

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The fame and excellence of wisdom, and its manner of teaching, Proverbs 8:1-4; the matter of its exhortations, Proverbs 8:5-12; its influence among men, Proverbs 8:13-21; its antiquity, Proverbs 8:22-31; the blessedness of attending to its counsels, Proverbs 8:32-35; the misery of those who do not, Proverbs 8:36.

Verse 1

Doth not wisdom cry? - Here wisdom is again personified; but the prosopopoeia is carried on to a greater length than before, and with much more variety. It is represented in this chapter in a twofold point of view:

1. Wisdom, the power of judging rightly, implying the knowledge of Divine and human things.
2. As an attribute of God, particularly displayed in the various and astonishing works of creation.

Nor has it any other meaning in this whole chapter, whatever some of the fathers may have dreamed, who find allegorical meanings every where. The wise man seems as if suddenly awakened from the distressful contemplation which he had before him, - of the ruin of young persons in both worlds by means of debauchery, - by the voice of wisdom, who has lifted up her voice in the most public places, where was the greatest concourse of the people, to warn the yet unsharpened, that they might avoid the way of seduction and sin; and cause those who love her to inherit substance, and to have their treasures filled with durable riches.

Verse 2

In the places of the paths - $\text{x'x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{a}} \text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}'\text{x}^{\text{a}} \text{x}^{\text{!}}\text{x}'\text{x}$ (beith nethiboth nitstsabah), "The constituted house of the paths." Does not this mean the house of public worship? the tabernacle or temple, which stands a center to the surrounding villages, the paths from all the parts leading to and terminating at it? In such a place, where the holy word of God is read or preached, there in a particular manner does wisdom cry, and understanding lift up her voice. There are the warnings, the precepts, and the promises of eternal truth; there the bread of God is broken to his children, and thither they that will may come and take the water of life freely.

Verse 3

She crieth at the gates - This might be well applied to the preaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and their faithful successors in the Christian ministry. He went to the temple, and proclaimed the righteousness of the Most High: he did the same in the synagogues, on the mountains, by the sea-side, in the villages, in the streets of the cities, and in private houses. His disciples followed his track: in the same way, and in the same spirit, they proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ. God's wisdom in the hearts of his true ministers directs them to go and to seek sinners. There are, it is true, temples, synagogues, churches, chapels, etc.; but hundreds of thousands never frequent them, and therefore do not hear the voice of truth: wisdom, therefore, must go to them, if she wishes them to receive her instructions. Hence the zealous ministers of Christ go still to the highways and hedges, to the mountains and plains, to the ships and the cottages, to persuade sinners to turn from the error of their ways, and accept that redemption which was procured by the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ.

Verse 4

Unto you, O men - $\text{x}\cdot\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\cdot$ (ishim), men of wealth and power, will I call; and not to you alone, for my voice is $\text{x}\cdot\text{x}^{\text{c}} \text{x}'\text{x} \text{x}^{\text{TM}} \text{x}\cdot\text{x}'\text{x}\cdot$ (al beney Adam), "to all the descendants of Adam;" to the whole human race. As Jesus Christ tasted death for every man, so the Gospel proclaims salvation to all: to You - to every individual, my voice is addressed. Thou hast sinned; and thou must perish, if not saved by grace.

Verse 5

O ye simple - $\text{x}\cdot\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}\cdot\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\cdot$ (pethaim), ye that are deceived, and with flattering words and fair speeches deluded and drawn away.

Ye fools - $\text{x}\cdot\text{x}^{\text{!}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\cdot$ (kesilim), ye stupid, stiffnecked, senseless people. That preaching is never likely to do much good, that is not pointed; specifying and describing vices, and charging them home on the consciences of transgressors. Where this is not done, the congregation is unconcerned; no man supposes he has any thing to do in the business, especially if the preacher takes care to tell them, "These were the crimes of Jews, Romans, Greeks, of the people at Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Laodicea, and of heathens in general;" but I hope better things of you, who have been born in a Christian land, and baptized in the Christian faith. Thus he arms their consciences in double brass against the good effects of his own teaching.

