

## Sermon 19, The Folly of Adultery, Proverbs 5

**Proposition:** Sexual immorality is a major characteristic of the fool, and it will ensnare and ruin him.

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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to a new section of the book of Proverbs. While we are still in the first nine chapters, the extended lectures that set the context for the whole book, we have spent the first four chapters hearing about why we should listen to wisdom and how we can get wisdom. But now we have three entire chapters dedicated to profiling the fool. What stands out about the fool in each of these three chapters is his sexual profligacy. He commits adultery and doesn't care. We see some other characteristics of

fools in the first part of ch. 6, but we see three entire lectures devoted to the folly of adultery. Now, do you think adultery might have been a problem in Solomon's day? And do you think that sexual immorality is a problem in our world today? To ask that question is to answer it. Surely our culture is one of the most sex-obsessed ever. And so we begin this morning to look at the portrait of the fool, a topic on which we will spend most of the next five weeks. What I hope to show you today is that sexual immorality is a major characteristic of the fool, one that will ensnare and ruin him.

### **I. Listen to Wisdom, v. 1**

Once again, our chapter begins with an address to sons. The message we're about to hear is one for those who are already sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. If you know Jesus, then you can pay attention to your Father's wisdom. Notice that it's called "my wisdom" and "my understanding." Wisdom is the Father's special possession, but one that we can share in. As ch. 2 taught, internalized wisdom equals protection — protection from moral hazard. Wisdom is something we ought to listen to. Do you read the word of God? Do you listen to it? Do you know your Father's wisdom?

### **II. Speak Wisdom, v. 2**

But don't just listen to wisdom. It also needs to come out your mouth. As we saw last Sunday, if wisdom is in your heart then it will come out your mouth. Malachi tells us that the lips of a priest should guard knowledge. Does that mean that priest never lets on about his religious knowledge? Not at all. It means that a priest has the responsibility to teach God's people the truth. And if your lips should guard knowledge, the same is true of you. You ought to listen to God's wisdom so that you have wisdom to share. If I ask you for wisdom, you should have some to give me because you've been listening to what God has to say to you.

### **III. Flee Sexual Immorality, vv. 3-14**

Well, the chapter transitions with a jump to the other kind of knowledge that lips might keep — carnal knowledge, as opposed to divine wisdom. The message of this chapter is clear. The strange woman is a threat to be avoided.

#### **A. The Strange Woman, vv. 3-6**

Now, let's get something straight. This chapter presents the figure of a tempting woman, a woman who does not belong to you but who presents herself as available anyway. It warns the child of God to flee from this woman. Now, does that mean that Scripture teaches that sexual immorality is strictly the woman's fault? The poor man is innocently led off to slaughter by the wicked woman, because men are sexually virtuous and women are sexually vicious. Is that the picture here? Absolutely not. Brothers and sisters, that reading is downright dishonest. The text is not trying to tell us that women in general are threats to male chastity and must be avoided. Rather, the text is presenting one particular threat to sexual morality. That particular threat is a woman who does not belong to you but who is sexually available — i.e., the definition of the "strange woman." And if you don't think that this type of female exists and poses a genuine threat to male chastity, you are kidding yourself. A simple Internet search for "woman" will turn

up millions of results of this type — a woman who makes herself sexually available to men, whether in the form of pictures, videos, communication by phone, or even in-person sexual intercourse. We all know this. “To make a documentary about the Internet that scarcely mentions sex, as Herzog does, is like writing a history of gardening and turning your nose up at the roses,” as Anthony Lane wrote in *The New Yorker*.<sup>4</sup> Even that simile probably undersells it. I was talking to a state trooper in Nevada one day, and I asked him about the legality of prostitution there. “Oh, it’s legal,” he told me. “But the brothels are all shutting down anyway.”

I asked him why.

“Because no one pays for sex these days. It’s available for free.”

