

Are You Wise or Unwise?

A sermon based on Proverbs 9:1-6.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's a game some pastors in our circuit used to like to play when we would get together. We called it, "Sin or No Sin." I know, it sounds incredibly nerdy, and to an extent, it was, but really, it was a great way for iron to sharpen iron, for fellow brothers in the ministry to look at hypothetical...difficult situations, talk about how we would apply God's Word to it, and usually reach a consensus on whether the situation was sin or no sin.

What often happened, though, was the game would "devolve" from "sin or no sin" to "wise or unwise," where we could agree the situation wasn't sinful, but now, in a particular context, would it be wise to allow that kind of situation to occur or continue...or would it be unwise. And again, still a good way for iron to sharpen iron, applying the scriptural principles to the situation, talking about the wisest and most loving actions if those circumstances arise.

Well, I'd like to play a round of "Wise or Unwise" with you this morning. Here are a few situations...in light of the events that took place at Charlottesville a little over a week ago, was it wise for our President to equally cast blame on both sides – the alt-right and alt-left – while avoiding making any profound statements about the original groups who were meeting and protesting and the content of the message they were spreading? What do you think?

Some liberal groups responded to those events by holding their own protests, in which, at least in Durham, NC, some pulled down a statue commemorating Confederate soldiers who lost their lives in the Civil War. They did that in a public park, while the police stood there and watched. Wise or unwise (maybe that's unfair, as we would likely upgrade that to "sin or no sin")?

The NFL season is about to start, and once again, there are several players who have indicated they will sit during the national anthem because, as one player put it, "I want to be able to use this platform to continuously push the message of that...I don't love segregation. I don't love riots or oppression. I just want to see people have the equality that they deserve." Wise or unwise?

Our new "school" year is set to begin in a few weeks. Over the next nine months, you'll have numerous opportunities to surround yourself with God's Word even more and grow in your faith in Jesus even more through Sunday morning Bible class, Women's Bible studies, Men's Bible studies, Sunday School. It'll be in your Christian freedom to choose which, if any, of those classed you'll be joining. And you ultimately choose none of them. Wise or unwise?

You see, it's not good enough to be able to look at other people's situations and think, "Well, if I were in their shoes, here's what I'd do/wouldn't do." Friends, every day, you have choices, you have situations where you have to look at each one and say, "Is doing this (or not doing this)...not is doing this sin or no sin...but, is doing this wise or unwise?" And I'll tell you, the right answer isn't always immediately and readily clear. But what it often comes down to this: it's all about using Christian judgment. And so, my question to you today is: Are You Wise or Unwise?

Our verses from Proverbs 9 give us some insight. Here, we're introduced to wisdom, who in the first part of Proverbs is personified as a woman. Any guesses who this wisdom symbolizes?

Let's see. "Wisdom" invites us on the way of understanding and righteousness. And so, the "wisdom" it produces in us is not mere learning or head knowledge. It is not skill in doing certain things. "Wisdom" involves moral judgment. "Wisdom" looks at the entire picture and doesn't just act in response to a temporary perceived gain. Such "wisdom" can come only in connection with God's Word.

So, we could say this wisdom is God's Word. The New Testament takes it one step further and refers to Jesus as the one who **"has become for us wisdom from God"** (1 Corinthians 1:30). Both are closely connected, and I would say both are fair understandings for wisdom here. Because look at what Wisdom does here. She's truly concerned with preparing the best "meal" for our benefit, putting herself out to do so. You can easily identify her preparations with God's gracious plan of salvation for sinful humans.

Right, the preparing the meat...literally, it's: "she has slaughtered her slaughtering." This describes the killing and preparation of an animal for eating. But we can be reminded of the use of the same Hebrew word in Isaiah 53: **"He (Jesus) was led like a lamb to the slaughter."** The slaughter of Jesus as the Lamb of God is certainly a most vital part of the preparations God makes for our heavenly banquet.

And then there's the wine, mixed with spices for the banquet, which was often done to make it as tasty as possible. Isaiah describes the same kind of banquet when he writes: **"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines"** (Isaiah 25:6). This banquet parallels the salvation God has prepared for all his people.

And who does Wisdom invite to the banquet? **"All who are simple."** Those who are naïve, inexperienced, easily enticed...those who could easily be led astray. She also invites **"those who lack judgment."** Again, literally, it's those who have a "heart of foolishness." And that might sound a little harsh, but it refers to those who don't always use the best understanding, reasoning, or judgment. I certainly fall into that group. You do as well. We are the guests.

So, we have Jesus, we have his Word, calling us, inviting us in order to fill us with wisdom and godly understanding. We have that to lead us down the path of being wise ourselves and using our wisdom, our best Christian judgment in every life situation. And so, in every situation in life, we display our Christian maturity. In this game of "wise or unwise," we ace every test.

If only it were that easy! Because, while in one corner you have this wonderful banquet lovingly prepared by Wisdom, there's the other corner. And who's standing there? Just a few verses later, starting at verse 13: **"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!' But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead."**

Did you notice it? Did you hear the comparisons? Folly is standing there, throwing a feast of her own, loudly giving the same invite, using the same words as wisdom, but taking things one step further and promising instant pleasure for all those who attend her banquet.

