

## The Way Of Folly

A basic narrative framework in the Bible is the metaphor of two “ways” or two “seeds.” Proverbs is organized entirely around this theme. There are two life paths (wisdom and folly), two basic worldviews (Yahweh and the gods), and two divine guides (Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly).

The basic dilemma is set out in chapter one: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (v. 7). Fools reject wisdom and instruction; therefore, they “despise” the fear of God. In fact, they despise God, himself. Like Adam, they reject the Lord as their authoritative guide for life. They follow Lady Folly, rather than Lady Wisdom. They do not lack information and they do not lack intelligence, but they are not teachable or submissive. The fool’s great weakness is his autonomy against God, a willful lack of understanding and self-delusion.

Lady Wisdom, representing the voice of God, declares to all who would listen:

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you...Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. (1:20-31)

In chapter nine Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly issue identical appeals to the person walking of the path of life. Lady Wisdom says:

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, “*Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!*” To him who lacks sense she says, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live and walk in the way of insight.” (vs 1-6)

Likewise, Lady Folly calls out:

The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, “*Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!*” And to him who lacks sense she says, “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. (vs. 13-18)

Proverbs presumes that every person is on a journey, a path to insight or illusion. There are only two options: the way that leads to wisdom or the way that leads to folly. Each path has its own authenticated guide. Both actively solicit followers. Both insinuate intimacy is a reward of discipleship. Lady Wisdom has understanding, but Lady Folly “knows nothing.”

Most importantly, both Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly reside at “the highest place of the town,” where temples were located in the ancient world. Both Wisdom and Folly claim divine sanction for their appeals. And so, both affirm the spiritual nature of wisdom and guidance in choosing life’s path. One represents true wisdom and the true God. Her appeal is to goodness, purity, and truth. The other represents foolishness and the serpent. Her message is seductive, deceitful, and destructive. The wise hear God’s voice, but fools listen only to themselves and false gods who validate their opinions. One way results in blessings, the other leads to the wasteland “east of Eden” (Gen 3:24).

Which path are you walking on: the way to insight or illusion?

Which journey have you taken: the way that leads to wisdom or the way that leads to folly?