

Proverbs 1-9 • The Naive, the Scoffer & the Fool

Introduction

Whereas a parallel Walk with the Word study is provided covering the positive calls of wisdom a believer should accept, this study addresses the characteristics and behavior of those rejecting the same. Unbelievers, by definition, reject God's Word outright, so what is being addressed here applies more to those who could or should adhere to God's Word but choose not to because of a far different spiritual condition. This may go a long way toward answering the puzzling question, at least where Bible-practicing Christians are concerned, of why there are those both in attendance at Church, and even perhaps authentic members of the Body of Christ, who continue to fail to put God's Word into practice. We often look at the folly of their beliefs and resulting behavior and wonder what it will take before they realize what is so obviously, at least to us, wrong and finally return to God's Word and ways. Scripture has much to teach that we might understand the greater issues which are at work just below the surface in such individuals and why it is so difficult to turn them around.

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

²¹At 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?

[Read 1:20-22]

Q: To whom is this first call of wisdom addressed in 1:20-22?

- "O naive ones" refers to someone who has yet to learn not to accept anything and everything on face value. Their bad discretion is actually the result of no discretion, which is why they are easily led astray.

¹⁵The naive believes everything,
But the sensible man considers his steps. — Proverbs 14:15

- "Scoffers" refers to those who from the outset will not listen because they are ruled by pride and therefore respond in ways designed to silence or belittle the messenger. This is the know-it-all who rejects any and all criticism or reproof no matter how it is presented.

¹A wise son accepts his father's discipline,
But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. — Proverbs 13:1

²⁴"Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names,
Who acts with insolent pride. — Proverbs 21:24

- "Fools" refers to those who believe they know better than everyone else and refuse to be guided by anything but their own emotions and sense of things. They might best be described as self-satisfied

²A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind. — Proverbs 18:2

²A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the
foolish man's heart directs him toward the left. — Ecc. 10:2

Q: According to these verses, what is the chief characteristic defining each of these types of people?

- The naive "love being simple-minded"—that is, when they accept any and every thing on face value, they are in their comfort zone.
- The scoffers "delight themselves in scoffing"—that is, they are not just prideful, but actually thrive in it.
- The fools "hate knowledge"—that is, they cannot abide anything which might expose their lack of judgment to do whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it.

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Application: This goes a long way toward understanding that their common condition is not primarily attributed to being deceived or resulting from a chance circumstance—it is something they have embraced and actively pursue; it's both a lifestyle and a way of thinking in place of biblical faith.

⁴"To you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to the sons of men.
⁵O naïve ones, understand prudence;
And, O fools, understand wisdom.

[Read 8:4-5]

Q: What is textually different about who is addressed in wisdom's second call in 8:4-5?

A: It is to "naïve ones" and "fools".

Q: Why do you suppose "scoffers" are absent?

A: This particular call is to "understand prudence" and "understand wisdom", both of which by definition a "scoffer" will not respond to because they automatically reject it.

Application: The "naïve" and the "fool" could make a correction by the acceptance of God's Word because they are simply ignoring or overlooking it. A scoffer's behavior precludes the acceptance of God's Word from the outset because they actively demean and reject it.

⁴"Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!"
To him who lacks understanding she says,
⁵"Come, eat of my food
And drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶Forsake your folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding."

[Read 9:4-6]

Q: What is obviously different about the target audience in wisdom's third call in 9:4-6?

A: It is reduced to addressing the naïve alone.

Q: Why might this category possess the greatest potential for change?

A: Whereas scoffers actively reject God's Word, and fools unwisely share a close behavior because they "hate knowledge" (1:22), the naïve can cure their ignorance by ultimately embracing and accepting God's Word. They may even learn from what happens to the others.

¹¹When the scoffer is punished, the naïve becomes wise;
But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.
— Proverbs 21:11

Q: How is this change expressed in all these verses?

A: In the invitation, "Come, eat my food". Food and eating is prolifically used throughout the whole of God's Word to represent consuming God's Word—that is, not just being a hearer, but a doer who puts it into practice.

Application: Unlike the others, the naïve are not engaged in behavior which actively prevents the possibility of adopting the needed change to begin to accept God's Word and ways.

²³"Turn to my reproof,
Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
²⁵And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;

[Read 1:23-25]

Q: So does God simply abandon such people? What does He do to try and reach them?

A: He reproves, or disciplines, them.

Q: What would happen if they responded correctly so as to "Turn to my reproof"?

A: They would, by the Spirit, understand the message and respond to it.

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Q: How is a lack of the right response characterized here?

