

CHAPTER 9

Christ and sin are rivals for the soul of man, and here we are told how they both make their court to it, to have the innermost and uppermost place in it. The design of this representation is to set before us life and death, good and evil; and there needs no more than a fair stating of the case to determine us which of those to choose, and surrender our hearts to. They are both brought in making entertainment for the soul, and inviting it to accept of the entertainment; concerning both we are told what the issue will be; and, the matter being thus laid before us, let us consider, take advice, and speak our minds. And we are therefore concerned to put a value upon our own souls, because we see there is such striving for them.

I. Christ, under the name of Wisdom, invites us to accept of his entertainment, and so to enter into acquaintance and communion with him (v. 1-6). And having foretold the different success of his invitation (v. 7-9) he shows, in short, what he requires from us (v. 10). and what he designs for us (v. 11), and then leaves it to our choice what we will do (v. 12).

II. Sin, under the character of a foolish woman, courts us to accept of her entertainment, and (v. 13-16) pretends it is very charming (v. 17). But Solomon tells us what the reckoning will be (v. 18). And now choose you, this day, whom you will close with.

PROVERBS 9:1-12

WISDOM'S INVITATION

Wisdom is here introduced as a magnificent and munificent queen, very great and very generous; that Word of God is this Wisdom in which God makes known his goodwill towards men; God the Word is this Wisdom, to whom the Father has committed all judgment. He who, in the chapter before, showed his grandeur and glory as the Creator of the world, here shows his grace and goodness as the Redeemer of it. The word is plural,

Wisdoms; for in Christ are hid treasures of wisdom, and in his undertaking appears the manifold wisdom of God in a mystery. Now observe here,

I. The rich provision which Wisdom has made for the reception of all those that will be her disciples. This is represented under the similitude of a sumptuous feast, whence it is probable, our Saviour borrowed those parables in which he compared the *kingdom of heaven* to a great supper, ^{<422>}Matthew 22:2; ^{<246>}Luke 14:16. And so it was prophesied of, ^{<236>}Isaiah 25:6. It is such a feast as Ahasuerus made to *show the riches of his glorious kingdom*. The grace of the gospel is thus set before us in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. To bid her guests welcome,

1. Here is a stately palace provided, v. 1. Wisdom, not finding a house capacious enough for all her guests, has built one on purpose, and, both to strengthen it and to beautify it, she has *hewn out her seven pillars*, which make it to be very firm, and look very great. Heaven is the house which Wisdom has built to entertain all her guests that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb; that is her Father's house, where there are many mansions, and whither she has gone to prepare places for us. She has hanged the earth upon nothing, there in it we have no continuing city; but heaven is a city that has foundations, has pillars. The church is Wisdom's house, to which she invites her guests, supported by the power and promise of God, as by *seven pillars*. Probably, Solomon refers to the temple which he himself had lately built for the service of religion, and to which he would persuade people to resort, both to worship God and to receive the instructions of Wisdom. Some reckon the schools of the prophets to be here intended.

2. Here is a splendid feast got ready (v. 2): *She has killed her beasts; she has mingled her wine*; plenty of meat and drink are provided, and all of the best. *She has killed her sacrifice* (so the word is); it is a sumptuous, but a sacred feast, a feast upon a sacrifice. Christ has offered up himself a sacrifice for us, and it is *his flesh* that is *meat indeed* and *his blood* that is *drink indeed*. The Lord's supper is a feast of reconciliation and joy upon the sacrifice of atonement. The wine is *mingled* with something richer than itself, to give it a more than ordinary spirit and flavour. *She has completely furnished her table* with all the satisfactions that a soul can desire — righteousness and grace, peace and joy, the assurances of God's love, the consolations of the Spirit, and all the pledges and earnest of eternal life. Observe, It is all Wisdom's own doing; *she* has killed the beasts, *she* has mingled the wine, which denotes both the love of Christ,

who makes the provision (he does not leave it to others, but takes the doing of it into his own hands), and the excellency of the preparation. That must needs be exactly fitted to answer the end which Wisdom herself has the fitting up of.

II. The gracious invitation she has given, not to some particular friends, but to all in general, to come and take part of these provisions.

1. She employs her servants to carry the invitation round about in the country: *She has sent forth her maidens*, v. 3. The ministers of the gospel are commissioned and commanded to give notice of the preparations which God has made, in the everlasting covenant, for all those that are willing to come up to the terms of it; and they, with maiden purity, not corrupting themselves or the word of God, and with an exact observance of their orders, are to call upon all they meet with, even in *the highways and hedges*, to come and feast with Wisdom, for *all things are now ready*, ^{<1423>}Luke 14:23.

