

Wisdom For Life And Ministry

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7 ESV)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray. (Proverbs 10:17 ESV)

'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.' (Job 28:28 ESV)

The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:42 ESV)

Warning Against Adultery

May 26th, 2019

Proverbs 5:1-23

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Introduction:

Good morning church. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs 5:1; that's on page 530 in your pew Bibles. This morning we are going to talk about adultery. How not to commit adultery; why not to commit adultery and what to do if you already have. Now before we get into that it will likely be helpful for us to address two potential objections to this message.

Potential Objections:

- 1. Is this an appropriate topic for church?**
- 2. Isn't this passage rather sexist in its approach?**

Let's do the first one first because I think it is the easiest.

- 1. Is this an appropriate topic for church?**

Answer: Yes.

How do I know that? Because the Bible tells me so. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

If you want to be mature and wise and prepared for life and ministry then you need to study everything the Bible has to say and the Bible actually has an awful lot to say about adultery. We need to know about it for ourselves and we need to know about it so that we can offer wise help and counsel to other people.

One of the reasons we are doing this series is because we want to raise up a whole host of skilled helpers in this church. As a skilled helper you are going to be talking to people who are feeling the PULL of this particular PITFALL and you are going to need to be prepared to guide them, successfully through it.

A wise guide needs to know about this. This comes up a lot in our congregation. I have some version of this conversation almost every week. I had it twice last week. So if you want to get involved in the counselling ministry here then you will need to be prepared to deal with this issue and that's why we are talking about it in church today.

Secondly you might object that this passage is inappropriately sexist in its approach.

2. Isn't this passage rather sexist in its approach?

This passage does portray the WOMAN as the seductress and many people have objected to that. After all, surely it is just as common – probably more common – for men to tempt women into adultery so isn't it true that this passage presents a sexist and biased view?

Well, thankfully there is a very simple and satisfying answer to that question. The reason the woman is portrayed in this passage as the seductress is because the entire Book of Proverbs is presented as the counsel of a mom and a dad TO THEIR ROYAL SON. The passage begins with the words:

My son, be attentive to my wisdom (Proverbs 5:1 ESV)

They are writing to their SON so of course they talk about the danger of being seduced by an adulterous WOMAN. It would be odd to expect anything else.

And of course we would want to note that GENERALLY in the Bible when stories of adultery are shared the blame falls almost exclusively upon the MAN. We think of David. Who does the Bible BLAME for the adultery between David and Bathsheba? It blames David. And David blames David. The Bible almost always blames the man for adultery – but here in this story the warning is being given to a man and therefore the potential seductress is of course portrayed as a woman.

So with those objections hopefully out of the way, let's hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at Proverbs chapter 5 verse 1.

1 My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding,
2 that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.
3 For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil,
4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.
5 Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol;
6 she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.

7 And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
8 Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,
9 lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless,
10 lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner,
11 and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed,
12 and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof!
13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.
14 I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation."

15 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.
16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.
18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.
20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths.
22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.
23 He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. (Proverbs 5:1–23 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Well let's begin with how not to commit adultery.

How Not To Commit Adultery

The father commends TWO things, one negative and one positive. Negatively he tells his son to STAY AWAY from tempting people and places.

1. Stay away from tempting people and places

Look at verse 8:

Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house (Proverbs 5:8 ESV)

He doesn't tell his son to stop being a pervert or to learn to control his desires or to think of himself as a missionary to the sexually and morally depraved – he doesn't say any of that – rather he tells his son to RUN AWAY.

Run away!!!

Know your limits.

Understand how you are wired.

Maintain a healthy FEAR of temptation and sexual sin and run away.

Derek Kidner says fabulously here:

"The New Testament echoes this practical, if seemingly unheroic, advice (2 Tim. 2:22; Matt. 5:28, 29), which could mean, in terms of detailed decision, e.g. 'change your job', 'change your newspaper', 'break with that set of friends' ..."¹

Isn't that marvelous? And how incredibly wise! If you want to be a skilled helper then this is precisely the sort of advice you will need to be prepared to give to men and women contemplating an adulterous affair.

