

## Sweet Temptation

Proverbs 9:1-6, Romans 7:19, Romans 7:22-24, Psalms 104:24, Psalms 104:27-30, Proverbs 8:1-9, Proverbs 8:23-31, Proverbs 9:13-18

### Slide 1

It's a familiar story.

Eve's strolling through the Garden of Eden when she's surprised by a talking snake who says, *"Hey, how ya doing?" "Fine." "What ya doin?" "Oh, Adam and I are just walking around taking in the beauty of God's creation."*

*"Oh, yeah? Lovely. Say, what about that tree over there?" "What tree? You mean that tree over there? The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?"*

*"Yeah. Look at the fruit on that tree. Gorgeous. Looks absolutely delicious, doesn't it? Ever been tempted to take a bite?" "Oh, no. God said that if we eat from that tree, we'll die."*

*"Did He really say that? Look, I'm telling you, you won't die. Who're ya gonna believe? Me or God?" "Listen, the only reason God said that is because He doesn't want you to know the truth."*

*"He's afraid that if you eat of its fruit, you'll be like Him, knowing good and evil and you won't need to blindly follow His orders. You'll be able to think for yourself. Doesn't that sound heavenly?"*

*"Okay, just one bite. How about you, Adam? Care to take a bite?"* and so, death entered creation and so did something else: free will.

God gave us the freedom to think for ourselves and make our own choices, but He also gave us the consequences that come with it, such as our never-ending struggle with 'temptation.'

Temptation's always a battle between what we want to do and what we know we should do. We work at justifying doing things we know that we shouldn't be doing.

Paul captured this struggle beautifully in his letter to the church in Rome.

Romans 7:19, 22-24a, *"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am!"*

## **Slide 2**

This is the struggle that Solomon so brilliantly analyzed in Proverbs 9, when he described the difference between the houses built by Wisdom and Folly.

Listen carefully to how Solomon described Wisdom's house in verses 1b-2, *"...she has set up its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table."*

The first thing to note is that Wisdom established her house on a firm foundation just as God built this incredible universe in which we live.

God created it on the firm foundation of His wisdom: *"Let there be light, let there be heaven and earth, let there be land and sea, let there be plants, let there be animals, and then, when all was ready "let there be man and woman."*

The very order of creation was based on God's wisdom. For humanity to survive, they needed food. For the animals to survive they, too, needed food, so God created plants.

In order for the plants to survive, they needed land to grow in and they needed nutrition which came from the water and the sunlight.

Without water, without sunlight, the plants would die and without plants the animals would die and without all of these things, we would die.

This universe, in which we live, is God's house built by His wisdom supported by seven pillars.

These pillars are: the pillar hewn out of the darkness, the pillar hewn out of the water, the pillar hewn out of the land, and the pillar of life. Six pillars hewn by God in six days.

The seventh pillar was the Sabbath. The day when God called us to sit with Him and enjoy His creation.

Let's look at Wisdom's house again. Wisdom's house, like God's creation, was also built in an orderly fashion. First, she built the foundation and then supported her house with seven pillars.

Then she slaughtered whose animals? Her animals. Why did she slaughter them? To feed her guests just as God made plants and animals to feed us.

She provided her guests with a feast just as God, in the Garden of Eden, in His house, set a table for us.

As Solomon's father, David, proclaimed in Psalm 104:24, 27-39, *"How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." "All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."*

We're to feast on the fruits of God's wisdom just as Wisdom's guests were called to enjoy the fruits of her labor.

Her house was filled with good things, so she sent her servants out to invite people to come and fill her house and enjoy the good things that she's prepared.

Her servants called out, *"Let all who are simple come to my house! To those who have no sense she says, Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight."* (Proverbs 9:4b-6).

Today, Wisdom still invites us to come into her house. She doesn't force us. She doesn't compel us. She simply invites us, but we're the ones who must make the choice.

### **Slide 3**

Remember what happened in the Garden of Eden. Eve, and then Adam, made the choice to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Their "choice" to eat the fruit was, in fact, a choice, wasn't it? In fact, before they ever took a bite of the forbidden fruit, they had already decided to listen to the serpent and disobey God.

From that point on, they could decide what was good and what wasn't good for themselves.

