

PROVERBS

In March 1966, John Lennon from the uber popular band 'The Beatles' set off a firestorm when he finished an interview with the London newspaper *The Evening Standard*. While their songs like "Hard Day's Night" and "Help!" had soared on the charts, John Lennon made the comment that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ himself. When the interview was published in the United States, the result was an angry reaction by many, and the Beatles' albums were burned in protest.

What John Lennon saw was the waning of Christianity in the West and the rise of Rock n' Roll. But what many did not recognize was the rise of the entertainment culture over the religious rot that had set in to the West. The entertainment complex is a massive conglomeration of art and business that has been wed together to create a massive influence that has changed the fabric and soul of Western civilization. Neil Postman, a media theorist, saw the dangers that entertainment would produce to the culture in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He saw that to be amused was to a-muse – stop thinking – by becoming passive participants in the cultural narrative rather than critical thinkers and engaged citizens.

So it's not a surprise that parents say to their kids that homework should come before entertainment. "Have you finished your homework?" is a question that has been asked hundreds of times by parents all over the place. And the reason is quite simple – entertainment is a powerful shaping force and has bled into all spheres of life so that learning and entertainment can hardly be discerned.

And yet, the power of these parents as they prepare to launch their son into the world in Proverbs 9 is not to do what so many did with the Beatles' albums – go and burn them – but to persuade them that wisdom and folly are not always easily discerned. So the very stark contrast between wisdom and folly is laid out for us in chapters 1-9 to prepare us to be launched into the world without our parents in Proverbs 10ff so that we might fear the Lord and discern and decide wisely. So let's consider how we see the wisdom of Christ in this passage in two ways.

Discern and Decide (9:1-6, 13-18)

The choice that we have to make is between wisdom and folly, and as we have seen throughout this book, the son is being encouraged to marry well – marry wisdom and avoid folly. The call then, is to make a wise and discerning choice.

But what is fascinating about how this process is set up is that it is a process by which the parents haven't burned the Beatles' albums and sworn off all forms of social media. Rather, they have sought to persuade by means of showing the consequences of different choices. And this is where the wisdom of age comes in – as you grow over the years, those who learn from

life experience are able to better see the trajectory of choices and give counsel to others. And for good reason – wisdom and folly can look very similar in some ways.

Consider their call: both wisdom and folly say the exact same thing in vv. 4 and 16. They both say, “Whoever is simple, turn in here!” Both wisdom and folly are at their homes crying out to the simple. They both are at the high places. The initial appearance of wisdom and folly isn’t plain to the young eye. The simple who are being called are going to hear the exact same thing. They can’t discern the difference by just the initial invitation. So the initial call isn’t enough to help us to know how to decide. We have to discern more.

So we need to consider their situation and look deeper and consider their offer. Wisdom offers a feast – she has prepared a delicious meal – expensive meat, bread, and wine. This isn’t a quick fix, but a feast. She offers something deep and satisfying, something that will take time to linger over, something that can be savoured and enjoyed. It is a costly meal, and it is worth sitting down and enjoying over time. But Folly offers a meal – bread and water, and it’s fast food and not really that great. It sounds good – it is described as sweet and pleasant, but it is also stolen and consumed in secret. It has an allure to it because it is forbidden, but this doesn’t satisfy. It’s a momentary pleasure. Like pornography that is stolen and consumed in secret, this is not a feast but a fast food drive thru moment that doesn’t last. And pornography is a good example of the difference of the food of wisdom and folly – what our culture offers is fast, easy access, and always available, but never satisfying. But it has to be consumed in secret, without people knowing, in shame and disgrace. But wisdom’s offer is the beauty of married love, secure and stable in the context of covenant, secured with promises and committed to work through the good and the bad.

We also need to consider their invitations. While both women say the same thing, what wisdom offers is something that has been built through hard work and generous effort. She offers to you something that has been tested and tried, something that has created something beautiful. But folly offers something that is stolen and her call is loud and boisterous. She gets your attention, but what she offers isn’t lasting. It hasn’t been tried and tested; it’s been taken and consumed in secret. Further, wisdom has built a house – and it is a fine house of seven pillars, and we don’t know what the seven pillars mean, but we can simply see that she has a fine home, built with hard work over time that is the result of generosity and hard work. But when folly invites you, she doesn’t offer you something from hard work and generosity, but she has stolen it and seduces you with her words.

