disappoints him. He feels grief and disappointment, but you're not doing any palpable harm to God by being foolish and being a scorner. You're only hurting yourself, you alone.

You're your primary victim if you do not choose wisdom. If you're wise, it's not that God gains something by it, it's that you gain something by it. You're wise for yourself.

Then, this section ends with this little section about the foolish woman again. This time, she's called the foolish woman. She's been called the immoral woman, she's been called the seductress.

But since we've been talking about wisdom in terms of being like a woman, so perhaps the foolish woman becomes the personification of foolishness as wisdom is here personified as a woman as well. The opposite of wisdom. A foolish woman is clamorous.

She's very noisy. In chapter 7, this was said about the seductress in verse 11, she's loud and rebellious. Sometimes people are loud on purpose.

It's an attention-getting device. Now, there's people who are louder than others. Their voice is just loud.

My youngest son, he's got a voice that really carries. When he's just talking at his normal volume, you can hear him a block away. It's a really strange thing.

Some people's voices are just loud. They're not being loud on purpose, they're just loud people. Their voices are loud.

That's not what's in view here. What's being in view here is somebody who's being clamorous. Somebody who makes a lot of noise, more than the average, or speaks louder than is natural for them because that's how they have learned people notice that they're there.

Getting attention to oneself. I'm sure everyone can think of cases where they've been in a crowd of people, maybe at some kind of a fellowship or some social event or a party or something like that. And somebody, more than everybody else, their voice can be heard above everyone else, telling the jokes.

They're quite amused with themselves. They're sure that they're funny. You can tell they're speaking at a louder volume than they would naturally speak because they're hoping everyone hears, everyone notices, everyone recognizes that they are.

So clever and so forth. Quietness is actually quite a virtue. And I have a voice that can project, obviously.

I speak without a microphone most of the time to a group, so I can be loud. But I feel that there is something to be said for controlling that. Not dominating the sound space that you're in because it does tend to, it draws attention to oneself.

To speak quietly, unless you have to speak loudly, then that seems to be a positive thing. Remember it says in 1 Peter chapter 3 that a woman should seek to have the

ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. And the same thing is said about men in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Paul said that men should work with their hands in quietness.

Basically it means just kind of, I don't know, it speaks of having a quiet spirit, a restful spirit, and not trying to just project yourself and your words and so forth in the public setting in a case where there's no need for that. Just clamorous, just noisy. It's not a virtue.

This foolish woman is clamorous, she's simple, simple-minded has been something that's spoken against throughout the Proverbs. She knows nothing, for she sits at the door of her house on a seat by the highest places of the city to call to those who pass by. Now that's what wisdom did back in chapter 8. Although wisdom didn't sit at her house, she actually went out into the streets making a proactive appeal to people.

But the foolish woman sits at the door of her house waiting for people to come by, and when she does, when they do, she cries out to them. And she calls out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. Now, remember, wisdom cries out to those who are simple also.

That's how that first appeal of wisdom in chapter 1 is given. In chapter 1, verse 20 and following, it says, wisdom calls aloud outside. In verse 22, she says, how long you simple ones, we love simplicity.

So, the simple-minded man has two women calling out to him. One is wisdom and the other is foolishness. And, of course, this woman here is probably another portrayal of the immoral woman, the seductress of the earlier sections that talked about her.

And she's calling people who are foolish to come and increase in their foolishness and suffer for it in her house. And as for him who lacks understanding, she said to him, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. This is an interesting insight.

It's probably in the context of immorality here, though it's a general truth as well. Why did Adam and Eve, why were they attracted to the forbidden fruit? They had all the fruit in the garden that was legit. What was it that made them contemplate or even go near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? There is something about what is forbidden that somehow tantalizes.

Water is not sweet, but if you stole it, there's something in that evil heart of the fallen nature that kind of relishes the thought that you're getting away with something. That which would ordinarily be ordinary becomes somewhat special in a perverted sort of way in the mind of somebody who feels like they've gotten it by stealth or they've gotten it. They're doing something.

They're getting away with something secret. And which is perhaps why you hear so many cases of people who before they get married, they are sexually involved with each

other and apparently enjoying it. But after they're married, their sexual life kind of just is dull.