Verse 6

Hear; for I will speak of excellent things - נִגְדִים (negidim), things which are preeminent, and manifestly superior to all others. The teaching is not trifling, though addressed to triflers.

The opening of my lips shall be right things - מֵישָׁרִים (meysharim), things which are calculated to correct your false notions, and set straight your crooked ways. Hence she declares,

Verse 7

My mouth shall speak truth - Truth, without falsity, or any mixture of error, shall be the whole matter of my discourse.

Verse 8

All the words - are in righteousness - בְּצֶדֶק (betsedek), in justice and equity, testifying what man owes to his God, to his neighbor, and to himself; giving to each his due. This is the true import of צְדָקָה (tsadak).

There is nothing froward - נִפְתָּל (niphtal), tortuous, involved, or difficult.

Or perverse - יִקְשֶׁה (ikkesh), distorted, leading to obstinacy. On the contrary,

Verse 9

They are all plain - כִּלְיֹתֵי (nechochim), straight forward, over against every man, level to every capacity. This is true of all that concerns the salvation of the soul.

To them that find knowledge - When a man gets the knowledge of himself, then he sees all the threatenings of God to be right. When he obtains the knowledge of God in Christ, then he finds that all the promises of God are right - yea and amen.

Verse 10

Receive my instruction, and not silver - A Hebrew idiom; receive my instruction in preference to silver.

Verse 11

Wisdom is better than rubies - See on Proverbs 3:15 (note).

Verse 12

I wisdom dwell with prudence - Prudence is defined, wisdom applied to practice; so wherever true wisdom is, it will lead to action, and its activity will be always in reference to the accomplishment of the best ends by the use of the most appropriate means. Hence comes what is here called knowledge of witty inventions, דָּאָת מֵצִיטֹת (daath mezimmoth emtsa), $\text{אֵלֶּם$ have found out knowledge and contrivance. $\text{אֵלֶּם$ The farther wisdom proceeds in man, the more practical knowledge it gains; and finding out the nature and properties of things, and the general course of providence, it can contrive by new combinations to produce new results.

Verse 13

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil - As it is impossible to hate evil without loving good; and as hatred to evil will lead a man to abandon the evil way; and love to goodness will lead him to do what is right in the sight of God, under the influence of that Spirit which has given the hatred to evil, and inspired the love of goodness: hence this implies the sum and substance of true religion, which is here termed the fear of the Lord.

Verse 14

Counsel is mine - Direction how to act in all circumstances and on all occasions must come from wisdom: the foolish man can give no counsel, cannot show another how he is to act in the various changes and chances of life. The wise man alone can give this counsel; and he can give it only as continually receiving instruction from God: for this Divine wisdom can say, $\text{אֵלֶּם אֵלֶּם אֵלֶּם}$ (Tushiyah), substance, reality, essence, all belong to me: I am the Fountain whence all are derived. Man may be wise, and good, and prudent, and ingenious; but these he derives from me, and they are dependently in him. But in me all these are independently and essentially inherent.

And sound wisdom - See above. This is a totally false translation: $\text{אֵלֶּם אֵלֶּם אֵלֶּם}$ (tushiyah) means essence, substance, reality; the source and substance of good. How ridiculous the support derived by certain authors from this translation in behalf of their system! See the writers on and quoters of Proverbs 8 (note).

I have strength - Speaking still of wisdom as communicating rays of its light to man, it enables him to bring every thing to his aid; to construct machines by which one man can do the work of hundreds. From it comes all mathematical learning, all mechanical knowledge; from it originally came the inclined plane, the wedge, the screw, the pulley, in all its multiplications; and the lever, in all its combinations and varieties, came from this wisdom. And as all these can produce prodigies of power, far surpassing all kinds of animal energy, and all the effects of the utmost efforts of muscular force; hence the maxim of Lord Bacon, "Knowledge is power," built on the maxim of the tushiyah itself; "כח חכמה" (li geburah), Mine Is Strength.

