

Proverbs 9:7-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-9/proverbs-97-9/>

There are two ways to respond to the correction and teaching of Wisdom. The first is to scoff and the second is to accept and apply. Which reaction we choose reveals which path we have chosen.

Throughout Proverbs, Solomon sets forth two binary options as the major choice for all mankind. The great measure of our lives comes down to which path we choose: life or death (Genesis 2:17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Matthew 7:13-14; Galatians 6:8). Here, these binary paths are differentiated by the choices of a *scoffer* and those of a *wise man*.

In verses 4-6, Wisdom has made a plea for naïve listeners to hear her and follow the path she prescribes. Verse 7 has the sound of a traditional proverb, a mini-parable meant to communicate truth: *He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself* (vs 7). The focal point of this statement is not *He who corrects* but the reaction of the *scoffer*.

Whoever speaks truth to a *scoffer* will get treated with *dishonor*. But *dishonor* from a *scoffer* is, ironically, a noble thing. It is a risk to present the truth to those who do not wish to hear it. But the reaction one receives, *dishonor for himself*, is actually a projection of the path the *scoffer* has chosen.

And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. There is a kind of reverse psychology happening here. If you treat the words of Wisdom with derision, you may think you are belittling her message but in actuality you are revealing yourself to be a *wicked man*. The *dishonor* and *insults* that are thrust upon the messenger are not true of the messenger. They are true of the *scoffer/wicked man*. Being treated with derision does not indicate the value of one's message but the path the receiver of the message has chosen for himself.

Verse 8 helps make this clear. *Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you.* Wisdom speaks here to elevate a reality: scoffers will not listen to wisdom. Therefore, don't waste your words on them. To correct someone who you know won't listen will not do them any good, but will cause them to attack you. So don't bother.

Jesus might have had this proverb in mind when He made this chiasmic statement in the Sermon on the Mount, after exhorting His disciples to first deal with their own flaws when they saw a flaw in someone else:

A Do not give what is holy to dogs, (dog)

B and do not throw your pearls before swine, (hog)

B' or they will trample them under their feet, (hog)

A' and turn and tear you to pieces (dog) (Matthew 7:6).

The implied element that is “holy” in this passage is words of correction. Giving words of correction to someone who doesn’t want to hear them is like offering a tasty morsel to a dog, you will just get your hand bitten. The implied “pearl” is the pearl of corrective words—the instruction of wisdom. Offering corrective words to a fool, a *scoffer*, a *wicked man*, is like putting a precious pearl necklace on a swine. They won’t appreciate the pearls; they will just maintain their hog-like ways of wallowing in the mud and will ruin them.

On the other hand, reprove a wise man and he will love you. People who are wise recognize corrective words as priceless pearls. They will listen to and treasure them.

The primary intention behind these statements is to get the reader to listen and pay attention to the words of wisdom, to convince us to be *wise* and not *wicked*. It is a plea to *love* what Lady Wisdom has petitioned in previous verses, to follow the path of wisdom Solomon is promoting. But a secondary instruction is to help us focus our energy on those who will listen. As the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy:

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”
(2 Timothy 2:2)

It can be a natural reaction to expend our time and energy on those with the greatest problems. There is clearly a place to help those in need. But when it comes to the discipleship of imparting wisdom, these passages exhort us to spend our energies on those who are listeners, those who desire to hear, learn, and grow.

As the messenger, Lady Wisdom leaves open whether the audience is a *scoffer* or a *wise man*. The response to the correction of wisdom will reveal the character of the listener. The subtle message here is: what is your character? What path will you choose? The path of wisdom leads to life, and it is the path of listening to correction. This path connects us to God’s good design. The path of foolishness leads to death, or separation from God’s good design. It is the path chosen by those who scoff at correction.

Verse 9 serves as the antithesis to the scoffer’s reaction: *give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning* (vs 9). The *scoffer* rejects the message of wisdom and tries to superimpose their foolishness on the messenger. The *wise man* internalizes the message of wisdom and uses it to increase in *learning* and wisdom. The *scoffer* destroys the message; the *wise man* utilizes it to his/her benefit.

Biblical Text

**He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself,
And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.**

⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you,

Reprove a wise man and he will love you.

**⁹ Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser,
Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.**