RUN AWAY!

¹Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 66-67.

Well I can't run away, they'll say, because we work together.

Well then, quit your job and look for a new one.

Well I can't do that because this is a very good job and I would be sad to lose it.

Well if you don't run away then you are going to lose your family, your honour and your eternal soul – so when you factor that in a little bit of employment stress isn't really that big of a deal is it?

That's wise counsel and that's what the father is saying to his son here.

Run away.

Or to transpose that into the digital age we might say "TURN AWAY" or "UNPLUG". A great MANY men and women have been led out of their marriages and into total personal and spiritual ruin either by looking at pornography or by engaging in online chat and dating forums which emotionally seduce people into relationships that ultimately poison and sabotage their marriages.

Have absolutely nothing to do with such things. Run away. Unplug the computer. Put blocking software on your phone.

Start sending messages by carrier pigeon if you have to – do whatever you need to do to keep yourself FAR from the source of sexual temptation. That's what the father is saying and we need to hear that inspired counsel again and again in our day.

The second thing he says is more positive. He tells his son to enjoy the pleasures and permission of marriage.

2. Enjoy the pleasures and permission of marriage

Look at verses 15-19. Now, before I read those verses let me remind you of the email I sent out earlier this week warning you that we would be covering some adult themes in the service this morning. If you didn't get that email and you'd like to hustle Johnny and Susy down to Children's Ministry, now would be a good time to do so. Not that Johnny and Susy shouldn't hear these things – I think we are often far too prudish on these matters and I think that creates a number of problems later on - but if you would like to remove Johnny and Susy now would be the time to do so.

Very well, let's read now from Proverbs 5:15-19. The father says to his son – speaking under the power and inspiration of the HOLY SPIRIT of course:

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.

18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,

19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. (Proverbs 5:15–19 ESV)

Bible commentator David Atkinson says usefully here:

"The Bible does not hide its delight at God's purpose for human sexuality. The erotic delight of sexual embrace is expressed in the

language of refreshment and blessing. ... Let the young man find joy in making love to the wife of his youth.²

A good marriage is a great guard against all forms of sexual immorality.

Let me be very frank with you. Many of the instances of adultery that I have dealt with over the years have been caused IN PART by a lack of generosity and joy within the marriage relationship. When something GOOD isn't happening – or isn't happening often enough – then something BAD is far more LIKELY to happen. That is wisdom. That is in the Bible – Old Testament and New.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:

“The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:3–5 ESV)

That is exactly what the father in Proverbs 5 is saying to his son. Paul says it to both men and women in 1 Corinthians 7. He says that both husbands and wives should regularly and generously GIVE SEX to each other in part to guard against sexual temptation.

Enjoying what God permits is one of the best ways of guarding yourself against that which God prohibits. Again – that is WISDOM and that is in the Bible, Old Testament and New. So we want to ENJOY – but I want to take up a level. Bruce Waltke comments very usefully here, saying:

“The father admonishes that inhibitions be left behind in the marriage bed.”³

He is referring there to the word “intoxicated” in verse 19. To be intoxicated is to be drunk. To be drunk is to have LOST ALL INHIBITIONS.

The father is praying for his son to have a wife that absolutely CAPTIVATES HIM – that totally and entirely SATISFIES HIM. He prays that his son will enjoy generous, delightful and intoxicating sex with his covenant partner such that he will never even be tempted to go looking for cheap sex in the common square – that's what this passage is saying.

I wonder – moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas – if you are praying this sort of prayer and having these sorts of conversations with the young men and women in your care?

As a skilled helper – in your family and in this church - you ought to be reminding young men and women entering into marriage that there is nothing dirty or sinful about marital sexuality. You ought to be reminding them that the more fun it is, the more satisfying you make it, the less likely it is that you will one day be cleaning up the pieces of a broken and shattered marriage.