Verse 15

By me kings reign - Every wise and prudent king is such through the influence of Divine wisdom. And just laws and their righteous administration come from this source. In this and the following verse five degrees of civil power and authority are mentioned.

- 1. מלכים (melachim), Kings.
- 2. רוזנים (rozenim), Consuls.
- 3. סריסים (sarim), Princes, Chiefs of the people.
- 4. נדבבים (nedibim), Nobles. And
- 5. שופטים (shophetim), Judges or Civil Magistrates

All orders of government are from God. Instead of שופטים (shophetey arets), "judges of the earth," שופטים צדקים (shophetey tzedek), "righteous judges," or שופטים צדקנים (shophetey tzedekim), "judges of righteousness," is the reading of one hundred and sixty-two of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., both in the text and in the margin, and of several ancient editions. And this is the reading of the Vulgate, the Chaldee, and the Syriac, and should undoubtedly supersede the other.

Verse 17

I love them that love me - Wisdom shows itself; teaches man the knowledge of himself; shows him also the will of God concerning him; manifests the snares and dangers of life, the allurements and unsatisfactory nature of all sensual and sinful pleasures, the blessedness of true religion, and the solid happiness which an upright soul derives from the peace and approbation of its Maker. If, then, the heart embraces this wisdom, follows this Divine teaching, and gives itself to God, his love will be shed abroad in it by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus we love God because he hath first loved us and the more we love him, the more we shall feel of his love, which will enable us to love him yet more and more; and thus we may go on increasing to eternity. Blessed be God!

And those that seek me early shall find me - Not merely betimes in the morning, though he who does so shall find it greatly to his advantage; (see on Psalm 4:1-8 (note)); but early in life - in youth, and as near as possible to the first dawn of reason. To the young this gracious promise is particularly made: if they seek, they shall find. Others, who are old, may seek and find; but never to such advantage as they would have done, had they sought early. Youth is the time of advantage in every respect: it is the time of learning, the time of discipline; the time of improvement, the time of acquiring useful, solid, and gracious habits. As the first-fruits always belong to God, it is God's time; the time in which he is peculiarly gracious; and in which, to sincere youthful seekers, he pours out his benefits with great profusion. "They that seek me early shall find me." Hear, ye young, and ye little ones! God offers himself now to you, with all his treasures of grace and glory. Thank him for his ineffable mercy, and embrace it without delay.

Verse 18

Riches and honor are with me - Often the wise, prudent, and discreet man arrives literally to riches and honor; but this is not always the case. But there are other riches of which he never fails; and these seem to be what Solomon has particularly in view, durable riches and righteousness; the treasure deposited by God in earthen vessels.

Verse 20

I lead in the way of righteousness - Nothing but the teaching that comes from God by his word and Spirit can do this.

Verse 22

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way - Wisdom is not acquired by the Divine Being; man, and even angels, learn it by slow and progressive degrees; but in God it is as eternally inherent as any other

essential attribute of his nature. The Targum makes this wisdom a creature, by thus translating the passage: **אֱלֹהִים בָּרַךְ אֶת הַיְהוָה בְּרֵישׁ הַבְּרִיאָה** (Eloha barani bereish biriteiah), **God created me in the beginning of his creatures.** The Syriac is the same. This is as absurd and heretical as some modern glosses on the same passage.

Verse 23

I was set up from everlasting - **נִסְחַחְתִּי** (nissachti), **was diffused or poured out,** from **נָסַח** (nasach), **to diffuse, pour abroad, as a spirit or disposition,** Isaiah 29:10. See Parkhurst. Or from **שָׁח** (sach), **to cover, overspread, smear over, as with oil;** to be anointed king. Hence some have translated it, **principatum habui, I had the principality, or was a ruler, governor, and director, from eternity.** All the schemes, plans, and circumstances, relative to creation, government, providence, and to all being, material, animal, and intellectual, were conceived in the Divine mind, by the Divine wisdom, from eternity, or ever the earth was. There was no fortuitous creation, no jumbling concourse of original atoms, that entered into the composition of created beings; all was the effect of the plans before conceived, laid down, and at last acted upon by God's eternal wisdom.