Brothers and sisters, there are plenty of strange women out there. That doesn’t mean that every woman is a strange woman. But those that are are one huge factor in male sexual sin. Did you notice that? It is sexual *sin* on the part of men to have sexual contact with these strange women. The men’s sin is not the women’s fault. But the women are sinning too, insofar as they are free agents in giving away their beauty to pornographers, johns, photographers, and drooling Christian men sitting in front of the computer with their hand in their pants. Sexual immorality is rampant in our world and in our churches, and there’s more than enough blame to go around. It is certainly not exclusively women’s fault, but no one can deny that millions of women freely participate in it. It is especially those women against whom this chapter warns us.

### 1. Now, vv. 3, 6

When you meet her, the strange woman utters a compelling erotic discourse. It may be actual words, and in Solomon’s day, of course, before the invention of photography, it was more likely to be real speech. These days, the clothing and the composition of the photograph can say it all. What do they say? What do those honey-laden lips say? “I am sexually available.” That’s what they say. And brothers and sisters, we’re kidding ourselves if we think that this (a) isn’t something women say and (b) isn’t something men want to hear. Of course men want to hear it! And of course strange women say it. She says it sweetly. She says it oh-so-smoothly. But actually, she has wandered off the way to life that featured so prominently in the last chapter. She doesn’t know how far off the way to life she actually is. So don’t get Solomon wrong. This woman is incredibly alluring — now.

### 2. Later, vv. 4-5

But consider the end. Notice how v. 4 begins. *In the end!* Yes, now she’s alluring — but in the end, she’s not like honey. She’s like wormwood — bitter, nasty. But it gets worse. She’s not only like a bitter taste. She’s like a devouring sword. She will cut you to pieces. But it gets worse! Her way leads to death. Follow her, and you’ll go straight to the land of the dead. But it gets worse! Ultimately, her way leads to Sheol, or what we would call Hell. She’s not like eating a crabapple or two — bitter, but something that you can shrug off. The present allure leads to future bitterness, injury, death, and hell. Of course, as Shakespeare said, all this the world well knows.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/29/lo-and-behold-and-mia-madre-reviews>

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action; and till action, lust  
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,  
Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight,  
Past reason hunted; and, no sooner had  
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;  
Mad in pursuit and in possession so,  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof and proved, a very woe;  
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows; yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Is that the final word on the subject? Is this chapter, like the powerful rhetoric of Shakespeare, alert to diagnose the evil of lust but utterly unfit to do anything about it? Brothers and sisters, the most honest moralists, the greatest minds, have painted lust in dark colors, as Solomon does here. But the world has gone on its merry way fornicating and sodomizing and ogling and harassing and generally speeding along to Hell. These kinds of portrayals have limited value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Is Shakespeare right to say that no one is able to resist the lure of lust in action?

He's half right. In fact, barring supernatural intervention, he is completely right. Everyone knows the consequences of sexual misbehavior, but no one knows how to stop doing it because it feels so good — temporarily.

### **B. The Wise Son, vv. 7-8**

But with the help of the Holy Spirit applying the power of Christ's death and resurrection, the wise son is able to resist the lure of the strange woman. By the grace of God, the wise son does two things.

#### **1. He Listens, v. 7**

He listens to his Father. He absorbs this portrait of the strange woman, and when he sees her allure, he is able to resist it.

#### **2. He Flees, v. 8**

He has the power to flee, to stay away from the temptation.

He knows well to shun the "heaven" that leads men to the hell that is the consequence of sexual sin. Why? Because he is a son! The plural address in these verses is simply another way of stating that identity. Because you are God's children, you have the Holy Spirit's power to turn away from sin. The believer in Jesus Christ knows how to overcome sin. He overcomes sin by listening to the Father and keeping his eyes fixed on Jesus. And then he deliberately avoids the strange woman. He doesn't text that coworker. He doesn't linger at her desk. He doesn't find

websites that show clothed strange women with the idea that sometime soon he will get to look at them naked. This is the way of wisdom.

### **C. The John, vv. 9-14**

But of course, among the vast crowd of fools, those with no idea how to shun the “heaven” of illicit sexual pleasure, we find one particular john. The Father draws a brief portrait of him as a big loser who bitterly regrets his sin.

#### **1. He loses big time, vv. 9-11**

What does the one who takes advantage of the strange woman’s sexual availability end up losing? Only everything a man can value.