You know who Folly is. You know the morsels she offers. I mean, think about it, what kind of exposure are our children getting each day? What about you? You watch a TV show and get choked up when this couple, who has been dating and sleeping together finally decides to take the next step...and move in together. Wise or unwise?

You see these co-exist bumper stickers promoting unionism – that you can believe in whatever God you choose and that’s ok – and you think to yourself, “Yeah, that would be nice if we could coexist and be more tolerating of each other’s religion” as opposed to, “How can I stand up as a faithful witness to the gospel and gently and lovingly let others know that no, you can’t just believe in whatever kind of god or divine being you choose and be right or ok.” Wise or unwise?

You’re shopping at Walmart and see these pamphlets from the local militant Baptist church on the “Tragedy of Lutheranism,” (and yes, this is a real thing I heard about from another pastor) and you read and can’t help but be appalled by some of things we actually believe (spoiler alert: those attacks would be gross misrepresentations). Wise or unwise?

Or...the wisdom we do have, but we don’t apply it in a godly manner...like, how it can be missing in the way we treat others and honor our God. We know what’s right, but we unwisely choose ourselves over others. We lash out in anger. We love things of this world more than God.

This kind of “un-wisdom,” God calls sin. Folly feeds us this constant diet of spiritual junk food and trash from television, social media, society in general, and I’m speaking from experience, it’s so easy to gobble it all up because it tastes good. But what we do is we fill up on that, and then don’t have any room left for being exposed to and hearing God’s Word. Wise or unwise?

Friends, folly offers lies, forbidden fruit, but inside of folly’s house are not the promised pleasures but the bones of dead men...***“her guests are in the depths of the grave.”*** And we’ve been there. And so what would be wise? For God to simply give up on us, allow us to wander across the street unimpeded, eat our fill of these lies, this foolishness, go down to the depths of hell.

But listen again to Wisdom’s call: ***“Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live.”*** Only by God’s grace can we hope to escape the entrapments of folly and enter the house that wisdom built.

You see, Christ is that wisdom. Now, the wise of the world despise the simple. But he who is wisdom knows that we are all simple, too simple to heed his invitation on our own...too simple to understand the way of salvation or the meaning of life or the point of death. But he doesn’t despise and spurn us in our simplicity; he calls; he invites. He lures and entices as (as Martin Luther was apt to say) with a banquet of understanding for this life and for the life to come.

We find life and true wisdom in Christ and, oddly enough, in the “foolishness” (as Paul calls it in 1 Corinthians) of the cross. You see, in wisdom and mercy, God the Father sent Jesus. God’s wise plan included Jesus living perfectly in our place. In God’s wisdom, Jesus suffered and died for all our sins. In perfect wisdom, Jesus rose to life on the third day in victory over sin and death. God’s wisdom resulted in forgiveness for all. God’s wisdom resulted in a way for you and I to have access to the most sought after banquet of all, the heavenly feast of the Lamb.

So let me ask, how tasty is the meal he provides? It's the good news of the gospel, described by the psalmist in this way, "**How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth**" (Psalm 119:103).

Wisdom invites us to feast on God's Word – by going to church, attending Bible classes, reading and sharing the Word at home and with friends. Now, I'll admit, this is a vastly different meal from what Folly offers. You could walk out of church this morning and have this smorgasbord of different treats at your fingertips for your tasting pleasure (for a moment), as opposed to the Bread of Life and the Living Water – Jesus and his Word – the same thing you get here Sunday after Sunday. Simple, yes, but those are the necessities we need daily...the necessities we need for eternity. "**From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation,**" Paul writes.

I grew up in the WELS bubble. I had religious teaching at every level of my education. But I still need the Bread of Life, just as much, just as often as you do...because that's where true wisdom lies.

We know we are the "simple" and "those who lack judgment." Wisdom's invitation is for us. But we also need to follow through and taste of the banquet – "eat my food and drink the wine." "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves," writes James. "Do what it says." All this begins to take place when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus.

And we rejoice in the result. No longer are we simple, but we mature, and even more so the more we're connected to the wisdom of God's Word. We no longer lack judgment but are equipped to practice sound Christian judgment in life's moments...being able to think, "Is what I'm about to do (or not do), is that going to bring glory to God. Is it going to be keeping in line with the truth of God's Word? Is it going to show love to my neighbor – friend or foe?"

"Sin or No Sin?" "Wise or Unwise?" It's a game we pastors like to play, to be more equipped to handle situations in a godly manner. But it's the reality you and I live every day. Every day it's Wisdom vs. Folly. Every day it's give in to the lies or practice Christian judgment. Will you be wise or unwise in the direction you go?

We need wisdom... in our work, in our relationships, in our witness to others, and in our lives of thanks to God. Pray. Ask God for wisdom—wisdom to serve and love him in all that you do. And thank God. Thank him that his wisdom and love led him to purchase and give you forgiveness through Jesus. And as you feast with Wisdom, you will walk in wisdom, leave your simple ways, and live for Jesus. Wise! Amen.