

PROVERBS VIII: STRAYING FROM THE SAVIOR
PROVERBS 9:1-6, 10, 13-18

(NLT) "Wisdom has built her house; she has carved its seven columns. ² She has prepared a great banquet, mixed the wines, and set the table. ³ She has sent her servants to invite everyone to come. She calls out from the heights overlooking the city. ⁴ 'Come in with me,' she urges the simple. To those who lack good judgment, she says, ⁵ 'Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Leave your simple ways behind, and begin to live; learn to use good judgment.' ¹⁰ Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment. ¹³ The woman named Folly is brash. She is ignorant and doesn't know it. ¹⁴ She sits in her doorway on the heights overlooking the city. ¹⁵ She calls out to men going by who are minding their own business. ¹⁶ 'Come in with me,' she urges the simple. To those who lack good judgment, she says, ¹⁷ 'Stolen water is refreshing; food eaten in secret tastes the best!' ¹⁸ But little do they know that the dead are there. Her guests are in the depths of the grave."

INTRODUCTION

French cuisine is often ranked as the most exquisitely prepared and finest tasting food in the world. In 1900, the President of France decided to show appreciation for the nation's 22,295 mayors. They were hosted at a lavish banquet beneath awnings at the royal Tuileries Garden in Paris. The menu consisted of pheasant, salmon, and duckling, among other meats, lush fruit dishes, and a variety of mouth-watering and fancifully decorated pastries. After being cooked to perfection by the finest chefs in Paris, headwaiters of 1,800 of the best hotels supervised the serving of this feast and catered to these mayors.

This Feast of the Mayors was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for most of these guests. No expense was spared in the quality of their food or service; all were allowed to eat and to drink to their heart's content. When this Presidential banquet ended and these mayors began their journey home, most could have passed by what they thought of as their favorite eating places without so much as a thought about stopping. Why? Two reasons: First, they were so stuffed that more food was the last thing they wanted; secondly, what could anyone else offer them that would be as spectacularly delicious and satisfying as the meal they had just enjoyed! If we practiced feasting upon the blessings Christ offers us by His Presence, by His Words, and by fellowship with His faithful followers, would we be as easily lured by the world's foolish and destructive temptations! Our two sermon points are: The World's Charm's and Our Savior's Charms.

I. THE WORLD'S CHARMS

Proverbs 9 employs the literary device known as *personification*. God is so intent that we follow His wise principles of conduct—for our own good, safety, and happiness—that He presents "Wisdom" as a woman calling us publicly to a lavish banquet. God is aware the Devil-driven world, personified as a woman named "Folly," is also calling to us. Folly lures us to abandon *God's* plans for our lives with false promises of happiness that trap us in personal ruin or spiritual disaster.

As far back as the first temptation in the Garden of Eden, Satan has sought to convince us life would be happier and more satisfying if we would defy the wishes and wisdom of how our Creator instructs us to live. Satan also seeks to convince us the benefits of defying God's rules far outweigh the costs of making up our own rules of right and wrong (**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-5**). Today, judges, politicians, and scientists are ready with money, medications, and mandates to help us try to escape the consequences of our rejection of God's helpful and healthful guidelines. "Who's to say who is right?" people demandingly ask today. Try telling people who lack faithful commitments to our Creator what "normal" is supposed to be and you may have a fight on your hands! Of course, we make allowances for the differences between what men and women think is "normal." A "normal" man has five items in his bathroom: a toothbrush, razor, shaving cream, a bar of soap, and a towel. The average number of items in a woman's bathroom is 328. A "normal" man would not be able to identify most of them.

Dr. David Wells of the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary of Massachusetts comments, "Worldliness is what makes sin look normal in any age and righteousness seem odd." In the eyes of a majority of Americans today, who are the oddest creatures walking our streets? Christians who live by the standards set down for us in what we follow as our Owner's Manual, the Bible. Years ago, English musicians noted that errand boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. This proved to be the result of the Westminster Abbey chimes being slightly out of tune. The boys didn't know something had gone wrong and the chimes pealed discordantly. Quite unconsciously, they had copied their pitch. Unconsciously and consciously, people all across this country have copied what they hear pealed as "normal" by the media, with little thought that many in our media are out of tune with our Maker, our Master Composer, who alone truly knows what is "normal" according to how He designed us best to live.