2. She herself *cries upon the highest places of the city*, as one earnestly desirous of the welfare of the children of men, and grieved to see them rejecting their own mercies for lying vanities. Our Lord Jesus was himself the publisher of his own gospel; when he had sent forth his disciples he followed them to confirm what they said; nay, *it began to be spoken by the Lord*, ^{<3113>}Hebrews 2:3. He stood, and cried, *Come unto me*. We see who invited; now let us observe,

(1.) To whom the invitation is given: *Whoso is simple and wants understanding*, v. 4. If we were to make an entertainment, of all people we should not care for, much less court, the company of such, but rather of philosophers and learned men, that we might hear their wisdom, and whose table-talk would be improving. “Have I need of madmen?” But Wisdom invites such, because what she has to give is what they most need, and it is their welfare that she consults, and aims at, in the preparation and invitation. he that is simple is invited, that he may be made wise, and he that *wants a heart* (so the word is) let him come hither, and he shall have one. Her preparations are rather physic than food, designed for the most valuable and desirable cure, that of the mind. Whosoever he be, the invitation is general, and excludes none that do not exclude themselves; though they be ever so foolish, yet,

[1.] They shall be welcome.

[2.] They may be helped; they shall neither be despised nor despaired of. Our Saviour came, *not to call the righteous, but sinners*, not the wise in their own eyes, who say they see (~~404~~ John 9:41), but the simple, those who are sensible of their simplicity and ashamed of it, and him that is willing to *become a fool, that he may be wise*, ~~405~~ 1 Corinthians 3:18.

(2.) What the invitation is.

[1.] We are invited to Wisdom's house: *Turn in hither*. I say *we* are, for which of us is there that must not own the character of the invited, that are *simple and want understanding*? Wisdom's doors stand open to such, and she is desirous to have some conversation with them, one word for their good, nor has she any other design upon them.

[2.] We are invited to her table (v. 5): *Come, eat of my bread*, that is, taste of the true pleasures that are to be found in the knowledge and fear of God. By faith acted on the promises of the gospel, applying them to ourselves and taking the comfort of them, we feed, we feast, upon the provisions Christ has made for poor souls. What we eat and drink we make our own, we are nourished and refreshed by it, and so are our souls by the word of God; it has that in it which is *meat and drink* to those that have understanding.

(3.) What is required of those that may have the benefit of this invitation, v. 6.

[1.] They must break off from all bad company: "*Forsake the foolish, converse not with them, conform not to their ways, have no fellowship with the works of darkness, or with those that deal in such works.*" The first step towards virtue is to shun vice, and therefore to shun the vicious. *Depart from me, you evil-doers.*

[2.] They must awake and arise from the dead; they must live, not in pleasure (for those that do so are dead while they live), but in the service of God; for those only that do so live indeed, live to some purpose. "Live not a mere animal-life, as brutes, but now, at length, live the life of men. *Live and you shall live; live spiritually, and you shall live eternally,*" ~~406~~ Ephesians 5:14.

[3.] They must choose the paths of Wisdom, and keep to them: "*Go in the way of understanding; govern thyself henceforward by the rules of religion and right reason.*" It is not enough to forsake the foolish, but we

must join ourselves with those that walk in wisdom, and walk in the same spirit and steps.

III. The instructions which Wisdom gives to the maidens she sends to invite, to the ministers and others, who in their places are endeavouring to serve her interests and designs. She tells them,

1. What their work must be, not only to tell in general what preparation is made for souls, and to give a general offer of it, but they must address themselves to particular persons, must tell them of their faults, *reprove, rebuke*, v. 7, 8. They must instruct them how to amend — *teach*, v. 9. The word of God is intended, and therefore so is the ministry of that word, *for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*.

2. What different sorts of persons they would meet with, and what course they must take with them, and what success they might expect.

(1.) They would meet with some *scorners* and *wicked men* who would mock the messengers of the Lord, and misuse them, would *laugh those to scorn* that invite them to the feast of the Lord, as they did, ^{<400>}2 Chronicles 30:10, would *treat them spitefully*, ^{<406>}Matthew 22:6. And, though they are not forbidden to invite those simple ones to Wisdom's house, yet they are advised not to pursue the invitation by reproving and rebuking them. *Reprove not a scorner; cast not these pearls before swine*, ^{<406>}Matthew 7:6. Thus Christ said of the Pharisees, *Let them alone*, ^{<454>}Matthew 15:14. “Do not reprove them.”

[1.] “In justice to them, for those have forfeited the favour of further means who scorn the means they have had. Those that are thus *filthy, let them be filthy still*; those that are *joined to idols, let them alone*; lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

[2.] “In prudence to yourselves; because, if you reprove them,” *First*, “You lose your labour, and so *get to yourselves shame* for the disappointment.” *Secondly*, “You exasperate them; do it ever so wisely and tenderly, if you do it faithfully, they will hate you, they will load you with reproaches, and say all the ill they can of you, and so you will get a blot; therefore you had better not meddle with them, for your reproofs will be likely to do more hurt than good.”

