

Warning Against Adultery

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[0 : 00] in Proverbs chapter 5. So that's what we're opening to, is the whole chapter from verses 1 to 23. And please join me in prayer as you open up to Proverbs 5.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for giving us your instruction, your wisdom. God, we pray that you would give us open hearts that are willing to receive, that are eager to obey, for your glory and for our good, Father.

And we pray in Christ's name, amen. All right, Proverbs chapter 5. My son, be attentive to my wisdom.

Incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion and your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil.

But in the end, she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps follow the path to Sheol. She does not ponder the path of life.

[1 : 03] Her ways wander, and she does not know it. And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.

Lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the merciless. Lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner. And at the end of your life, you groan when your flesh and body are consumed.

And you say, how I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof. I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, or incline my ear to my instructors.

I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe.

[2 : 10] Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight. Be intoxicated always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman, and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his past. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.

He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly, he is led astray. This is God's word. Over the last six weeks, we took a hiatus from our sermon series in Proverbs to study 1 John.

So this allowed us to focus on some Christian fundamentals, such as the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the importance of Christian obedience and love.

This week, we're returning to the book of Proverbs. So I think it's helpful to do a quick recap of where we've been in Proverbs. A few weeks back, Sean unpacked the three different contexts we need to pay attention to as we study scripture.

- [3 : 15] The historical context, the literary context, and the theological context. So the historical context answers questions like, who wrote the text? Who's the audience?
- When was it written? Why was it written? And for Proverbs, we learned that King Solomon was the lead author, though not the sole author. So since he wrote most of it, or came up with most of it, most of the Proverbs dates back to the 10th century BC.
- In terms of audience, it wasn't specified to one person, but given to all people across class and profession and gender. It's not intended just for the young and uneducated, but it was given to the simple and the wise, so opposite ends of the wisdom spectrum.
- Therefore, it includes everyone in between. And also we learned from Sean that the collective masculine is used, or that the masculine pronoun is used to refer to a group of men and women together.
- So this is relevant for our chapter today because though chapter five addresses men to beware of the adulterous, women can and should apply this instruction to avoid the adulterer.
- [4 : 25] So that's the historical context. Next, there's the literary context, which asks questions about words, syntax, grammar, as well as the genre.
- So Proverbs belongs to wisdom genre, as opposed to say narratives or epistles. And it's written in the style of poetry. In poetry, not only is an idea communicated, but the text tries to do so beautifully and with imaginative and figurative language.
- So reading Proverbs will be a different experience than reading example Paul's epistle to the Romans. Finally, there's the theological context, which asks questions like, how does this fit with the rest of scripture?
- What does it teach us about God? How does it relate to Jesus? This book helps us to live life in the fear of the Lord, to live every moment before the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the glory of God.
- As Proverbs chapter one, verse seven says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. A person who trusts God, who loves him, who lives for him, this will be a person who lives in the fear of God.
- [5 : 46] And it is a life entered into by humbling ourselves and receiving the message of Christ crucified for us. That we who are sinners condemned to death, we were loved so much by God that he sent his only son into the world to die on our behalf on the cross.
- And those who trust in Christ for salvation will be saved from death to eternal life. That's what we humbly receive and trust. This is the ultimate wisdom that this world foolishly despises because it disagrees either with the idea that it needs saving or it doesn't like having to be saved through faith in Jesus.
- But for us, Christ is our wisdom from God. It's in this Christ-centered life that the wisdom of Proverbs comes alive and that it makes sense. So that's the theological context.
- We've covered the first four chapters so far. And in the first four chapters, we've hit themes like the importance of getting wisdom, entrusting ourselves completely to God, seeing the signposts from God's word that tell us to beware of sin, turn away from sin, to walk in his ways, God's ways.
- And one of the signposts back in chapter two was about adultery. And our chapter today goes into more depth on this topic of adultery. It serves as a huge signpost that says, warning, danger, don't commit adultery, turn away.
- [7 : 18] That's what this chapter says. So the main message of our passage today is that we should stay away from the adulteress and take pleasure in our spouse as God intended us to do.

