

Proverbs 1:20-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-1/proverbs-120-23/>

Wisdom (personified as a woman) shouts in public, beckoning all to hear and obey.

Here we are introduced to *wisdom* personified in the feminine. Lady *Wisdom* is a consistent character throughout Proverbs. She is held in high esteem: a caretaker and a guide, a disciplinarian, a judge, and a path to success. Solomon also uses a feminine noun to personify folly in Ecclesiastes 7:23-26; he will talk in Proverbs about the adulterous woman (Proverbs 5:3). So Solomon is using these two archetypes (both personified in the feminine) to highlight the choice between wisdom and evil. These young men can choose either folly or wisdom to be their constant companion.

The word for “proverb” is the same Hebrew word for “parable” (see Proverbs 1:1-6), so it makes sense for Solomon to personify *wisdom*. He does this throughout the book, most notably in Chapter 8. It helps bring life to the characteristics of *wisdom*, allows us to see *wisdom* in the context of human activity, and invites us to wrestle with its complexities in the way only a parable can do.

Lady *Wisdom* is a strong and powerful authority in these verses. She makes herself hard to ignore. She *shouts in the street and lifts her voice in the square. She also cries out at the head of the noisy street and utters sayings at the entrance of the gates of the city.* She is vocal and she is visible. She is in the *streets*, in the *city square*, and at the *entrance gates*. God has placed wisdom everywhere in His creation. The entire creation speaks of God, so it also speaks of wisdom. As Psalm 19 states:

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge”
(Psalm 19:1-2)

All of this is done clearly and publicly, as opposed to the whispered dealings of the sinners in the previous section (see notes on Proverbs 1:16-19). Lady *Wisdom*’s *shouts* are so loud that they rise above the murmur of their surroundings—*at the head of the noisy streets she cries out.* Her admonitions are prevalent. *At the entrance of the gates of the city she utters sayings.* The *gates of the city* would be akin to a modern town square with a court house—the center of civic life. Wisdom makes her realities known loud and clear, “in our face.”

Wisdom is embedded in every observable cause-effect relationship, if it is perceived truly. Solomon gave us an example with the *sinner*s who intended violence against others but actually are setting it up for themselves.

Surely, Solomon says, you cannot miss the call of wisdom. You can ignore it, with great effort, but you cannot claim it is hard to find.

This is what *Wisdom* is proclaiming to the young or *naïve ones* (the direct audience of The Book of Proverbs) and to all of us: *How long, O naïve ones, will you love being simple-minded? How long will we ignore wisdom and choose a lesser way? How long will we follow the guidance of lesser voices, voices that lead us to destruction?* Lady Wisdom is making herself known; if we ignore her, it is on us for making a bad choice. There will be no excuse that the knowledge was hidden.

Wisdom asks *How long will you love being simple-minded? And how long will scoffers delight in scoffing? How long will fools hate knowledge?* The “how long” question, asked out of lament and longing, stretches to all three clauses in Verse 22. *How long* (literally “from when to when”) will this continue? This makes clear that these *fools* refuse wisdom because they *love* being foolish. Further, *Wisdom* notes these *naïve ones* do not merely endure their childish reasoning, but cling to it with affection. They *delight in scoffing*. A *scoffer* is one who mocks or ridicules, one full of scorn and derision for the truth.

And perhaps the most scathing question asked by Wisdom: *how long will fools hate knowledge?* The word for *knowledge* is the same word used in verse 7 in connection with the fear of the Lord—a knowing that encompasses fact, interpretation, wisdom, and application. Seeing and applying reality as it actually is. We cannot claim passive indifference as our excuse for *turning* away from *Wisdom*. Rather, the *fool* that rejects *knowledge* is doing so because they *hate knowledge*. Solomon again makes it clear that there is a binary choice to be made: *wisdom* verses folly. Those who choose folly do so deliberately, and are *fools*.

In the strongest possible terms, *Wisdom* then calls for repentance. She implores the *simple-minded fools* to lay aside their naïveté, foolishness, and *scoffing*, *admonishing them to “Turn to my reproof.”* The word *turn* (“shuwb”) in verse 23 is better translated “return.” We were made for wisdom, created in wisdom’s image, and have gone astray. The *reproof* of wisdom shows us where we have gone astray; it is a correction that will *turn* us back to our proper course. This admonition to *turn* connects to the first part of the chapter, when Solomon exhorted the student to “receive instruction” (Proverbs 1:3). To turn away from folly and choose wisdom requires embracing *reproof*.

Lady *Wisdom* sends forth a promise for those who *turn to her reproof*—“*I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.*” She is shouting from all over the city. The message is clear: wisdom is available. She is here and ready to share fully. Nothing will be withheld for those willing to listen, to receive instruction. Wisdom will *pour out* her *spirit* on anyone who chooses to receive. Not only that, Lady Wisdom will *make known* her *words* to anyone willing to hear and embrace instruction. The willingness and commitment to follow in the footsteps of wisdom seem to guarantee the success of achieving wisdom. It is time to *turn* and pay attention to the truth of her calling.

Biblical Text

**²⁰ Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;**

²¹ At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;

At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:

²² “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?

And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing

And fools hate knowledge?

²³ “Turn to my reproof,

Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;

I will make my words known to you.