

Proverbs 8:4-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-8/proverbs-84-9/>

Lady Wisdom shares her credentials. She is the path to truth, righteousness, and prudence for all mankind.

In the previous section, Solomon rolled out the red carpet for Lady Wisdom. She entered into public spaces, clearly seen, and began to cry out.

Verse 4 marks the beginning of Lady Wisdom's speech. She says, "*To you, O men, I call*" (vs 4). Solomon has addressed his audience as "young man" and "my son" throughout the early chapters of Proverbs. The word for *men* here is the Hebrew word "is" and it refers to the male gender specifically. Further evidence that Solomon may be addressing a school for young boys.

Then, for the first time in Proverbs, "*and my voice is to the sons of men*" (vs 4). The word for *men* here is not the Hebrew word "is" as in the prior phrase, but "adam," which is used to refer to "mankind" (both genders). So Solomon is expanding his audience to include everyone that is beginning their life's journey. Wisdom is addressing herself to the specific crowd to which Solomon is teaching, but goes further to say that all of this applies to every human being as well. All of humanity.

Wisdom says to us all: "*O naïve ones, understand prudence*" (vs 5). A synonym for *naïve ones* is "simple ones," as some other translations use. The Hebrew word translated here as *naïve ones* is found only twenty-one times in all of Scripture and twenty of those times are in the books of the wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs).

The *naïve ones* are the audience of Proverbs—those who are impressionable, early in their stage of learning, incomplete in their understanding. Which, since none of us are God, is all of us when compared to God. To the *naïve ones* Solomon commands *understand prudence*. This is the stated goal of The Book of Proverbs, found in very similar phrasing in Proverbs 4:1.

The word translated *understand* is the Hebrew *bin* and it means "discern." The root of the word *bin* literally means "*to separate mentally*." So, to be able to perceive what is best for you (setting it apart from what is harmful). To be able to tell the difference between what is reality and what is false, what is *prudent* and what lacks prudence.

The Hebrew word translated *prudence* is "arma" and it is where we get words like army and armament. The word "arma" means "shrewd" or "crafty"—it is sometimes used in the Bible with a negative connotation that suggests trickery. But it is used here (and elsewhere in Scripture) in a positive way to mean "subtlety," "guile," or "wily." Jesus told His disciples to be "shrewd as serpents" while remaining as "innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Jesus also told a parable to encourage his disciples to be shrewd, but in a manner that honored the principles and rewards of His kingdom, rather than that of the world (Luke 16:1-10).

So Wisdom is telling those who are impressionable, who are learning and do not have it all figured out (that's all of us) to separate what is discernibly good from what is not. To this, Lady Wisdom adds: "*and, O fools, understand wisdom*" (vs 5). The word *fools* is as derogatory as it sounds—it often means "idiot" or "stupid one." Again, at least at times, this is all of us. Without listening and following God (imparted here through Solomon's teaching on wisdom), we will be *stupid* to the ways of reality and how the world operates—not to mention being oblivious as to how to operate best within this life.

The word for *understand* in this phrase is the same as in the phrase preceding it—"bin," meaning "discern" or "mentally separate." And the word for wisdom here is actually "leb," which means "heart." So Lady Wisdom is telling (us) *fools* to be "of a discerning heart," the very essence of *wisdom*. This is the path to converting from being *fools* to being wise; to learn to discern between folly and illusion and our true self-interest.

Now that she has our attention and has implored us to separate truth from falsity, Lady Wisdom commands, "*Listen, for I will speak noble things.*" The command is to hear what wisdom says. We cannot gain wisdom without receiving it. In order to receive wisdom, we must adopt a posture of humility—humility being the willingness to see reality as it is. This is so that we can receive, own, and implement the truth of wisdom.

We *listen* to wisdom because she *will speak noble things* (vs 6). The word translated *noble things* is "nagid" and it literally means "leader" or "ruler." It is used to refer to a prince or a governor or (more generally) nobles—people in positions of authority. Other translations choose "excellent things" as the translation here. The idea is that these are the best things, the lead things. The things to which we must hitch our wagon, so to speak. The most important things of life. Lady Wisdom is not dealing with things that are trivial. Rather she is dealing with the things that truly matter.