The passage is organized into three parts. There's verses one through six on the end of adultery as death. Verses seven through 14 on the consequences of adultery as ruin.

And verses 15 through 23 on the ways of God as the light. A quick pause here for our parents to point out that the content of this chapter involves the topics of adultery and intimacy in marriage.

And I know we have a broad age group tuning in to our worship service. So I'll do my best to keep this child friendly. That being said, the passage itself is relatively racy as we've already read.

And God's word is very good and does not require any censorship. So anyway, I want to give that quick heads up for parents before we dive in here.

[8 : 23] So let's look at the first section in verses one through six. It talks about the end of adultery being death. So verse one says, my son, be attentive to my wisdom.

Incline your ear to my understanding. You know, a child might make bad life decisions because no one's around to tell him any better. Or he might be getting good advice, but choosing to ignore it.

So it's helpful for us to be told to listen up to wisdom. And in verses two through four, we see a contrast between the lips of the son and the lips of the forbidden woman.

The son having received wisdom into his heart, he must now guard this knowledge with his lips, it says. In other words, he must carefully consider this knowledge. He's got to think about it, ponder it, which will lead to him eventually speaking it and even teaching them to other people.

This is in contrast to the lips of the forbidden woman, which drip honey and are smoother than oil, but lead to death. What's translated in verse three as forbidden woman is literally foreigner or stranger.

[9 : 40] In this context, it refers to someone who is outside the circle of a man's proper relations, is foreign to that. So here it's an adulteress who is forbidden to a man.

And here her words are described as dripping honey and smoother than oil. They are seductive, sweet to listen to. They promise pleasure and satisfaction.

And maybe in our lives, they might appear as subtle compliments about our appearance or caring questions that try to make an emotional connection.

They might be flirtatious or suggested innuendos, but all that seek entrance into the intimate spaces of our hearts that are reserved solely for our spouse.

So don't be fooled by these sweet words. They are initially sweet, but they hide the poisonous aftertaste of death. It says in verses four through six, but in the end, she is bitter as the wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

[10 : 48] Her feet go down to death. Her steps follow the path to shale. She does not ponder the path of life. Her ways wander, and she does not know it. Her words start sweet as honey.

But in the end, it's bitter as wormwood. They're smoother than oil, but then they're sharp like a sword. I think this is a helpful description for us of how sin operates and how the devil tries to lure us in.

Sin does have something pleasurable about it. It's appealing, or else we never get tempted by it. But it's important for us to consider what it's going to end up like.

I have this image of Satan walking the streets of East Cambridge, and it's sadly a common occurrence to find a lot of dog poop around because people don't pick up the dog poop. So I think of Satan, like picking up one of those pieces of dog poop and covering it with a few coats of honey, and then he hands it over to you.

So that's what it's like to be offered sin, to be offered adultery. He likes to tell us about the initial pleasures of sin while hiding its bitterness and hiding its death that inevitably come and destroy us.

[12 : 03] It's like when he deceived Adam and Eve in the garden, but he lied. He lied, and he said that they wouldn't die, which was exactly contrary to what God had told them.

Or when he advertises the fun of getting drunk while hiding the hangover, bad decision-making, long-term health risks like liver disease, if that's kept up.

Or when we're tempted to vent our anger and verbally abuse someone because, honestly, it just feels so good sometimes to let loose. But we don't see the hurt and the pain that comes and the healing that's needed because we fail to speak truth in love.

Or here in this chapter, when we're tempted to enjoy sex outside of marriage, and we only see the gratification, we only see the immediate opportunity, but not the pain, the emptiness, our opening the way up for possible divorce and abortions and health issues.

But again, coming back to what Proverbs, the book, is about, here we see the importance of the fear of God being the foundation of wisdom because even with these examples that I've mentioned, it's possible to weigh the pros and cons without God in the picture and say, yeah, it's still worth it for me.

[13 : 28] There are ways that I can protect myself enough from the risks. But if God is our Heavenly Father who loves us, if Christ is the one who died for us, if the Holy Spirit is within us to empower us to become more like Christ, then the pros never outweigh the cons.