But a broader interpretation of our **Proverbs 9** verses suggests itself than how closely we are following our Creator's helpful and healthful moral guidelines. The Old and New Testaments use the metaphor of a marriage union to describe the quality of the intimate relationship our LORD desires with us. This allows us to view the temptations of the world, which seek to sidetrack us from living as God intends, as Satan's efforts to charm us away from the embrace of our Savior, in whose arms alone we can find the lasting and transforming love that will give us the satisfying happiness we all seek. Please hear the voice of Scripture in **Isaiah 54:5** (MEV): "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of Hosts [Leader of Heaven's armies] is His name"; **Isaiah 62:5** (MEV): "[A]s the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God shall rejoice over you"; and **Hosea 2:19-20** (ESV): "And I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD." When we commit ourselves to Christ, He embraces us with marriage-quality intimacy and affection! But the mindset of many today is that a marriage built upon lifetime commitments is optional. A teacher overheard a high school girl telling a classmate about her plans for their upcoming prom. "I'm renting a stretch limo, spending \$1,000 on a new dress, and I've reserved a table at the most expensive restaurant in town," she said. The teacher shook her head and said, "I didn't spend that much on my wedding." The girl replied, "I can have three or four weddings. But a prom you do only once."

The New Testament's classic passage about marital love is **Ephesians 5:22-32**, which I quote in part from the New Living Translation: "For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up His life for her²⁶ to make her holy and clean, . . . No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. . . . As the Scriptures say, 'A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one."

Why don't we experience more transforming intimacy with Christ as members of His Bride, the Church? Vivid glimpses in **Daniel 10** and **Ephesians 6:10-18** reveal Satan as a detestable schemer who uses vast, hellish armies to oppose God and tempt Christians and non-Christians to abandon God's will and God's ways. **Ephesians 6:10-12** declares (NLT), "A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." Satan is aided in his efforts by much in the world around us that is under his control. **I John 5:19** (NLT) reveals, "We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one." Satan is also aided by tendencies in our nature to relish Satan's temptations, unless we are kept under God's control by the Holy Spirit who lives within us. As **Galatians 5:16-17** (NLT) explains, "So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions."

Do you recall Folly's tempting call in **vs. 17**: "'Stolen water is refreshing; food eaten in secret is the best!'"? This is the age old lie we can indulge in forbidden pleasures and it will remain a secret; we can defy God's laws and no one will ever know. A noble steamship set sail one summer day from New Orleans, filled with passengers and cotton. A rain shower dampened a few bales during loading, but no one thought this posed any problem. The cotton was stowed away in the hold and the hatches fastened down. But the damp, closely packed bales began smoldering in the heat of the hold. Danger grew unseen and unknown. One day, a large sheet of flame burst forth. The fire alarm sounded, but flames quickly enveloped the ship with a disastrous loss of life and cargo. Even if we think sinful passions pose no problem for us if we just lightly engage in them, smoldering disaster is growing that can erupt and ruin us unless we place our desires back under God's controls.

II. OUR SAVIOR'S CHARMS

A survey some years ago of readers of the *Discipleship Journal* revealed their greatest spiritual challenges as Christians involved these temptations: 1. Materialism; 2. Pride; 3. Self-centeredness; 4. Laziness; 5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness; 5. (Tie) Sexual lust; 7. Envy; 8. Gluttony; and 9. Lying. Rather than attempting to identify the temptations with which *we* may most struggle, may I suggest what may be the main reason why we yield to any temptation, why we can be baited by any of Satan's lures to stray from the LORD's will? It's because we are not fully enough in the arms of **Jesus** and enraptured with His charms!

