

Intro:

Today I want to take our discussion of Proverbs in a new direction. We are going to discuss a major theme of the first nine chapters of Proverbs.

The title of our study is *Dame Wisdom & Madame Folly*¹. I got these names from another preacher; I think they are particularly apt.

Proverbs personifies Wisdom and Folly as two different women. There are at least two directions one can take for this kind of study:

1. We can make direct application to male/female relationships
2. We can make extended applications to gain a real understanding of wisdom and folly using these metaphors.

I am not sure how many lessons we will have on this subject, but today I want to introduce the main passages under consideration and give you a bit of the character of each 'woman' that Proverbs describes for us.

I. The 'women' sections of Prov 1-9

A. Madame Folly alone

1. The **flattering** stranger 2:16-19
2. The **deceptive** stranger 5:1-23
3. The **destructive** stranger 6:20-35

B. Dame Wisdom alone

1. The woman of **hope** 1:20-33
2. The woman of **blessing** 3:13-18
3. The woman of **honour** 4:5-9
4. The woman of **supreme value** 8:1-36

C. Both women contrasted

1. The woman of **life** vs. The woman of **death** 7:1-4, 5-27
2. The way of **wisdom** vs. The way of **folly** 9:1-6, 13-18

¹ The titles "Dame Wisdom" and "Madame Folly" originally from James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 72

II. Character contrasted

“Both the way of wisdom and the way of folly are personified by women. This would be especially relevant in light of the father-to-son instruction which is given in Proverbs. If there is one thing a father should teach his son, it is the kind of woman to pursue and the kind of woman to avoid. Dame Wisdom and Madam Folly are literary tools to teach the young man a lesson on two levels, the literal and the metaphorical.”²

A. Madame Folly’s character

1. She is an **adulteress**

a. She forsakes the “guide” (companion) of her youth (2.17)

Pr 2.16-17 To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words; ¹⁷ That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God;

b. Anyone involved with her must contend with an angry husband (6.29-35)

Pr 6.29-35 So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. ³⁰ Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry; ³¹ But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. ³² The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. ³³ Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out. ³⁴ For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance. ³⁵ He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts.

² Robert Deffinbaugh, *The Way of the Wise: Studies in the Book of Proverbs* (www.bible.org: Biblical Studies Press, 1996), p. 18

- c. She assures her victim that her husband is not around (7.19-20)

Pr 7.19-20 "For my husband is not at home, He has gone on a long journey;²⁰ He has taken a bag of money with him, At the full moon he will come home."

2. She is **godless** and **immoral**

- a. She 'forgets the covenant of her God' (2.17)

Pr 2.17 That leaves the companion of her youth **And forgets the covenant of her God;**

- b. She is called a 'stranger' in 2.16 = 'foreign woman' which suggests paganism rather than real faith in God.

Pr 2.16 To deliver you from the **strange** woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;

This term is used of Solomon's foreign wives who turned his heart from the Lord.

3. She is **senseless** and **simple**

- a. Loud and empty (9.13)

Pr 9.13 The woman of folly is boisterous, *She is naive and knows nothing.*

- b. Unstable and ignorant (5.6)

Pr 5.6 She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know *it.*

4. She is **shameless** (30.20)

Pr 30.20 This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, "I have done no wrong."

B. Dame Wisdom's character

“Wisdom, on the other hand, is personified as a virgin, whom the wise son should pursue, and with whom he should seek a wholesome, yet intimate relationship. While a young man should avoid Madam Folly, he should pursue wisdom as he would the woman who would be his bride.”³

1. She is **valuable** (3.15, 4.6-8)

Pr 3.15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.

Pr 4.6-8 “Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.”⁷ “The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding.”⁸ “Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her.

2. Worthy of **deep personal** relationship (7.4)

Pr 7.4 Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” And call understanding *your* intimate friend;

“The Hebrew word rendered ‘sister’ here is used in Song of Songs (4:9,10,12; 5:1,2) with the sense of ‘lover.’ It seems to have that nuance here as well. The young man is therefore urged to pursue wisdom as a lover and intimate friend, a healthy contrast to Madam Folly.”⁴

3. She is **god-like** (contrasted to Folly's godlessness)

a. She will give her spirit (1.23)

Pr 1.23 “Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

³ Deffinbaugh, p. 18

⁴ Deffinbaugh, p. 19, footnote 19

b. She will deliver from the way of death (1.33, 4.6-9)

Pr 1.33 “But he who listens to me shall live securely And will be at ease from the dread of evil.”

Pr 4.6-9 “Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.⁷ “The beginning of wisdom *is*: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding.⁸ “Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her.⁹ “She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.”

c. She is a ‘tree of life’ (3.18)

Pr 3.18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

d. She is eternal (3.19-20, 8.22-31)

Pr 3.19-20 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, By understanding He established the heavens.²⁰ By His knowledge the deeps were broken up And the skies drip with dew.

Acquiring wisdom is the same as spiritual growth. You need to view God and His ways in this very desirable sense.

Conclusion:

We can make many applications with these passages:

1. Single men should literally be seeking godly women
2. All women should be seeking to become godly women (can’t be ‘god-like’, but you can be godly)
3. All of us need to respond to the invitation of wisdom and become intimately acquainted with her — study the Proverbs, study the Bible, think not only about doctrine, but also about life.

(Doctrine without life is useless — it is partaking of the woman folly.)