(2.) They would meet with others, who are wise, and good, and just; thanks be to God, all are not scorners. We meet with some who are so

wise for themselves, to just to themselves, as to be willing and glad to be taught; and when we meet with such,

[1.] If there be occasion, we must reprove them; for wise men are not so perfectly wise but there is that in them which needs a reproof; and we must not connive at any man's faults because we have a veneration for his wisdom, nor must a *wise man* think that his wisdom exempts him from reproof when he says or does any thing foolishly; but the more wisdom a man has the more desirous he should be to have his weaknesses shown him, because a *little folly* is a great blemish to *him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour*.

[2.] With our reproofs we must *give* them *instruction*, and must *teach* them, v. 9.

[3.] We may expect that our doing so will be taken as a kindness, ~~485~~ Psalm 141:5. A wise man will reckon those his friends who deal faithfully with him: “Rebuke such a one, and *he will love thee* for thy plain dealing, will thank thee, and desire thee to do him the same good turn another time, if there be occasion.” It is as great an instance of wisdom to take a reproof well as to give it well,

[4.] Being taken well, it will do good, and answer the intention. A *wise man* will be made wiser by the reproofs and instructions that are given him; he *will increase in learning*, will grow in knowledge, and so grow in grace. None must think themselves too wise to learn, nor so good that they need not be better and therefore need not be taught. We must still press forward, and follow on to know till we come to the perfect man. *Give to a wise man* (so it is in the original), give him advice, give him reproof, give him comfort, and *he will be yet wiser; give him occasion* (so the Septuagint), occasion to show his wisdom, and he will show it, and the acts of wisdom will strengthen the habits.

IV. The instructions she gives to those that are invited, which her maidens must inculcate upon them.

1. Let them know wherein true wisdom consists, and what will be their entertainment at Wisdom's table, v. 10

(1.) The heart must be principled with *the fear of God*; that is *the beginning of wisdom*. A reverence of God's majesty, and a dread of his wrath, are that fear of him which is the beginning, the first step towards

true religion, whence all other instances of it take rise. This fear may, at first, have torment, but love will, by degrees, cast out the torment of it.

(2.) The head must be filled with the knowledge of the things of God. *The knowledge of holy things* (the word is plural) *is understanding*, the things pertaining to the service of God (those are called *holy things*), that pertain to our own sanctification; reproof is called *that which is holy*, ^{<4116>}Matthew 7:6. Or the knowledge which holy men have, which was taught by the holy prophets, of those things which *holy men spoke as they were moved by the holy Ghost*, *this is understanding*; it is the best and most useful understanding, will stand us in most stead and turn to the best account.

2. Let them know what will be advantages of this wisdom (v. 11): “*By me thy days shall be multiplied*. It will contribute to the health of thy body, and so *the years of thy life on earth shall be increased*, while men's folly and intemperance shorten their days. It will bring thee to heaven, and there thy days shall be multiplied *in infinitum — to infinity*, and the *years of thy life shall be increased without end*.” There is no true wisdom but in the say of religion and no true life but in the end of that way.

3. Let them know what will be the consequence of their choosing or refusing this fair offer, v. 12. Here is,

(1.) The happiness of those that embrace it: “*If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself*; thou wilt be the gainer by it, not Wisdom.” A man cannot be profitable to God. It is to our own good that we are thus courted. “Thou wilt not leave the gain to others” (as we do our worldly wealth when we die, which is therefore called *another man's*, ^{<4162>}Luke 16:12), “but thou shalt carry it with thee into another world.” Those that are wise for their souls are wise for themselves, for the soul is the man; nor do any consult their own true interest but those that are truly religious. This recommends us to God, and recovers us from that which is our folly and degeneracy; it employs us in that which is most beneficial in this world, and entitles us to that which is much more so in the world to come.

(2.) The shame and ruin of those that slight it: “*If thou scornest Wisdom's proffer, thou alone shalt bar it*.”

[1.] “Thou shalt bear the blame of it.” Those that are good must thank God, but those that are wicked may thank themselves; it is not owing to God (he is not the author of sin); Satan can only tempt, he cannot force;

and wicked companions are but his instruments; so that all the fault must lie on the sinner himself.

[2.] “Thou shalt bear the loss of that which thou scornest; it will be to thy own destruction; thy blood will be upon thy own head, and the consideration of this will aggravate thy condemnation. *Son, remember,* that thou hadst this fair offer made thee, and thou wouldst not accept it; thou stoodest fair for life, but didst choose death rather.”