Again – that's in the Bible.

God WANTS you to enjoy sex within your marriage. He SEES what you are doing there in your bedroom and he HEARTILY APPROVES OF IT. He DESIGNED SEX. He knew you would ENJOY IT and he wants you to

²David Atkinson, *The Message of Proverbs*, ed. J. A. Motyer, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 74.

³Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 322.

ENJOY it because ENJOYING the fullness of his PERMISSION – will help keep you content and satisfied within the boundaries he has established for your life.

Raymond Van Leeuwen says very carefully and very usefully here:

“The opposition of adultery to married love concretely shows that sin and folly cross created boundaries, while the play of eros within marriage illustrates freedom within form.”⁴

Freedom within form. That’s a very useful phrase isn’t it?

Within the correct FORM of covenant marriage there ought to be play, pleasure, fun and FREEDOM. Such things are an excellent guard against the temptation to adultery and immorality.

Now, one last comment here before we move on. Notice that the young man is told to:

rejoice in the wife of your youth (Proverbs 5:18 ESV)

Most commentators understand this to imply that the young man in Proverbs is a YOUNG MARRIED MAN. We should think of this entire book as a gift given to a young man about to walk out of mom and dad’s house and into a house that he will share with the wife of his youth. People of course got married young in those days. The average age for marriage in Israelite culture was about 18 for boys and 16 for girls.

So perhaps we can be MORE SPECIFIC here. The Bible appears to be saying here that GETTING MARRIED YOUNG and ENJOYING MARITAL SEX is a great guard against all forms of sexual immorality.

I think that is a fair exposition and application of the text.

Certainly it would be very hard to argue with that principle given everything we have observed in our culture over the last 70 years. Ask the older folks in our church – the ones who got married at 19 and who stayed married for 70 years – ask them if the world is better now that the young people wait until their early 30’s in order to get married. I am pretty confident that they will tell you that it was a lot better and a lot EASIER back in their day.

We may have taken a wrong turn here brothers and sisters and we may want to reevaluate some of our cultural assumptions in light of the wisdom and counsel of this text – that’s all I’m saying.

The bottom line is this – the father tells his son in this passage how best to avoid adultery. He tells him to AVOID tempting people and places and he tells him to enjoy the pleasures and permission of covenant marriage. That’s how NOT to commit adultery.

And now Solomon tells his Royal Son WHY NOT to commit adultery. To wise teaching he adds a series of stern warnings.

Why Not To Commit Adultery

He says first of all that committing adultery will result in personal ruin.

⁴ Raymond Van Leeuwen as cited in *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 305-306.

1. It will result in personal ruin

He says that in verses 9-12. The father says that committing adultery will cost you your money, your health and your reputation. It will take literally everything that matters to you. The Book of Proverbs identifies adultery as the most expensive form of sex known to man. In the very next chapter the father says:

for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life. (Proverbs 6:26 ESV)

Now, he's not commending prostitution there, he is simply saying that adultery is THE MOST EXPENSIVE TYPE OF SEX KNOWN TO MAN. It WILL TAKE ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING FROM YOU.

Think of everything that adultery took from David. It stole his moral authority. He wasn't able to discipline his son Amnon when he raped his half sister Tamar. He felt hypocritical in dealing with that so he didn't deal with that and so his son Absalom dealt with it and in the end David lost two sons and a daughter – that was the PRICE, ultimately for his affair with Bathsheba. That was what hurt him the most. The loss of honour and reputation – he could handle that – but the greatest price was the loss of his kids.

It's always the kids that pay eventually.

The same is true today. Adultery generally leads to divorce and to broken homes and that generally leads to family poverty. After reviewing the Canada census data one columnist for the Financial Post put it this way:

"You want to raise your kid's chances of being poor? Get divorced."⁵

Adultery is very expensive and a disproportionate share of the price is generally paid by the children.

By the way – who is the father in the story that we are reading today?

