

Seeking and Finding the Wisdom from God



We come at last to wisdom. It may seem strange to have gone through all these past chapters only now to come to the concept most commonly associated with the Book of Proverbs. In a manner of speaking, all the other topics discussed so far are simply ways in which this greater issue of wisdom works itself out in our lives. After all, what is the call to hard work, the call to patient endurance, the call to disciplined chastity but appeals to engage each of these aspects of life through wisdom?

This is all very true, but the Book of Proverbs goes about explaining this in an unusual way. In this book of wisdom, the concept is portrayed not as a set of doctrines or principles, as important as those might be. Instead, it is anthropomorphized, transposed from an abstract ideal of a life well-lived into a personification of wisdom itself.

Offering something of a preview of Christ's later use of parables, this metaphor for wisdom is nearly unique in the Book of Proverbs. While the bulk of this book is comprised of short nuggets, each highlighting a single point, wisdom, particularly in chapters 8 and



9, operates as an extended analogy, alluring the reader to seek wisdom as a treasure, to be pursued, even courted, above all else. As these Scriptures put it, we are called to value wisdom more than we would any other earthly goal. “Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her,” (Proverbs 8:10-11).

There are other “characters” in this book, but none are used as extensively as this one. You have the fool, the sloth, and the scoffer. Each of these shows up in the book from time to time, but never for more than a few verses. You also have the Woman Folly

in chapter 9 and the Proverbs 31 “Superwoman,” but even these extended metaphors do not rise to the level of Lady Wisdom. In fact, this personified version of wisdom is so strong that it is not unheard of for scholars to link its portrayal here to the Logos of the Gospel of John. While that is clearly taking things too far, we should not overreact by undervaluing the truth presented in these passages.





Rather than merely a synonym for being smart, the way we often think of it, Lady Wisdom stands as an allegory for the foundational principles of the entire universe. It is something to be known and to be learned from. “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world,” (Proverbs 8:22-26).

As such, the quest for wisdom is not something to be left only for the intelligentsia of the world, those whose lives are dedicated to pondering the “higher things,” but it is a necessary prerequisite for anyone seeking a well-managed life. It makes no more sense to strive for the good life without wisdom than it would to operate an elaborate machine without consulting the directions. But, neither is wisdom a fact to be learned or a skill that, once achieved, can be left in the rearview mirror. While it is always to be sought, never in the Book of Proverbs is the pursuit of wisdom seen as something which can be surpassed.



Rather than an object to be acquired, wisdom is more a disposition to be encouraged. In fact, as we will see, one might go so far as to say that this seeking out of wisdom is the fundamental lesson about this subject found in the Book of Proverbs. For the human being, living as both finite and fallen, having both weaknesses and corruptions, one of the key skills we must acquire in our quest for wisdom is the recognition that we do not know everything. After all, before we can begin to search for something, we must first admit that there is something we lack.

This is not the smarmy false humility we see in Socrates, claiming that we are wise because we know we are not wise. We today pride ourselves on our skepticism. Terrified of being “taken in” or being made to look the fool, we are quick to ascribe the worst of motives to anyone and anything.

In this, we resemble nothing quite so much as the dwarfs at the end of C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, denying the truth of the goodness around us for fear of being deceived. In each of these cases, we have not learned anything, nor have we become wise. All we have done in these moments is to admit our inadequacy while refusing to hope that there is anything which can be done about it.

Think of the way Proverbs speaks of wisdom. It repeatedly refers to the need to search for it, to long for it, to find in its beauty the motivation to strive for more. The wise man of the Bible is not the one who has learned things but the one who knows that there are things to be learned. It is a hopeful humility. In each way that wisdom works itself out in our lives, we find

the humility that realizes our own need while yet still maintaining the hope that something can indeed be known.

Biblical wisdom is the recognition that there is an order to the cosmos that is bigger than us, yet that this order is open to us as it is the creation of Him Who transcends creation itself, and who nonetheless pours Himself out to reveal Himself and His love to us.