Because of the action of Adam and Eve, free will entered creation. Free will, the ability or desire, to make our own decisions including whether we're going to listen to the serpent or listen to God.

The choice to accept Wisdom's invitation seems obvious but wait... Folly, like the serpent, suddenly appears and makes her own offer.

Proverbs 9:13-17, *“Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way, “Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense she says, “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!”*”

The serpent in the Garden wasn't loud but he was right there in Eve's face, whispering in Eve's ear, and Eve was right there waving the fruit in Adam's face.

The serpent spoke as though he knew what he was talking about, but he was wrong when he said that we wouldn't die.

Now, he was right that our eyes would be opened, that we'd know right from wrong, good from evil, but he played on our ignorance.

So, what's Folly doing? She's not only sitting in front of a house that she didn't build inviting people to come to her feast which she didn't prepare, she's also seated at the *“highest point of the city.”*

Some commentaries have held that she's sitting in front of the Temple but the word for *“highest point”* is plural which suggests to me that she's sitting in places of power.

She's placed herself where she can influence or tempt the most people just as people of power continue to do today.

Notice what Folly says in the first part of verse 16. Folly makes the same invitation that Wisdom did, *“Let all who are simple come to my house!”* I believe this is designed to deceive or to sow confusion.

People are deceived because she appears to be an imitation of Wisdom just as people today are deceived into buying Gucci shoes or Rolex watches which are really knock offs.

On-line scammers have gotten really good at creating messages and webpages that look and sound like the real thing.

What Folly, or the world, has to offer, is either a cheap imitation or, in this case, stolen.

Wisdom slaughtered her animals and mixed her wine. Folly serves her guest stolen water and stolen bread, but stolen from whom?

Everything that the world offers us, everything that the powers that be use to tempt us, comes from the universe that God created.

God may not have made your car, but He made the metal that the automakers used to build your car.

The farmer may plant fruits and vegetables but on the third day God created the fruit and vegetables they grow.

Ranchers may raise the cattle that we eat but they didn't make the cattle. God did that on the sixth day, and He made seafood on the fifth day.

Everything we buy, everything we pay money for, was made out materials that came from God.

Profiteers, like Folly, use what the wisdom of God has given us to survive for power and profit.

Yet, in both cases, Wisdom and Folly don't force you to come into their houses and partake in their feasts.

#### **Slide 4**

Now, God could compel us, but He doesn't. Satan can't compel us, but he does tempt us. So ultimately, we must make a choice.

When Satan challenged Job's loyalty to God, God said Satan could tempt Job but he couldn't lay a hand on him. Unfortunately, what happened in the Garden still happens today.

Today, like the serpent, Satan's hanging around, crouching at the door, prowling like a hungry lion, calling to us loudly like Folly; dangling sin on the end of fish hook, waiting for you to take the bait.

So, what is it about sin that's so tempting? In his book, "*Confessions*," Augustine recounts an event that highlighted his propensity for sin.

He and some of his friends climbed the wall to his neighbor's orchard and stripped all the pear trees of their fruit, not, in Augustine's words, "*to eat the fruit ourselves, but simply to destroy it.*"

The part that really bothered him was that he went along with it and that he enjoyed doing it.

He realized that, had he been alone, the thought of breaking into his neighbor's orchard and destroying his fruit would've never crossed his mind.

He had lived next door to his neighbor for years and never thought about destroying his neighbor's fruit. It wasn't until one of his friends came up with the idea that he even considered the thought.

Like people who, in Solomon's words, were "*going straight on their way*" when they were tempted by Folly's offer to come into her house and sit down at her stolen feast.

Augustine's reflection on what he did wasn't to shift blame to his friends or to shift blame to Folly but that his friends' invitation, or Folly's invitation, appeals to and exposes something within us.

In verse 17, Folly makes an interesting claim: *“Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!”*

Why is that so true? I used to watch *Walt Disney Presents* and *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* on Sunday night.

One show had a short film where a boy from the city was visiting his cousin in the country.

There was a farmer who had a huge watermelon growing in the middle of his patch and he knew that it was a temptation to the local boys.

They were obsessed with sneaking into the patch and stealing that watermelon; which they eventually did.

I always remember what one of the boys said as they gorged themselves on that stolen watermelon: *“Taint nuthin’ sweeter than a stolen watermelon.”*

It’s the “sweetness” of sin that makes it so tempting. If stolen water weren’t so sweet, no one would be tempted to steal it.