It's never worth it for us to sin. So here we see the importance of the fear of God. Finally, at the end of the section, notice in verse 6 how the adulterous woman is lost.

She's not seeking the paths of life and wisdom. She doesn't know that she's lost. This person who's speaking smoothly and sweetly to you, who's pleasant, but trying to get you to stray from God's ways, this person doesn't have your best interests at heart.

She doesn't even have her own best interests at heart. So we see that the end of adultery is death. And there is wisdom in considering the end of our decisions.

Moving on to the second section of verses 7 through 14, there's another plea to listen to these words of wisdom because the consequences of adultery is ruin.

[14 : 49] The specific advice in verse 8 is, it says, keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house. Adultery is not something to be played around with.

We need to take it seriously. We need to flee from this temptation. A great biblical example of doing this well is Joseph in Genesis 39. So Joseph is one of the 12 sons of Jacob and he's sold into slavery by his brothers.

And he ends up being bought by a man named Potiphar. So listen with me as I read a few verses from Genesis chapter 39. Now, Joseph had been brought down to Egypt and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

The Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him and made him overseer of his house and he put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.

[16 : 12] The blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me. But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

He is not greater in this house than I am nor has he kept back anything from me except you because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

And as she spoke to him, as he spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment saying, Lie with me.

But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. So what does Joseph do well here? First, we see that he maintained a strong connection and a strong relationship with God.

[17 : 34] His primary objection was, How can I do this wrong against God? Even through his very difficult circumstances, he cultivated this deep relationship with God and he didn't turn away from him.

Second, we see that he didn't justify adultery. He doesn't think to himself, you know, I've had a hard life. I deserve this. It's not that big of a deal.

My master is a loser anyway. I mean, I'm doing all the hard work around here. I'm earning the money. Plus, his wife wants me more than he wants. than him. Right? So he doesn't think these thoughts.

And the situation is not about himself and what he wants, but it's about loving God. It's about loving his master who's treated him so well. Third, he makes no space for temptation.

He refuses to even be with Potiphar's wife in verse 10 once he identifies this temptation. And when she tries to trap him, he bolts. He just gets out of there. He even leaves his clothes behind him.

[18 : 39] What does this look like for us? Maybe it's in a work situation. Maybe there's someone at work who's making advances towards you.

Someone that you have a ton of contact with and honestly, you can't avoid not seeing this person. You know that he or she is going to be a problem for your marriage.

So then maybe it's time to look for another job. or there's a friend of the opposite sex that you spend a lot of time with. You get along with really well but you guys are getting uncomfortably close.

You're sharing too many deep things, being more emotionally connected with this person than with your spouse. Maybe it's time to cut that friendship off. Whatever it might be, again, this is something to take seriously.

It's something to flee. We've got to identify its sources and kill it. It also helps to share this temptation with a close Christian friend so you can be prayed for, you can be kept accountable and so that's helpful.

[19 : 47] Moving on in the passage, verses 9-14, they talk about the consequences of adultery. Verses 9-10 say, Lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength and your labors go to the house of a foreigner.

These verses talk about the economic ruin that come from infidelity. So the words your honor, your years, your strength, your labors, these talk about the effort and the good yield of one's life and they're being funneled because of adultery to others.

It's unclear exactly who the others are. There are a few possibilities. It could be the jealous husband of the adulteress. It could be that man's family.

It could be the family of this person's cheated wife. And in terms of what we see and what we might see in our lives, the financial consequences of adultery, you know, they can be a divorce settlement, they can be child support payments, they could be blackmail from the person that you had an affair with, but it's pointing to the fact that adultery can ruin you economically and financially.

Verse 11 speaks of groaning at the end of one's life. It says, when your flesh and body are consumed. This could refer to the ill physical effects of sexual immorality, for example, from sexually transmitted diseases, though this doesn't necessarily have to be the case in this passage.

[21 : 30] It might just be saying that at the end of life, when this person's physical vitality has left him, he looks back on his life with regret at the decisions he's made.

