

Translation

20. Wisdom will cry aloud outside.
In the plazas she will give her voice.
21. At the top of the noisy places she will call,
In the entrances of the gates,
In the city she will say her sayings.
22. “How long, simple ones, will you love simplicity,
And (how long will) scoffers in their scoffing delight,
And fools hate knowledge.
23. You must turn at my reproof.
Behold, I will cause my spirit to flow to you.
I will cause you to know my words to you.
24. Because I call and you refuse,
I stretch out my hand and no one is paying attention,
25. And you neglect all my counsel,
And at my reproof you are not willing,
26. I also in your calamity will laugh.
I will mock when your terror comes,
27. When your fear comes as a devastating storm,
And your calamity like a whirlwind will arrive,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
28. Then they will call to me and I will not answer.
They will seek me early and they will not find me,
29. Because they hate knowledge
And the fear of Yahweh do not choose,
30. They are not willing for my counsel,
They despise all my reproof.
31. And they will eat from the fruit of their ways,
And from their schemes they will be satisfied.
32. For the turning away of the simple ones will kill them,
And the prosperity of fools will destroy them,
33. And the one who hears me will dwell in security,
And will be at rest from terror of evil.

Structure of the Passage

There are fourteen verses and thirty-two lines in the section. The first five lines are an introduction. The next twelve lines (vv. 22–26) describe what wisdom will do because the simple, fools and scoffers reject her. The last twelve lines (vv.28–33) describe what wisdom will do when, in desperation, they finally do call to her. In between these two main sections are three lines in verse 27 that describe the coming of their terror. The passage is a carefully constructed chiasm.

Furthermore, verses 21, 22 and 23 are all triple parallelisms, and each one carries wisdom’s address a step farther. In the first three lines wisdom tells us from where she calls, in the next three lines to whom she calls, and in the last three what she calls. In verses 24 and 25, a quadruple parallelism, wisdom describes how the simple, the fool and the scoffer have responded to her, and in the final verse of the section wisdom tells them how she will respond to them.

Verses 28–33 are constructed in a comparable manner, but in reverse order. Thus, verse 28 tells them again how wisdom will respond to them, verses 29 and 30 how they have responded to her, and verses 31–33 what will be the consequences both for those who reject her and those who hear her.

Verses 20–21: Introduction

- A Verses 22–23 (6 lines): Wisdom’s Call
- B Verses 24–25 (4 lines): Their Rejection
- C Verse 26 (2 lines): Wisdom’s Threat
- D Verse 27 (3 lines): Their Fear
- C’ Verse 28 (2 lines): Wisdom’s Threat
- B’ Verses 29–30 (4 lines): Their Rejection
- A’ Verses 31–33 (6 lines): Consequences of Rejection and Hearing

The Introduction (vv. 20–21)

This whole section of the chapter personifies wisdom as a woman. Chapters 8 and 9 do the same thing. Perhaps the reason for choosing a female personification is simply that the word “wisdom” in the Hebrew is in the feminine gender.

The passage represents this woman as calling on men to hear her and by hearing to become wise.

The emphasis of the first two verses is on the public character of her crying out. She cries aloud. The word can even mean to shout. She is outside rather than inside. She is in the plazas (or public squares), in the noisy places (places where people gather), in the entrances of the gates (where many people will be passing by), and in the cities (rather than in the little towns or open fields). She wants her message to be heard by as many as possible.

This is the character of the gospel. In fact, the gospel is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and God commands us to proclaim it publicly to any and to all who will hear.

Moreover, Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30), and these words of wisdom are his words. It is he who calls men to hear him, to become wise, and to turn from their folly, and he does it not only here but also through the prophets and apostles.

If we do not remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is our wisdom, this whole book may well become to us just a collection of secular aphorisms, helpful advice for living but having nothing to do with the gospel. Learning this wisdom requires that we believe in God and in his Son and that we receive the righteousness of Christ by his Spirit.

Wisdom’s Call (vv. 22–23)

In verses 22 and 23 wisdom first singles out her audience. They are the simple, the scoffers and the fools. The simple are those whose characters as wise or foolish are not yet fixed, who are immature, untrained or naïve. Because of their simplicity they often act foolishly, but the difference between them and the fool is that the fool has had opportunity to learn and has refused. He hates knowledge and rejects the fear of God and obedience to his commandments. The simple one has not yet gone that far. The scoffer is worse than both. He hates reproof

and those who reprove him (9:8, 13:1), mocks at sin (14:9, the word translated “mock” is the same word used for scoffer here) and is proud (21:24).

Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21 illustrate well the difference between the fool and the scoffer. Ahab was a fool. He denied God and refused obedience to his commandments. But he was also pusillanimous in his wickedness. He never quite dared to go full bore for what he wanted. Thus, when Naboth refused to sell his vineyard, Ahab went to his bed and sulked. And when God declared his judgment through Elijah, he clothed himself in sackcloth and went about mourning. Jezebel was much more hardened in sin. When she heard what Ahab wanted, she went and took it with a high-handed disregard of righteousness and justice. She was a scoffer.

Wisdom has a different question for each of these groups.

Her question for the simple is, how long will you love simplicity? There is no sin in being simple if you are young in years or young in the faith, as long as you are willing to learn. If you love simplicity, if you will not advance in maturity, if you must be fed with milk instead of solid food (Heb. 5:12–14) after years as a believer, if you cannot yet discern between good and evil, then you love simplicity. You are also in danger of becoming a fool. The calling to the simple, therefore, is to become wise.

Wisdom’s question for the scoffer is, how long will you delight in scoffing? It is characteristic of scoffers that they delight in their scoffing at God, his ways and his people, take pleasure in sin, and refuse to think about coming judgment. Their judgment is very great.

The question for fools is, “How long will you hate knowledge?” That’s the characteristic of a fool. He does not want to learn the knowledge of God or to become truly wise. Unless he repents, he will perish in his folly.

To all three groups wisdom addresses the exhortation or command of verse 23: “Turn at my reproof.” That’s the call of the gospel, the call to repent of simplicity, scoffing and folly, to believe the words of wisdom, and to seek the wisdom that is from above.

And to all the simple ones, scoffers and fools who do repent, wisdom makes promises in the last two lines of verse 23. The first is the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of wisdom (Isa. 11:2) and by whom alone we can achieve wisdom. The second is the promise of knowledge, particularly knowledge of the words of wisdom. This is the blessing of the light of truth.

This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. (Jn. 1:7–9)

Wisdom’s Threat (vv. 24–31)

In verses 24–27 wisdom turns from promises to threats. This is the way God always speaks. He promises blessings on obedience and curses on disobedience (cf. Dt. 27:11–28:68). The call of the gospel is not only a promise of blessing to those who believe, but also a command disobedience to which brings us into peril of our lives.

There is a time of calamity, terror, fear, distress and anguish coming for all those who do not turn at wisdom’s reproof. It is the time of the judgment of God, whether it is judgment that comes in this life or in the day of the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the world. It is a time that may be delayed for so long that the wicked think it will never come. But wisdom does not leave room for any ifs or buts here: the time is coming. It is a time of devastating storm and of whirlwind, of ruin and death.

On that day the simple, the fools and the scoffers will begin to cry out for wisdom and to seek her urgently. They will realize suddenly that they have been deceiving themselves and pulling the wool over their own eyes. That will be their awakening from complacency to terror.

And wisdom says, “When that day comes, I will laugh and mock. You will seek me, but you will not find me. You will have waited too long. I called you, and you refused. I stretched out my hand to you, and you paid no attention. You rejected my counsel and were not willing to receive my rebuke. Now, in your desperation, you say, ‘Lord, Lord...,’ but I never knew you. Depart from me.”

There is a change from second person to third person between verses 27 and 28. In the preceding verses wisdom had been talking directly to the fools and scoffers. Now she begins to talk to everyone else about the fools and scoffers. She makes the fools and scoffers an example to warn us from similar folly and scoffing:

*Then they will call to me and I will not answer.
They will seek me early and they will not find me.*

They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. Therefore, they will eat from the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own schemes. They will reap what they have sown. The Lord will condemn them and give to them a reward according to their works.

Wisdom’s Conclusion (vv. 32–33)

Verse 32 explains why the simple and the fool will eat the fruit of their own way. *The turning away of the simple will kill them.* They turned away. The word is the same word used in verse 23, where wisdom says, “Turn at my reproof.” They did turn, but not to wisdom. They turned away instead. They chose their own way rather than the way of wisdom, and their way was the way of death from the beginning. It cannot end in anything other than death. *The prosperity of fools will destroy them.* Prosperity here is a word that signifies their satisfaction with their place and way in the world, their freedom from trouble, and, as they thought, their security and invulnerability. That prosperity distracted them from fundamental realities and made them ignore the call of wisdom. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choked out the word. They will perish.

Again, wisdom adds a promise. Those who hear her will have security and freedom from the terror of all the evils that come on fools.

This is a very urgent warning to us. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. Do not receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1–2). Heed the call of wisdom, the call of the Lord Christ himself. Believe in him. Clothe yourself with his righteousness. Receive counsel and reproof. Fear the Lord and depart from simplicity, folly and scoffing. If you do not, you will perish.