Solomon. As in the son born to David and Bathsheba. As in a person who knew FIRSHAND the horrific cost of sexual immorality and adultery. Solomon who was probably HATED by all his older brothers and sisters. Solomon who had a front row seat on the chaos, carnage and collapse of David's personal empire.

That's the father who is warning his son in this story to COUNT THE COST of adultery. Cheap sex is never cheap boy. Take it from someone who knows.

Adultery will result in UTTER RUIN – in this life, we see that in verse 14 – and in the life to come. We see that in verses 21-23.

2. It will result in spiritual ruin

21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths.

22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.

23 He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. (Proverbs 5:21-23 ESV)

Bruce Waltke says that "dies" there in verse 23:

"refers to eternal death in opposition to the eternal life of the righteous, not merely to either a premature death or clinical death."⁶

⁵ <https://business.financialpost.com/opinion/william-watson-surprise-child-poverty-in-canada-comes-from-divorce-not-capitalism>

⁶

So the Bible isn't saying that you will get AIDs and DIE if you commit adultery – although that may happen, nor is it saying that you will die younger if you commit adultery – although that may happen also – it is saying that you will die SPIRITUALLY and ETERNALLY if you commit adultery. If you knowingly and willfully disregard a clear commandment of the Lord – then you will die.

That's what's on the line here – that's why the father said earlier:

Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol (Proverbs 5:5 ESV)

If you are following her then you are walking on the road to hell. That's what the Bible is saying here. You cannot willfully disregard the Word of God and be a Christian. The Apostle Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ESV)

You cannot DO any of those things and call yourself a Christian. Those things don't go together. Of course you can be tempted. Of course you can slip and flounder, but you cannot walk willfully on that path and call yourself a Christian – because that is the road that leads to darkness, death and ruin; that is not the road that leads to life.

And that leaves us with one very important question to consider:

But What If I Already Have?

What if I have committed adultery already?

Is there any hope for me?

Well, let's look at what the Apostle Paul says in the very next verse AFTER 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Having said that those who do this kind of stuff will not inherit the kingdom of God he goes on to say:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11 ESV)

So obviously there IS hope for those who have committed all manner of terrible sin. Some of the people in Paul's church had previously been adulterers and thieves and homosexuals and drunkards. And yet they were washed, they were SANCTIFIED, they were JUSTIFIED in the name of the Lord – thanks be to God.

So what do we make of all that? How does it all go together?

I think it would be fair to say that if you hear this counsel today – if you hear these strong warnings in the text – and you press through them to commit adultery then you give every evidence of not being saved. If you can do that then you really should have NO CONFIDENCE in the reality of your profession of faith. You are clearly self-deceived. How many times must we read Jeremiah 17:9 before we begin to take it seriously?

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

What that means is WE LIE TO OURSELVES. We believe things about ourselves THAT ARE NOT TRUE. So FEELING like you made a real profession of faith when you were 10 years old and FEELING that you must therefore be wonderfully and marvelously saved – IS A FEELING that REALLY ought NOT TO BE TRUSTED. It is NOT AUTHORITATIVE over and against the actual evidence that you provide in the way that you live your life.

If you can press through CLEAR WARNINGS like this to DO THINGS LIKE THAT then there is every reason to doubt that you are a Spirit filled child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

I think that is the only conclusion we could come to if we are taking the text seriously this morning.

But what about the person who is hearing all of this for the first time today? What about the person who is – like the prodigal son – coming to their senses FACE DOWN RIGHT NOW in the slop of sexual immorality and impurity?

Is there hope for that person?

And of course there is.

The Apostle John said:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

Listen to that marvelous promise – he will forgive us and he will CLEANSE US from all unrighteousness. Isn't that wonderful? We can be forgiven AND CLEANSED – we will not be TAINTED forever.

There is hope. God knows how to FIX what we have broken. But you have to confess your sin and you have to give him all the pieces. So let's do that now. Let's bow our heads, examine our hearts and pray to the Lord together. Let's pray.