So that's verse 11. In verse 14, it refers to the social consequences of this person's mistakes.

So it says, I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. When infidelity comes to light in a public setting, there could be dishonor and humiliation for those involved in the affair and also those related to those people.

There might be professional consequences, for example, for those in government whose roles involve and require public trust and opinion.

And so the takeaway from this section is that adultery can bring ruin to your life economically, physically, and socially.

[22 : 35] Finally, in the last section in verses 15 to 23, we read about the ways of God as the light and how we should live.

Remember that repentance involves a turning away from sin, but it's not just a turning away from sin. It's a turning to God in faith and obedience. So they're two sides of the same coin.

So this chapter has already instructed us that the sin that we're turning away from is adultery and we're turning to God and walking in His ways of being sexually satisfied in our spouse.

the imagery of drinking water is present throughout these verses referring to our thirst being quenched. There's drink water from your own cistern in verse 15.

In verse 16, it says it points to streams of water. Let your fountain be blessed in verse 18. And this points to the fact that God has created us as sexual creatures and He has provided for us with marriage to meet our sexual desires where we can satisfy our thirst and we can drink deeply from our spouse.

[23 : 51] This idea of drinking water from your own cistern is referring to the water pit that people in the dry area of Canaan would hollow out in the rocky ground.

So they would dig this pit and then they would use it to collect and store rainwater. for its owner. And verses 16 through 17 say, should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets, let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you.

These verses are saying enjoy the spouse that only you have access to. It's referring to the idea of privately owned property versus common property.

As in only you can drink from the cistern in your backyard that you dug while the water fountain in the park, I mean, anyone can drink from there, right?

So within a faithful marriage, husband and wife are enjoying one another exclusively, whereas with an adulteress, she or he is less concerned about exclusivity and more concerned about availability, right?

[25 : 03] So these verses are saying, don't let the source of your satisfaction be common and shared, but let it be private, special, belonging to you only.

There's also the alternative interpretation that this warning of not letting your springs be scattered abroad, that it's a warning that your spouse might be unfaithful to you if you are unfaithful.

I think this interpretation is problematic for a couple reasons. First, the wife in verse 15 is referred to in the singular as your own sister and your own well, but in verse 16, it talks about springs and streams in the plural.

So there's no good reason that a wife would be changed from singular to plural from one verse to the next. And also a second problem is in terms of cause and effect, it's difficult to think that just because you are unfaithful you would automatically cause your spouse to choose to be unfaithful.

He or she might be deeply hurt, yes, extremely angry, yes, but making the same foolish decisions that you make, that is not necessarily true.

[26 : 25] So I would go with the previous interpretation. Moving on to verses 18 to 19, notice the imagery and language used here.

It says, rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight, being intoxicated always in her love.

The husband is to be intoxicated, drenched, lost in his wife's love. This phrase of being intoxicated again is a bit racy as I mentioned earlier and it can have negative connotations when referring to alcohol or even the adulterers in verse 20.

But when it comes to the love of your spouse, it's a good thing to be lost in her love and in his love. note that this enjoyment of one's spouse is both qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitatively, the husband rejoices and is filled with delight. And quantitatively, it is at all times and always. Of course, there's more wisdom that goes into the practical implications of a healthy love life.

[27 : 37] So if your husband planning on coming to shop for counseling and complaining that your wife isn't intoxicating you enough since she's not at all times and always providing for you when you want it, and you want him to call her out that she's a bad wife, you should prepare to be surprised, disappointed when he calls you out as a bad husband.

But still, it's important here of the idea that the wife is available to quench the husband's thirst and vice versa. That's how God meant it to be. In verses 21 through 23, it ends the chapter by pointing out God's omniscience and justice.

So God is omniscient. He knows all, he sees all, all the paths of men are before him. And God is just. The wicked will face the consequences of their sin and their foolishness.

And though we're talking specifically about adultery in this chapter, these verses help to zoom out onto all sin. it's not just adultery that arises from a lack of discipline, as it says in verses 23, but all wickedness.