In December of 2012, I united Bob Hilliard and Debbie O'Connor in marriage. They told us last June at their home in Billings, MT, where we'd gone for Norm Hilliard's Memorial Service, "We are still on our honeymoon." What if during pre-marital counseling, either insisted they wanted all the privileges and benefits of marriage but wanted to keep their options open? If either met someone appealing, they were to be free to pursue their passions temporarily if they would later return to their marriage partner. Such "open marriage" agreements are common today, but are they a mockery of love and faithfulness. Yes! Would Bob & Debbie still be on their "honeymoon" if "open" to new lovers? This would have been like a mayor at the Paris banquet saving "a little room" for something tasty on his way home, after being blessed to eat better food than he ever thought it possible to enjoy! We can do this as Christians. Even when we are committing our hearts to Christ to become part of His Bride, we hold back parts of ourselves, we save "a little room" for something else that might seem tasty to us; some sinful soufflé. As long as it's a temporary passion and we return to our Savior, we deceive ourselves by thinking, "Is this not okay?"

Bob and Debbie did not cheapen their marriage commitments like this because they were fully satisfied with each other. The extreme satisfaction of newlyweds does often change, but does it have to? A hospital admitting clerk always fondly recalled one couple. The husband, a heart-attack victim, had been whisked away from his wife by the staff. Hours passed before she was allowed to see him. She was then dismayed to find him hooked up to elaborate machines that blipped, hissed, and beeped. She tiptoed to his bed, bent over him, and whispered, "George, I'm here." Then she kissed him. Suddenly the monitors began to beep and to go "blip-blip." "He was okay," she later explained. "But after forty-seven years of marriage it's nice to know that I can still make his heart skip when I kiss him."

A book, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, can help us sustain a marriage-closeness to our Savior that can "still make our heart skip" and keep us in His arms and out of the world's. Five major needs of women are: 1) Affection, 2) Conversation, 3) Honesty and openness, 4) Financial support, and 5) Family commitment. Five major needs of men are: 1) Sexual fulfillment, 2) Recreational companionship, 3) An attractive spouse, 4) Domestic support, and 5) Admiration. Men and women each represent half of the wholeness of personality found in our Creator, according to **Genesis 1:27 & 5:2**, so it's fair to say **Jesus** expects our attention to all ten of these needs in our relationship with Him and He counts our actions toward other believers as what we do to Him (**Matthew 25:40**). "Sexual fulfillment" does not

pertain to a spiritual being, but Christ does desire an emotional and spiritual union with us that mirrors a marriage's physical union, as **I Corinthians 6:15-17** reveals.

We should ask ourselves, when was the last time we demonstrated and expressed affection to **Jesus** or engaged Him in a meaningful conversation that drew Him into our plans? Do we deal with the Lord with honesty and openness? Do we practice financial support of His work and commitment to His family? Do we long for the intense intimacy and spiritual union with the Lord symbolized by the physical intimacy between husband and wife? Do we plan recreational activities that deepen our experience of and service to **Jesus**? Do we seek to keep ourselves as physically fit and appealing as possible as one way to be pleasing to Him? Do we seek to make the quality of our home life and hospitality we extend to guests in our homes an expression of our devotion to the LORD? Do our words and actions express our admiration of our Savior? Would it possibly make a difference in enhancing our relationship with **Jesus** if we made these 10 needs a checklist to help us know if we are demonstrating a marriage-quality devotion to our Savior?

CONCLUSION

Our hearts are so fickle and unpredictable. A woman seeking counsel from psychologist George W. Crane confided she hated her husband and intended to divorce him. "I want to hurt him all I can," she hissed. "Well, in that case," said Dr. Crane wisely, "I advise you to start showering him with compliments and to please him in every way possible. When he thinks he can't live without you and is convinced you love him devotedly, then start the divorce action. That's the way to hurt him most." Some months later the wife returned to report she'd followed his advice and all was going well. "Good," said Dr. Crane. "Now's the time to file for divorce." "Divorce!" the woman said indignantly. "Never. I love my husband dearly!"

What happened? The more this wife became devoted to fulfilling the major needs of her husband, even when her heart was not in it, the more her husband became inspired to fulfill his wife's deepest needs. The hymn, *Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy*, has these words as its chorus: "I will arise and go to Jesus, He will embrace me in His arms; in the arms of my dear Savior, O there are ten thousand charms." As our Heavenly Bridegroom, **Jesus** is always inspired to fulfill our deepest needs as members of His Bride, the Church. How many of His charms are lost on us because we are too much in the world's arms, and we are not with **Jesus** near enough or long enough to be exhilarated by our Savior's love?