PROVERBS 9:13-18

THE INVITATION OF FOLLY

We have heard what Christ has to say, to engage our affections to God and godliness, and one would think the whole world should go after him; but here we are told how industrious the tempter is to seduce unwary souls into the paths of sin, and with the most he gains his point, and Wisdom's courtship is not effectual. Now observe,

I. Who is the tempter — *a foolish woman*, Folly herself, in opposition to Wisdom. Carnal sensual pleasure I take to be especially meant by this *foolish woman* (v. 13); for that is the great enemy to virtue and inlet to vice; that defiles and debauches the mind, stupefies conscience, and puts out the sparks of conviction, more than any thing else. This tempter is here described to be,

1. Very ignorant: *She is simple and knows nothing*, that is, she has no sufficient solid reason to offer; where she gets dominion in a soul she works out all the knowledge of holy things; they are lost and forgotten. *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart*; they besot men, and make fools of them.

2. Very importunate. The less she has to offer that is rational the more violent and pressing she is, and carries the day often by dint of impudence. *She is clamorous* and noisy (v. 13), continually haunting young people with her enticements. *She sits at the door of her house* (v. 14), watching for a prey; not as Abraham at his tent-door, seeking an opportunity to do good. *She sits on a seat (on a throne, so the word signifies) in the high places of the city*, as if she had authority to give law, and we were all

debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh, and as if she had reputation, and were in honour, and thought worthy of *the high places of the city*; and perhaps she gains upon many more by pretending to be fashionable than by pretending to be agreeable. “Do not all persons of rank and figure in the world” (says she) “give themselves a greater liberty than the strict laws of virtue allow; and why shouldst thou humble thyself so far as to be cramped by them?” Thus the tempter affects to seem both kind and great.

II. Who are the tempted — young people who have been well educated; these she will triumph most in being the ruin of. Observe,

1. What their real character is; they are *passengers that go right on their ways* (v. 15), that have been trained up in the paths of religion and virtue and set out very hopefully and well, that seemed determined and designed for good, and are not (as that young man, ^{<1018>}Proverbs 7:8) *going the way to her house*. Such as these she has a design upon, and lays snares for, and uses all her arts, all her charms, to pervert them; if they *go right on*, and will not look towards her, she will call after them, so urgent are these temptations.

2. How she represents them. She calls them *simple* and *wanting understanding*, and therefore courts them to her school, that they may be cured of the restraints and formalities of their religion. This is the method of the stage (which is too close an exposition of this paragraph), where the sober young man, that has been virtuously educated, is the fool in the play, and the plot is to make him *seven times more a child of hell* than his profane companions, under colour of polishing and refining him, and setting him up for a wit and a beau. What is justly charged upon sin and impiety (v. 4), that it is folly, is here very unjustly retorted upon the ways of virtue; but the day will declare who are the fools.

III. What the temptation is (v. 17): *Stolen waters are sweet*. It is to water and bread, whereas Wisdom invites to the beasts she has killed and the wine she has mingled; however, bread and water are acceptable enough to those that are hungry and thirsty; and this is pretended to be more *sweet* and *pleasant* than common, for it is *stolen water and bread eaten in secret*, with a fear of being discovered. The pleasures of prohibited lusts are boasted of as more relishing than those of prescribed love; and dishonest gain is preferred to that which is justly gotten. Now this argues, not only a bold contempt, but an impudent defiance,

1. Of God's law, in that the waters are the sweeter for being stolen and come at by breaking through the hedge of the divine command. *Nitimur in vetitum* — *We are prone to what is forbidden*. This spirit of contradiction we have from our first parents, who thought the forbidden tree of all others *a tree to be desired*.

2. Of God's curse. The *bread is eaten in secret*, for fear of discovery and punishment, and the sinner takes a pride in having so far baffled his convictions, and triumphed over them, that, notwithstanding that fear, he dares commit the sin, and can make himself believe that, being eaten in secret, it shall never be discovered or reckoned for. Sweetness and pleasantness constitute the bait; but, by the tempter's own showing, even that is so absurd, and has such allays, that it is a wonder how it can have any influence upon men that pretend to reason.

IV. An effectual antidote against the temptation, in a few words, v. 18. He that so far wants understanding as to be drawn aside by these enticements is led on, ignorantly, to his own inevitable ruin: *He knows not*, will not believe, does not consider, the tempter will not let him know, *that the dead are there*, that those who live in pleasure are *dead while they live, dead in trespasses and sins*. Terrors attend these pleasures like the terrors of death itself. The giants are there — *Rephaim*. It was this that ruined the sinners of the old world, the giants that were *in the earth in those days*. *Her guests*, that are treated with those *stolen waters*, are not only in the highway to hell and at the brink of it, but they are already *in the depths of hell*, under the power of sin, led captive by Satan at his will, and ever and anon lashed by the terrors of their own consciences, which are a hell upon earth. The depths of Satan are *the depths of hell*. Remorseless sin is remediless ruin; it is the bottomless pit already. Thus does Solomon show the hook; those that believe him will not meddle with the bait.