- "...I called and you refused..."
- "...I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention..."
- "...you neglected all my counsel..."
- "...you...did not want my reproof".

¹¹My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD
Or loathe His reproof,
¹²For whom the LORD loves He reproves,
Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.
— Proverbs 3:11-12

Application: The Lord's initial, good faith efforts to reach those practicing these behaviors is through His discipline.

[Read 1:26-27]

²⁶I will also laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
²⁷When your dread comes like a storm
And your calamity comes like a
whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon
you.

Q: What takes place when there is no response to the initial overtures of discipline?

A: We are provided a list describing God's escalation to personal tragedy:

- "...dread comes like a storm..."
- "...calamity comes like a whirlwind..."
- "...distress and anguish come upon you."

Q: What is a famous example in Scripture of someone backslidden who finally repented and returned when they had a "rock bottom" personal experience?

A: The Prodigal Son.

Application: As a final effort, the Lord will attempt to reach those practicing these behaviors by bringing about some kind of "rock bottom" experience.

[Read 1:28-32]

²⁸Then they will call on me, but I will
not answer;
They will seek me diligently but they
will not find me,
²⁹Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.
³⁰They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof.
³¹So they shall eat of the fruit of their
own way
And be satiated with their own devices.
³²For the waywardness of the naive
will kill them,
And the complacency of fools will
destroy them.

Q: What ultimately happens to those unresponsive to all of God's efforts to reach them?

A: When they realize the truth, it will be too late.

Q: What are stipulated as the root causes leading to this end? Discuss what these have in common.

- "Because they hated knowledge..." (v.29)
- "...and did not choose the fear of the LORD." (v.29)
- "They would not accept my counsel..." (v.30_
- "They spurned all my reproof." (v.30)

Q: How is God's judgment ultimately expressed in v.31?

- "...they shall eat of the fruit of their own way..."
- "...they shall...be satiated with their own devices."

Q: And how do we know that this all came about as the result of personal choice?

A: It is identified as "waywardness" and "complacency"—in other words, straying from the truth and failing to act upon the truth.

Application: In the ultimate consequences of "reaping what you sow", these behaviors, if consistently pursued, will unavoidably lead to destruction.

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⁶Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; ⁹but just as it is written,

“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN
AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE
HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR
THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”

¹⁰For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

[Read 1 Co. 2:6-13]

Q: What is the distinction Paul makes about wisdom?

A: In preaching the Gospel it is important to avoid the pollutive effects of “the wisdom of men” so that they might receive the Gospel; but when it comes to the wisdom of God, this is reserved to be taught **AFTER** the Gospel has been received.

Application: *It is certainly necessary to declare the Gospel to the lost, but it is equally important to teach God's wisdom to those who are maturing in the faith. It is impossible to build a strong church using only the Gospel; there needs to be the teaching of the plan and “mystery” of God leading into the deeper things. It is never about just making “converts” but “disciples”, which is the point at which God's wisdom is imparted.*

Q: What are the two spirits which are contrasted by Paul?

A: The “spirit of this world” and “the Spirit of God”. (v.12)

Q: How does this relate back to the two messages presented in the previous verses?

A: The spirit of this world speaks “in words taught by human wisdom” as opposed to “those taught by the Spirit”. (v.13)

Point: *The problem with the naïve, fool and scoffer is they are still beholden to “words taught by human wisdom” and therefore not really changing from their old life.*

Q: How does Paul say that Isaiah 64:4 is fulfilled?

A: The wisdom of God is revealed exclusively through Spirit-filled Believers.

Q: Why is this actually a practical matter?

A: As stated in v.11, just as only a man's spirit can know a man's thoughts, only the Spirit of God can make known God's thoughts.

Q: But how is this accomplished? How does the Holy Spirit communicate?

A: According to v.13 the Holy Spirit teaches “in words”. The phrase “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” might be best understood as “explaining spiritual things to spiritual people”. Scripture is the Word of God given by the Spirit of God. This is affirming the authority and priority of God's Word. There is an old saying, “Prayer is us talking to God, Scripture is God talking back to us”.

Application: *Only Spirit-filled Believers will ever fully comprehend the complete, full, and deeper meaning of God's Word. No unregenerate person will ever understand it as anything more than an academic exercise according to their earthly thinking. But neither will those who do not crucify the old life and live in obedience to God's Word and ways, as exhibited by the naïve, the fool and the scoffer who never turn back from their ways.*

Overall Application

- What will it take to reach the naïve? How might we pray for and minister to them?
- What will it take to reach the fool? How might we pray for and minister to them?
- What will it take to reach the scoffer? How might we pray for and minister to them?