If bread eaten in secret wasn’t so pleasant, no one would be tempted to hide while they ate it.

A bowl of ice cream or a banana? Work out at the gym or watch a movie? I know that going to the gym or eating a banana is healthier but...

Folly says stay home on Sunday, don’t go to church. Why go when you can just watch it on TV in your PJs.

It may not be stolen bread or water, but it is a poor substitute for the real thing. I know that I’m not as good as some of those silver tongued TV preachers, but do they know your name?



Can you call them any time, day or night? Can they give the whole Sunday experience? Getting ready... thinking about the day... wondering who's going to be at the church, who's not.

Walking into the sanctuary and having that feeling of being at home in Wisdom's house, God's house.

Seeing friends, singing together, praying together, praying for each other, maybe going out to eat after the service.

How can watching a service on TV even come close to that? Why is it even a struggle? Why is it an effort to choose between Wisdom's offer and Folly's offer?

Sure, both call out to the simple, but one offers abundant life and the other offers death.

### **Slide 5**

Verse 18 tells us that those who enter Folly's house don't *"know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead."*

Over time, we either grow in wisdom or folly. What we love determines where we're headed, where we end up, and who we become.

Verse 11 tells us, *"For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life."*

This is quite different from what waits for the "scoffer." Wisdom says they're on their own and doomed to failure.

In fact, when Eve reached out and plucked the forbidden fruit from the tree, her action revealed what her heart desired even before she took a bite.

The same could be said here in Proverbs 9. Those who choose to go to Wisdom's house or choose to go to Folly's house had already started receiving the fruits of their decision.

The lovers of Wisdom, who were on the way to Wisdom's banquet house, had already begun experiencing the benefits of it.

You can't choose both wisdom and folly. It has to be one or the other. Every sinner must turn his or her back upon either their Savior or their sin.

As Augustine pointed out: *"Thus, though Wisdom was himself our home, he made himself also the way by which we should reach our home."*

Satan never created anything, including himself. God created the House of Wisdom through His wisdom.

All Satan or Folly can do is take what God has created, what God built, and distort it, to use it to tempt us and ultimately destroy us.

Folly takes what's good and destroys our goodness. She tears down the ordered world that Wisdom made and uses it to tempt us away from God.

Away from what was created to multiply our days and add years to our lives. Folly gives us bread instead of meat. She gives us water instead of wine.

Folly only offers ignorance and confusion, a house that she didn't build, stolen bread and water, and a path that leads to the depths of Sheol. Over and over again, Wisdom calls out: *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

*“The one who doesn’t listen,”* says Bible commentator David Hubbard, *“who makes the wrong choice or answers the wrong call has only himself or herself to blame.”*

## **Slide 6**

### Conclusion

So, today, we’ve been warned. While Wisdom can’t compel us to come into her house and sit at her table, she does her best to warn us and help us to make the right choice but ultimately the choice is ours.

In his epic poem, *The Odyssey*, the Greek poet Homer described the poem’s hero, Ulysses’, encounter with a group of women called “Sirens.”

The sound of the Sirens’ singing was so beautiful and enchanting that it lured sailors to their death on the jagged and dangerous rocks that surrounded their island.

As they were about to pass the island where the Sirens lived, Ulysses ordered his men to plug their ears with wax.

Now, Ulysses had been warned about the beauty and danger of the Sirens’ song but he still wanted to hear it for himself.

He ordered that his men tie him to the mast of their ship and not let him go no matter how much he begged.

He, of course, begged to be untied when he heard their singing but his men obediently followed his orders and wouldn’t let him go until they were safely out of danger.

In his poem, *Argonautica IV*, the Greek poet Apollonius came up with a different way of handling the temptation of the Sirens’ call.

His hero, Orpheus, countered the song of the Sirens by playing his own song on a flute.

His song was so beautiful and enchanting that the sailors paid no attention to the song of the Sirens. Jesus Christ is our Orpheus.

We don't have to bind ourselves or others with rules and regulations. The fear of the Lord is to love Him, to hear His song so clearly that the Siren song of sin is drowned out completely.

Wisdom is calling you right now, but take my word for it, her voice won't be the only voice that you'll hear today.