Verse 24

When there were no depths - **תְּהוֹמוֹת** (tehomoth), before the original chaotic mass was formed. See Genesis 1:2.

I was brought forth - **חֹלַלְתִּי** (cholalti), **was produced as by laboring throes.** Mr. Parkhurst thinks that the heathen poets derived their idea of Minerva's (wisdom's) being born of Jupiter's brain, from some such high poetic personification as that in the text.

Verse 26

The highest part of the dust of the world - **רוֹשׁ אֶפְרוֹת תֵּבֵל** (rosh aphroth tebel), **the first particle of matter.** The prima materia, the primitive atom. All these verses (verses 3-29) are a periphrasis for I existed before creation, consequently before time was. I dwelt in God as a principle which might be communicated in its influences to intellectual beings when formed.

Verse 27

When he prepared the heavens, I was there - For there is no part of the creation of God in which wisdom, skill, contrivance, are more manifest, than in the construction of the visible heavens.

When he set a compass upon the face of the depth - Does not this refer to the establishment of the law of gravitation? by which all the particles of matter, tending to a common center, would produce in all bodies the orbicular form, which we see them have; so that even the waters are not only retained within their boundaries, but are subjected to the circular form, in their great aggregate of seas, as other parts of matter are. This is called here making a compass, **בְּחֻקְךָ חָגַלְתָּ** (bechukko chug), **sweeping a circle;** and even this on the face of the deep, to bring the chaotic mass into form, regularity, and order.

Verse 28

The clouds above - **שְׁחָכִים** (shechakim), **the ethereal regions,** taking in the whole of the atmosphere, with all its meteors, clouds, vapours, etc.

Verse 29

When he gave to the sea his decree - When he assigned its limits, adjusted its saltness, and proportioned the extent of the surface to the quantity of vapors to be raised from it, for the irrigation of the terrene surface.

The foundations of the earth - Those irreversible laws by which all its motions are governed; its annual and diurnal rotation, and particularly its centrifugal and centripetal forces; by the former of which it has its annual motion round the sun like all other planets; and by the latter all its particles are prevented from flying off, notwithstanding the great velocity of its motion round its own axis, which causes one thousand and forty-two miles of its equator to pass under any given point in the heavens in the course of a single hour! These are, properly speaking, the foundations of the earth; the principles on which it is constructed, and the laws by which it is governed.

Verse 30

Then I was with him, as one brought up - **אֲמוֹנִי** (amon), a nursling, a darling child. Wisdom continues its parable, says Calmet; and represents itself as a new-born child which is ever near its parent, and takes pleasure to see him act, and to sport in his presence. This is poetical and highly figurative; and they who think they find

the deity of Jesus Christ in these metaphors should be very cautious how they apply such terms as these; so that while they are endeavoring to defend the truth, they may do nothing against the truth, in which most of them unhappily fail.

Rejoicing always before him - All the images in this verse are borrowed from the state and circumstances of a darling, affectionate, playful child; as any one will be convinced who examines the Hebrew text.

Verse 31

Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth - There God displays especially his wisdom in ordering and directing human beings, and in providing for their wants. The wisdom of God is in an especial manner manifested in his providence.

My delights were with the sons of men - This Divine wisdom, as it delighted in the creation of man, so it continues to delight in his instruction. Hence it is represented as offering its lessons of instruction continually, and using every means and opportunity to call men from folly and vice to sound knowledge, holiness, and happiness. It is to man that God especially gives wisdom; and he has it in the form of reason beyond all other creatures; therefore it is said, "My delights are with the sons of men;" to them I open my choicest treasures. They alone are capable of sapience, intelligence, and discursive reason.

Verse 32

Now therefore - Since I delight so much in conveying instruction; since I have the happiness of the children of Adam so much at heart, hearken unto me; and this is for your own interest, for blessed are they who keep my ways.