And here is something we need to notice about their invitations: while the invitations seem the same, the appeal and seduction isn’t by beauty, but by words. It’s smooth talkers, winsome words, and a fine appeal that sounds good initially, but the charismatic, smooth talker is no indication of something fine and good. I have worked with people who are really good at packaging and putting together things in a way that look slick and have cool sayings, but when you peel back the layers of the cool, what I have often found underneath is rot. Substance

matters. The branding, the cool look, the flash – it's all outward show. But wisdom offers you something deeper, something more profound, something built on a better foundation.

Finally, we need to consider their results. While wisdom has built a house and offered a feast, her result is to leave behind simplicity and find life (v. 6). What she offers is something lasting, rewarding, and enduring. But folly offers stolen goods, with short term pleasure and pain that has dead bodies as the result.

So as the parents prepare to launch their child out of the house and into the world, they don't tell them to burn the Beatles albums. They show them that there is a substantial difference in ways to live. One mutilates you, one remakes you. One is fast and easy, the other is rewarding and lasting. At first, they sound the same, but their end is completely different. And all it takes is to slow down and discern the difference. Life and death. Feast or fast food. A call to the way or being called away. The choices couldn't be more starkly contrasted, but they seem the same.

So what does this mean? You've got to...

Learn the Way of the Wise (vv. 7-12)

Wisdom has to be learned, but there is also the need to discern who is wise and who is foolish. While this middle section seems out of place, there is a general principle here to help you sift through who is wise and who is not: how do they handle correction. And here, the two people who are presented are the wise and the scoffer.

The scoffer really has no hope. He knows everything. He's got it all figured out. If you correct him, he will hate you. And so the advice here is – stay away. These are the people who will hurt you. These are the people who will abuse and injure you because they don't really love you – they hate you. They write you off. They aren't life-long learners. They are wise in their own eyes.

But the wise person doesn't initially look wise. He receives correction. He sees that he can grow in wisdom. He wants to keep growing. He knows that there is so much more that he has yet to obtain. And this is the kind of person who doesn't bring injury or abuse to you, but loves you. He thanks you. He knows a gift when he has received it.

Why is this? Because wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord. And as we began Proverbs 1, we saw that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge – fools despise wisdom and instruction, but those who are wise grow in their knowledge of God. This gives them insight. And the insight they have leads to life (v. 6, vv. 11-12a).

The most simple way to discern wisdom and folly is this: who is humble, who is repentant, who receives correction. They know God, and the way that you know that they know God is that they welcome and receive correction. They invite it. Their heart attitude is humility. Their

posture is repentance. And their path is life. And this is because when you discern and decide to learn the way of the wise, you will...

See the Wisdom of Christ

At the start of our service, Peter read for us Jesus' words from the end of his first public teaching – the Sermon on the Mount. And as Jesus taught the disciples and the crowds, what he appealed to them to do was to build a life built on something lasting, enduring, and solid. To build on the solid rock, the firm foundation. Why? Because life will bring storms. There will be hardships and trials. There will be disappointments and griefs and sorrows. When these waves come and crash into your life, what you have built your life upon will show either to be lasting or to be languishing. The wise man builds his house upon the rock, the foolish man built his house upon the sand. Both had homes. Both experienced storms. And here is what we need to know: the good life doesn't avoid the storms but weathers the storms.

There are sunny days and there are cloudy days. There are seasons of harvest and there are seasons of storms. Because you experience a storm doesn't tell you anything about God or his love for you. We live in a fallen world, broken by Adam's sin and experiencing the curse. But Jesus came to show us that his life was built upon the fear of the Lord, the solid rock. So when the storms of hell broke loose, when darkness covered the land, when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – he was not abandoned to death. He was raised to life to point you to the reality that if you build your life upon something that can endure the darkness of sin and death and hell itself and still rise again, then there is something better than fast and sweet and stolen. There is something that is lasting and secure and sure.

John Lennon could say that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ. And he might have been right for the moment. But where is John Lennon and where is Jesus Christ? Whose name is still sung? Whose praise is still enduring? Whose love is lasting?

Build your life on that which lasts. Everything else is sinking sand.