And in many cases, I don't suppose the mechanics of it are any different. It's just that now it's legitimate. It's ordinary when it's illegitimate.

That there's something about it that perhaps arouses excitement. Stolen water is sweet. Bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

But it says that person who hears her, the foolish man who hears this appeal, he does not know that the dead are there and that her guests are in the depths of shale. So she can feel the fact that if you go her way, you're going to die. But she advertises the scintillating aspects of getting away with something that you know is naughty.

It's a little different, the same experience. If you know you're getting away with something. Now, of course, Christians have a different heart.

They actually don't feel very good about doing things that are naughty. They sometimes do them, but they don't feel comfortable with it because your heart's been changed. You got the spirit of God in you.

Solomon's writing at a time before this phenomenon of being born again was even happening to people. He's writing to ordinary fallen people who he's hoping to encourage them to do their best to be less sinful and more wise. And in the fallen heart of the unregenerate, there really is something that is attracted to what is known to be forbidden, even if it was forbidden.

It wouldn't otherwise be attractive. Paul said that the law, when it came to him as a youth, it aroused in him all kinds of covetousness that wasn't there before. Examples often given of, you know, a person who sees a sign that says, keep off the grass.

And they would never have thought about going on the grass before. But now they just have this urge to step on it, you know, just to feel like they're getting away with something they're not supposed to do. There's a lady in the Church of England who said to her parson, she objected to having the Ten Commandments posted in the church.

She said, it gives people too many ideas. And to the fallen heart, it kind of does. You hear, you should not steal, and then suddenly you think about stealing.

Hmm, I hadn't thought about that before. That does sound fun, you know. Now, when you're born again, your heart's different than that.

Actually, you don't find pleasure in that which your conscience tells you is wrong. You know, it promises that same pleasure. That's why Christians sin.

There's the attraction to it at a certain foolish level. But once you really, if you succumb

to it, you don't enjoy it. I think.

I mean, I don't think I can say I've ever enjoyed knowingly sinning as a Christian. I mean, I'm not saying there isn't a part of you that enjoys it. Certainly the flesh has its own set of desires contrary to the spirit.

But the spirit is there. And the spirit doesn't make you comfortable with it. A person who doesn't have the spirit of God can really enjoy sinning briefly.

But what Solomon is saying, there's death at the end of that road. I mean, it is the truth that stolen water is sweet for people like that. But once you're born again, if you think this water is stolen, if you're thirsty, you might drink it anyway, but you kind of feel badly about it.

You wish, you regret it and so forth. And you don't even fully enjoy it as much, knowing that you're really not doing what you should do. There's that conviction of the spirit.

Jack Hayford, I remember, used to say that being born again just, it spoils you for sinning. You know, it ruins you for sinning. You can enjoy sinning until you're born again.

After that, you can't. Now, someone says, well, I've enjoyed sinning since I was born again. I think, well, maybe you weren't born again.

Because God gives you a new heart when you're born again. The law is written on your heart. And it's your heart that objects to violation of the law.

Not just an external law that objects to what you're doing and you don't mind, but your heart objects. Your heart protests against it. And that, it ruins you for sinning.

Now, if you can convince yourself you're not sinning, that's another story. But if you're feeling that you're doing something illicit, then it's not the same as what's described here to the Christian. But he's not talking to a Christian.

He's talking to a man with an ordinary fallen heart. And certainly it is an insight, I think a valid one, into the nature of fallen man. Attraction to what is forbidden.

When the same thing would not hold that much attraction otherwise. Bread and water are not exactly tantalizing foods, but if it's stolen water and bread eaten in secret, that changes the experience for the sinner. He enjoys his rebellion.

He enjoys the evilness of it in a certain way. That tells us a lot about human nature. Unredeemed human nature.

And that reaches the end of this section, chapters one through nine of Proverbs. The style of the book changes after this into miscellaneous individual sayings and so forth. And so at a certain point, we're going to be looking at these in a topical arrangement

rather than moving through verse by verse as we've been doing.

But here we stop. Thank you for watching.