Verse 34

Watching daily at my gates - Wisdom is represented as having a school for the instruction of men; and seems to point out some of the most forward of her scholars coming, through their intense desire to learn, even before the gates were opened, and waiting there for admission, that they might hear every word that was uttered, and not lose one accent of the heavenly teaching. Blessed are such.

Verse 35

Whoso findeth me - The wisdom that comes from God, teaching to avoid evil and cleave to that which is good; findeth life - gets that knowledge which qualifies him to answer the purposes for which he was made; for he is quickened with Christ, and made a partaker of the Divine life. Christ dwells in his heart by faith; he lives a new life, for Christ liveth in him; the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes him free from the law of sin and death. And shall obtain favor of the Lord. The more he walks after the Divine counsel, the more he obtains of the Divine image; and the more he resembles his Maker, the more he partakes of the Divine favor.

Verse 36

Wrongeth his own soul - It is not Satan, it is not sin, properly speaking, that hurts him; it is himself. If he received the teaching of God, sin would have no dominion over him; if he resisted the devil, the devil would flee from him.

Love death - They do it in effect, if not in fact, for as they love sin, that leads to death, so they may be justly said to love death, the wages of sin. He that works in this case, works for wages; and he must love the wages, seeing he labors so hard in the work.

I Have gone through this fine chapter, and given the best exposition of it in my power. I have also, as well as others, weighed every word, and closely examined their radical import, their connection among themselves, and the connection of the subject of the chapter with what has gone before, and with what follows after; and I cannot come, conscientiously, to any other interpretation than that which I have given. I am thoroughly satisfied that it speaks not one word either about the Divine or human nature of Christ, much less of any eternal filiation of his Divinity. And I am fully persuaded, had there not been a preconceived creed, no soul of man, by fair criticism, would have ever found out that fond opinion of the eternal sonship of the Divine nature, which so many commentators persuade us they find here. That it has been thus applied in early ages, as well as in modern times, I am sufficiently aware; and that many other portions of the Divine records have been appealed to, in order to support a particular opinion, and many that were false in themselves, must be known to those who are acquainted with the fathers. But many quote them who know nothing of them. As to the fathers in general, they were not all agreed on this subject, some supposing Christ, others the Holy Spirit, was meant in this chapter. But of these we may safely state, that there is not a truth in the most orthodox creed, that cannot be proved by their authority, nor a heresy that has disgraced the Romish Church, that may not challenge them as its abettors. In points of doctrine, their authority is, with me, nothing. The Word of God alone contains my

creed. On a number of points I can go to the Greek and Latin fathers of the Church, to know what they believed, and what the people of their respective communions believed; but after all this I must return to God's word, to know what he would have me to believe. No part of a Protestant creed stands on the decision of fathers and councils. By appealing to the Bible alone, as the only rule for the faith and practice of Christians, they confounded and defeated their papistical adversaries, who could not prove their doctrines but by fathers and councils. Hence their peculiar doctrines stand in their ultimate proof upon These; and those of Protestantism on the Bible. Some late writers upon this subject, whose names I spare, have presumed much on what they have said on this subject; but before any man, who seeks for sober truth, will receive any of their conclusions, he will naturally look whether their premises be sound, or whether from sound principles they have drawn legitimate conclusions. They say this chapter is a sufficient foundation to build their doctrine on. I say it is no foundation at all; that it never has been proved, and never can be proved, that it speaks at all of the doctrine in question. It has nothing to do with it. On this conviction of mine, their proofs drawn from this chapter must go with me for nothing. I have been even shocked with reading over some things that have been lately written on the subject. I have said in my heart, They have taken away my Eternal Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. I cannot believe their doctrine; I never did; I hope I never shall. I believe in the holy Trinity; in three persons in the Godhead, of which none is before or after another. I believe Jehovah, Jesus, the Holy Ghost to be one infinite, eternal Godhead, subsisting ineffably in three persons. I believe Jesus the Christ to be, as to his Divine nature, as unoriginated and eternal as Jehovah himself; and with the Holy Ghost to be one infinite Godhead, neither person being created, begotten, nor proceeding, more than another: as to its essence, but one Trinity, in an infinite, eternal and inseparable Unity. And this Triune God is the object of my faith, my adoration, and my confidence. But I believe not in an eternal sonship or generation of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ. Here I have long stood, here I now stand, and here I trust to stand in the hour of death, in the day of judgment, and to all eternity. Taking the Scriptures in general, I find a plurality in the Divine nature; taking the grand part mentioned, Matthew 3:16, Matthew 3:17, I find that plurality restrained to a trinity, in the most unequivocal and evident manner: Jesus, who was baptized in Jordan; the Holy Ghost, who descended upon him who was baptized; and the Father, manifested by the Voice from heaven that said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And how that person called Jesus the Christ, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, could be called the Son of God, I have shown in my note on Luke 1:35.

