

THE HOUSE THAT WISDOM BUILT

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." Proverbs 9:1.

There is a real fascination in building a house. We like to watch the pouring of the footing and the foundation, the erection of the studding, the putting on of the roof and the finishing. Each step captivates us, for a house in the process of construction represents progress. It shows somebody is alive and is interested in doing something constructive. Each phase of the construction is interesting and fascinating. Any thoughtful builder wants to make sure that only good and durable materials are put into his house. If second rate materials are used in the construction, within a few years at most the owner will have trouble with his house. Wisdom demands that one not use shoddy materials in the construction of a house.

The book of Proverbs is a veritable storehouse of spiritual information. In the first six verses of the ninth chapter Solomon is contrasting wisdom and folly. He tells us what wisdom has done in our behalf. The house to which Divine Wisdom invites her guests is one which has cost time, labor and materials in the preparation. "Wisdom hath builded her house." The building of anything that will last implies the expenditure of time and labor and material. When the eagle builds her nest for her yet unborn eaglets she spends much time in her work and bestows much labor upon the arrangement of the materials used therein. In the building of a house for human habitation, whether it be a modest cottage or a palatial residence, thought, time, labor and painstaking care must be given to the building. The same thing is true in mental construction. When thoughts are to be gathered together and fashioned into a book, the gathering and the building involve the expenditure of many hours and days, and sometimes years, of mental labor before the work is completed.

God has done likewise in the works which He has wrought for the benefit of His creatures. The house which He built for the habitation of the human race was not brought into its present form all at once. God did not create the heavens and the earth in one day. His Word tells us that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exodus 20:11). In creation Divine Wisdom "builded her house." What is true of creation is also true of redemption. The process of building the plan of redemption took centuries and ages.

That which was so long in preparation is strong and enduring in character. The snowflake is not long in being formed, and it is short in duration. The bubble upon a stream is built instantly, but it passes away just as quickly. On the other hand, the coral island has taken many years, and has cost many thousands of lives to build it, but now it stands a rock in the midst of the sea, and has become the base on which men dwell. All that is strong and lasting in the world required time in its formation. So is it with the refuge where that is found which will satisfy the soul of man. It was long ere it was completed, but it is a lasting edifice, built upon a sure foundation.

In the counsels of eternity God formed by unerring wisdom a plan which no human mind could have ever suggested, and which can admit of no improvement. We are thankful for a good plan when we reflect that the permanence of a building is in a great measure dependent upon it.

The first verses of Proverbs 9 may be regarded as a representation of the wisdom which God has erected for man in and through what Christ has actually done for him. In this light let us observe some things which are set forth in these verses.

I. The Firmness of Its Structure.

It is both substantial and magnificent. It rests on the most secure foundation -- the three persons in the ever-blessed Trinity, the perfections of God and the all-sufficient righteousness of the incarnate One. It does not repose on the yielding sand of human merit or mortal workmanship, but on the Rock of Ages, which time cannot crumble or change. Not only is the foundation safe and immovable, but the superstructure is perfectly invincible.

"She hath hewn out her seven pillars." A pillar, which is used as a support and ornament of a building, is an emblem for strength, and seven is the emblem of perfection. Therefore, the idea is that of perfect strength and beauty. The seven pillars of Christian truth are the deity of Christ, the incarnation of Christ, the impeccability or holiness of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ and the return of Christ.

II. The Adaptation of Its Provisions.

"She hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table." The adaptation of its provisions is seen in two things:

1. Their nature.

The things specified here were the staple commodities of life among the people of the East. The idea suggested here is that Christian truths sustain a relation to the soul analogous to the relation that the necessities of physical life do to the body. As the body cannot live without the right appropriation of food, the soul cannot live healthily without the right appropriation of Christian truths. Christ said, "I am the bread of life."