The next phrase builds on this. Lady Wisdom says: "*And the opening of my lips will reveal right things*" (vs 6). So, again, the source of wisdom is bigger than our mere ego. All humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). But to gain wisdom requires direction by something greater than us. We need to be taught. Just as a child greatly benefits from a good mother, so it is with all humans relative to the need to be taught by Lady Wisdom.

The imagery of *the opening of lips* is a way to show that wisdom is being passed along, communicated, and clarified for us. The word translated to English as *right things* is the Hebrew "mesar" and it is also translated "excellent" or "trustworthy." So, if we partner this with the "*noble things*" mentioned above, we get the mix of what is true, what is best for us in terms of what is most important (excellent) and what is most consistent (trustworthy). You could say wisdom puts us on the right path and steadies us on that path.

"*For my mouth will utter truth*" (vs 7). Lady Wisdom will *utter* what is true. The word *utter* has the connotation of a satisfying groan, roar, or growl. It is like when you lie down on the couch after a long, hard day on your feet and you let out a satisfying groan of comfort. Truth oozes from every aspect of Lady Wisdom.

The Bible talks about nature pulsating with the message of God. Reality is seeping through every pore of creation, waiting to be expressed. And wisdom is communicating truth in this way, putting language to the ineffable realities of human existence. The word for *truth* (“emet”) in the phrase *For my mouth will utter truth* means “surety” or “reliability.” This speaks of what really is/what you can depend on.

Reality. The words of wisdom are a rumble of how things are, an expression of *truth* that goes beyond words, and extends into all of existence.

On the other hand Lady Wisdom exclaims that “*wickedness is an abomination to my lips*” (vs 7). If Lady Wisdom is speaking about reality, naming things as they are, straightforward and reliable, *wickedness* is the perversion of that clarity. It is a quelling of reality. A derailing life. *Wickedness* relies upon substituting an illusion of reality for the truth.

And this departure from *truth* is *an abomination, to Lady Wisdom’s lips*. It is the opposite of what wisdom is expressing. It is disgusting, foreign, abhorrent.

Lady Wisdom reinforces: “*All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness*” (vs 8). The word for *utterances* here is not the same as the word for *utter* above. Here it is the Hebrew word “emer,” which means “words.” These words (*utterances*) are expressed *in righteousness*. Meaning they are “right” or true. They line up with God’s creative design.

The word for *righteousness* is the Hebrew word “sedeq” and it means “justice.” Again, this has the connotation of what is real, what is true. When something is justified, it lines up with an established standard. An example is a “left-justified” margin, a vertical line on the left side of a page that marks the starting place for all sentences to begin (as in this paragraph). In life, God created the standard for moral behavior with a cause-effect relationship, just as surely as He created the physical world with cause-effect relationships. When we live in *righteousness* we line up with God’s design, which is what works well—what creates good outcomes.

“*There is nothing crooked or perverted in them* (her words),” Lady Wisdom emphasizes there is nothing twisted or perverse in what she says—she is sharing the truth. To be *crooked* is to not line up with God’s creative design. To be *perverted* is to be separate and apart from God’s creative design. Since death is separation, it would follow then that to live apart from God’s standard (sin) will lead to death (separation from what works to our great benefit). This is one of the primary themes of the Bible, that sin/unrighteousness leads to death/separation (Genesis 2:17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Romans 6:23).

Lady Wisdom continues, “*My utterances are all straightforward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge*” (vs 9). To him who *understands* (the same word used above that means “discerning” or “to mentally separate”), the path of wisdom is clear. They are straight (not crooked), right, plain, and clear. Those who can discern are able to discern that Lady Wisdom is speaking the truth. Being able to discern that God’s ways are actually for our best opens the door to *find knowledge*.

This would infer what, upon reflection, must be true. Namely, that for us as humans, being limited creatures, we require a starting place in order to *find knowledge*. We must have an anchor. We need to believe what is true in order to *find knowledge* and come to experience and live what is true.

Biblical Text

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And my voice is to the sons of men.
⁵ O naive ones, understand prudence;
And, O fools, understand wisdom.
⁶ Listen, for I will speak noble things;
And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.
⁷ For my mouth will utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
⁸ All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.
⁹ They are all straightforward to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.**