So let's wrap up by talking a few application points here. Why might we be tempted to commit adultery? What lies does the enemy throw into our faces to tempt us?

[29 : 01] One thought is around our needs being satisfied. We might think my needs aren't being met. My marriage is really difficult. And honestly, it has been for a long time.

This chapter paints a rosy but unrealistic picture of marriage. I deserve to be happy, even if that's not with my spouse. So that is one thought.

First, let me address that marriage is difficult. It's really difficult. We are all sinful people. And two people in marriage, it's like two pieces of rough metal that come really close and rub against each other.

There's going to be friction. There's going to be sparks flying sometimes. We should expect this and not be surprised by it. So I don't want to devalue that. But second, marriage is not about our happiness.

That's not what this world wants to tell us. It wants you to think that it's all about you. This world sells us on products and services that make our lives easier, more satisfying.

[30 : 06] But marriage is not about you. It's not about me. It's not about our happily ever after. Of course, happiness does take place in marriage, but it's not like a marriage is broken if a person's not happy.

Instead, marriage is a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church. And when we reflect this well, we point to how wonderful God is, how great he is.

How does Jesus treat his pride? How does he treat us to church? We know that he loves us, he nourishes us, he cherishes us, he chooses to take the worst from us, all of our mistakes, all of the hateful venom that will spit out at him, all of our burdens.

He takes our worst and in return he gives us his best. On the cross, he took away our sin and he was punished on our behalf. And in him, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

He was rich, yet for our sake he became poor so that we, by his poverty, might become rich. I mean, how absurd would it be if Jesus treated us the same way that spouses so often treat each other in this world?

[31 : 22] You know, if he said, Ray, you know, I've sorry, I've decided to end our relationship because you're not really satisfying my needs and desires. You've been growing apart from me these past few years. Honestly, you care more about your family, your next promotion, you're binging on Netflix, than you care about prayer and Bible study.

You know, you must not know about me, Ray, because there are a ton of other people who appreciate me a lot more than you, right? That's pretty ridiculous. We know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, that he has loved us with an everlasting love.

Jesus is faithful to us. So marriage is not about our happiness. It's about reflecting Christ in the church. And it's also about our sanctification.

It's about becoming more and more holy, becoming more and more like Jesus. On the cross, Jesus took our worst and gave us his best, right? So in marriage, we get the opportunity to demonstrate that to someone else.

Because marriage brings out the good and the bad and the ugly, we can have the opportunity to receive hurtful words, inconsiderate actions, gross incompetence, and in response, we get to choose to give kindness and patience and love.

[32 : 47] this is impossible on our own. We can't do it. And the world doesn't sell us anything that can help us with this. It's only God by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ that we are made new again.

Another thought that might tempt us to adultery is that I'm strong enough to fight this temptation or I'm not susceptible to this. And though it might not be a particular temptation or chronic sin now for us, we shouldn't let our guard down.

It's when we're tired, when life is hard, when marriage is hard, when we're not our best selves, that then a woman or a man who's basically trained himself or herself to be a professional seductress or seductor who comes our way, and that's when we can all be caught off guard.

So don't play with fire, but again, flee from sin, flee from temptation. Another reason we might be tempted towards adultery is the thought that I'm strong enough to figure it out on my own, and here I'm referring specifically to marriage struggles.

When things are hard, I can just plow through it. We are supposed to be sexually gratified in our marriages, relationships, but that might not be the case due to a lot of other reasons that don't have to do with sex directly.

[34 : 19] For example, ineffective communication, constant conflict, emotional disconnection, a lack of time in a busy life, a lot of things can happen.

And so we might be tempted to tough it out and figure it out on our own, but honestly, it can save us a lot of time, a lot of heartache to seek out help from church elders and from professional counseling.

So I'll encourage you guys to look into that and feel free to speak to me or Sean or Matt about this more if you're interested in pursuing this and we can help direct you guys.

So in conclusion, brothers and sisters, please be attentive. Be attentive to God's words. Keep your way far from the adulterer that brings death, and ruin.

Seek to be satisfied in your spouse and remember that God loves us and he wants the best for us. Amen.