2. Their variety.

There is a variety in the provisions -- meat, wine and bread. Physiologists tell us that man's body not only requires food, but a variety of it -- animal and vegetable. God has provided many different kinds of food to satisfy our physical appetites. Although they are all adapted to the same end -- the nourishment of the body, the difference in their composition and flavor adds much to man's enjoyment. The human spirit, like the body, craves a variety in its food, and God has satisfied that craving. There are many spiritual truths upon which the spiritual nature can feed. These truths are adequate for the present and the future.

III. The Invitation of Its Messengers.

"She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither."

1. The invitation is earnest.

"She crieth." That indicates that it is not a cold, half-hearted or formal invitation.

2. The invitation is universal.

"Whoso" indicates that there is no restriction, but that the banquet is spread for all. Provisions are suited to every type of mind. Truths im-

plied here are sublime enough for the greatest philosopher and simple enough for the untutored child.

The divine preparation is complete. The house is built, the full number of pillars erected, the beasts killed, the wine mingled and the table set. Everything is arranged; nothing is forgotten or omitted. Every guest will find that which he needs. How complete is the preparation which God has made for us in the glorious gospel of grace!

It is plain that the human spirit needs a feast from the fact that God has made the provision for it. It was to meet the need of the Israelites that God fed them with manna in the wilderness. When the Lord Jesus provided the food for the multitude in the wilderness it was to supply a manifest need. Man's spiritual nature will starve without the feast which God's wisdom has prepared and provided.

The only means by which guests can be brought in is by invitation and persuasion. Nobody can be compelled to partake of the feast of wisdom. Persuasion can be used, and people can be induced to eat of it from a sense of need, but force is useless. So it is with all the spiritual blessings which God has prepared for men. All the force that can be exercised to get them to receive them is that of persuasion. Paul wrote: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:11). He also said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:20).

If those of us who are God's children are going to build the house of genuine Christian character, wisdom requires that we use certain materials:

1. Common sense.

In Proverbs 9 folly and wisdom are contrasted and personified. Both have build houses and people are pictured going into their houses. Those who go into folly's house are simple-minded and lacking in common sense. Those who go into wisdom's house display their good, common sense. Those who go into folly's house illustrate the irrationality of sin. Folly admits this when she persuades her guests that "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant," as verse seventeen states. Only a person without common sense would believe that and be governed accordingly. Those who give a second thought to the words of folly know that stolen water is not sweet, but that it is bitter, and that bread eaten in secret is not pleasant, but leaves a bewilderingly disagreeable taste in the mouth. Unfortunately, some do not take a second thought. Folly has been clever enough to blind the eyes of her guests, so that they are attempting to solve their problems by abnormal and senseless means. What a pity that folly's guests did not go to the house of wisdom and there listen to what common sense had to say!

2. Humility.

Humility is brought to light in Proverbs 9 in the contrast between wisdom and the scoffer. Like folly, scoffer has built a house, and he has used conceit in the construction, but has left out humility. To reprove scoffer is sheer folly, for he will only hate his reprover. Verse eight says, "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." To reprove a wise man is to invoke his love and blessing; and what is more, to give instruction to a wise man is to make him still wiser. Verse nine

says, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will yet be wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." To be wise one must be humble enough to accept reproof and to profit by new information. The "know-it-all" is not wise. Yet he is a person whom nobody can tell anything. He has all of the answers, and there is little or nothing left for him to learn. How can any man be wise when he is unwilling to accept reproof, is resentful of advice, and is indignant in the presence of those who would dispute what he thinks to be right?

Willingness to hear the truth about ourselves, even though it is hard to take, is an indication of our desire for humility and our sincerity about striving after wisdom. Christ will be our advisor if we permit Him to be. Willingness to hear Him is humble wisdom. Men of true wisdom are always men of deep humility.

3. Divine insight.

This insight is given by the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Paul identified wisdom and knowledge as gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The house that wisdom built has in it the materials of common sense, humility and divine insight or understanding.