Some writers, in their defense of the doctrine above, which I venture to say I do not believe, have made reflections, in real or pretended pity, on the belief of their Trinitarian brethren, which have very little to do with candor: viz., "How the supporters of this hypothesis can avoid either the error of Tritheism on the one hand, or Sabellianism on the other, is difficult to conceive." Now, the supporters of the doctrine of the underived and unbegotten eternity of Christ's Divine nature might as well say of them: How the supporters of the eternal sonship of Christ can avoid the error of Arianism on the one hand, and Arianism on the other, it is difficult to conceive. But I would not say so; for though I know Arians who hold that doctrine, and express their belief nearly in the same words; yet I know many most conscientious Trinitarians who hold the doctrine of the eternal sonship, and yet believe in the proper deity, or eternal godhead, of Jesus Christ. After all, as a very wise and excellent man lately said: "While we have every reason to be satisfied of the soundness of each other's faith, we must allow each to explain his own sentiments in his own words: here, in the words used in explanation, a little latitude may be safely allowed." To this correct sentiment I only add: -

Scimus; et hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim.

- Horace.

"I grant it; and the license give and take."

I have passed the waters of strife, and do not wish to recross them: the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. I will have nothing to do with ill-tempered, abusive men; I wish them more light and better manners.

And while I am on this subject, let me add one thing, which I am sure will not please all the generation of his people; and it is this: that Jesus Christ, having taken upon him human nature, which was afterwards crucified, and expired upon the cross, did by those acts make a full, perfect, and sufficient offering, sacrifice, and atonement for the sin of the whole world. That he died, paid down the redemption price, for every soul of man, that was ever born into the world, and shall ever be born into it. That all who lay hold on the hope set before them shall be saved; (and all may thus lay hold); and none shall perish but those who would not come to Christ that they might have life. And that men perish, not because they were not redeemed, but because they would not accept of the redemption.

To conclude on this subject, it will be necessary to refer the reader to the remarkable opposition that subsists between this and the preceding chapter. There, the prostitute is represented as going out into the streets to seek her prey; and the alluring words of carnal wisdom to excite the animal appetite to sinful gratification, which she uses: here, heavenly wisdom is represented as going out into the streets, to the high places, the gates of the city, to counteract her designs, and lead back the simple to God and truth.

These personifications were frequent among the Jews. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus we find a similar

personification, and expressed in almost similar terms; and surely none will suppose that the writer of that Apocryphal book had either the Christian doctrine of the Trinity or the sonship of Christ in view.

I will give a few passages: -

“Wisdom shall glory in the midst of her people; in the congregation of the Most High shall she open her mouth, and triumph before his power. I came out of the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth as a cloud. I dwelt in the high places; I alone compassed the circuit of the heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep, in the waves of the sea, and in all the earth. He created me from the beginning, before the world; and I shall never fail. I am the mother of fair love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope. I therefore, being eternal, am given to all my children which are named of him. Come unto me, and fill yourselves with my fruits. I also came out as a brook from a river, and a conduit into a garden,” etc., etc., Ecclesiasticus 24:1, etc. This kind of personification of wisdom we have had in the preceding chapters; and in the following chapter we shall find the figure still kept up.