

When a difficult decision is before you and you receive advice from many sources, how do you know which advice is wiser? Proverbs is a book about wisdom, written by those who experienced a lot and shared their tested wisdom to us. This wisdom isn't only practical, but also ethical. It reflects God's character, righteousness, and justice. Wisdom is skill in the art of godly living. In addition, 1 Corinthians 1:30 says that Jesus is the wisdom of God for us. As we grow to be more like Jesus, we grow in wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 says wisdom is having the fear of the Lord. This fear is more than awe and trembling, but it is living with intentional awareness of God's presence, in response to our loving Savior.

Proverbs 1:8-9 is an invitation from parents to receive wisdom, not just because parents have the right to tell children what to do, but because it reaps a real reward. The garland and pendant mentioned in v. 9 refers to rewards that convey the highest honor. Wise decisions are ones that can be made publicly and give honor to God. Unbelievers should see your wisdom and see how great Jesus is through your decisions. Every decision you make is a spiritual one. For example, when making decisions about marrying someone, whether you are able to share in the relationship with Christ together should be a deciding factor.

This parental wisdom in Proverbs applies not just to the home but also to life outside of the home. In vv. 10-19 the father describes the opposite of wisdom, the fool, whom we should never give in to. They invite us to ambush and devour others. We don't often see this overt villainy, but the underlying folly is self-centeredness. This goes beyond working hard for honest gain, but extends to self-interest that is to the detriment of others. It views rules and laws as suggestions. It sees life as full of limited commodities, and tells us that the only way we can gain is by taking from others. It views people as resources. It loves wealth and uses people, whereas wisdom loves people and uses wealth for God's glory.

But the wicked fool sets a trap for himself. Heeding wickedness leads to destruction. Folly can lead to temporal punishment, and eternal punishment if it goes too far. I'd much rather deal with God's correction than the consequences of straying from Him. But this folly is not just applicable to criminal activity. It relates to a selfish mindset. When we go out for dinner, my

family usually makes a big mess. But we clean it up out of consideration for the waiters. The voice of folly can tell us to leave it for others to clean up, since it's their job. While true, it fosters a self-centered inconsiderate mindset. If this goes on, we can become desensitized to others and become rude and even ruthless. This might seem like a far-fetched slippery slope argument, but this is exactly how I was before I knew Christ. So we must beware of counsel that rationalizes self-interest to the detriment of others. You know this mindset has taken hold when you feel happy about others' failure, or when envy and resentment take hold. But can we turn back from this folly?

Verses 20-33 describe wisdom seeking and calling us at the city gate, the most prominent hub in the city. This personification of wisdom often speaks for God. Just like a potential spouse, wisdom is a potential life partner that we should choose over folly. She tells us to look beyond immediate gratification to the long term. Three types of people are described in vv. 22-23: the simple and undecided, the fool who mocks wisdom, and the wise. Verses 22-33 form a chiasm. The call to turn from folly and description of the fate of the foolish and the wise are in vv. 22-23 and 32-33. Folly is stated to be the reason for dire consequences in vv. 24-27 and 29-31. Wisdom is just and fools reap what they sow. And in the center, v. 28 tells us that eventually if we follow folly, it will be too late to turn back. Turn now and by God's grace we can escape. A good example is the story of Bob and Audrey Meisner, who were leaders of their church. Audrey had an affair and ended up pregnant, but after receiving wise advice from a mentor, Bob decided not to expose or leave her, and even raised the illegitimate son as his own. And now their marriage and family is saved and thriving because Bob heeded wisdom. We must choose wisdom rather than folly. Failure to choose wisdom has the same results as choosing folly. When we receive advice, look at the lives and the words of those who are giving it. Are they characterized by Christ-likeness? Following Jesus is harder, but it is ultimately better. Make your decisions not out of self-centeredness, but rather in light of Jesus' character and God's presence.