##### **a) Vigor, Years, Strength, Toil, vv. 9-10**

He loses his vigor, his manly ability to act. He loses his time — the most valuable thing in the world, for he can never get it back. He loses his strength, which is the ability to accomplish tasks. And he loses his painful toil. His wealth is dissipated, his labor wasted, his time eaten up, and his manliness used up. That’s the fate of the old lecher.

So what about the Harvey Weinstens, the Bill Clintons, and all the other lechers brought down by #MeToo campaigns? Have they lost everything in this sense? Well, it’s obvious that they’ve lost something. They are universally despised. But they are also ridiculously wealthy, which is the reason we know their names. For the average person — for people like us — adultery will result in major losses. We can talk about child support. We can talk about living in poverty. We can talk about the time investment of schlepping kids back and forth from household to household, and the emotional cost of having a sexual relationship and then breaking up, and then doing it again, and again, and again. Brothers and sisters, while this verse is obviously using a little bit of hyperbole (adulterers don’t lose every cent and starve to death within 30 days), the overall point is both clear and well-known. Give in to sexual sin, and you will be the loser.

##### **b) Health, v. 11**

The loss is not only in your identity as a man and a worker. It’s not only a financial loss. It’s also a loss of health. Anybody remember the AIDS crisis? Or heard of venereal disease? It’s real. Your flesh and body can literally be consumed by indulging yourself sexually.

#### **2. He bitterly regrets his sin, vv. 12-14**

But the loss of health and prosperity is outmatched by the gnawing teeth of remorse — literally, “to bite again.” When you suffer from remorse, you constantly gnaw yourself in your guilt and pain, seeking atonement through self-inflicted pain. The man who knows not well to shun the heaven of sexual pleasure will come to regret it, in this life or in the life to come. The john in view in this passage is relatively smart, and he caught on in this life. He identified four problems that brought him to destruction after his sexual sin.

##### **a) A discipline problem, v. 12a**

The first of these was a discipline problem. He hated discipline! He didn’t want to go out and run once a week even though he knew it would be good for his health. He didn’t want to undergo the discipline of wisdom. He preferred to do whatever felt good at the time.

Brothers and sisters, wisdom is a discipline. And if you have a discipline problem, then you will never be wise! The fool is undisciplined. He literally hates it. Any kind of short-term pain for long-term gain is not worth it in his book. And so when the long-term pain comes after the short-term pleasure, he openly admits that he got there by hating discipline.

That's why ch. 3 told us not to resist God's discipline: If you do resist it, the time will come will you bitterly regret your lack of discipline.

#### **b) A heart problem, v. 12b**

But this John also had a heart problem. His heart despised reproof. His heart was stuck on itself. He did what he wanted to do, thought what he wanted to think, and believed that whatever he thought was correct by definition, because he thought it. This is a heart problem. A heart that despises being told that it's wrong, a heart that's unwilling to entertain the possibility of being wrong, is a fool's heart! And a fool is going to end up in bed with a strange woman at some point. That's the message here.

#### **c) A listening problem, v. 13**

How are you at listening to reproof? Do you fight back, attacking anyone who tries to reprove you? Do you get all bent out of shape if someone suggests to you that you might need to address some area of your life?

Brothers and sisters, ask the people close to you if you despise reproof — if you have a hard time listening. If they are reluctant to answer, then the answer is yes. Remember how we have seen over and over that the first characteristic of the fool is an inability to listen? Well, here is that truth again. He doesn't listen because his heart doesn't care. He hates being told he's wrong! And so he lashes out at anyone who says, "I don't think you ought to frequent those porn sites. I think you might need to stop talking to that woman. I think you're getting way too friendly with Mrs. So-and-so."

This John didn't listen to his teachers. He knew that sexual sin was wrong, all right. But that didn't make him want to change. He blew off the knowledge that had been instilled in him. And if you're sitting here listening to a sermon today, then you also know that sexual promiscuity is wrong. You know that any and all sexual contact with anyone except your opposite-sex spouse is completely evil. But if you blow off that knowledge, then you have a listening problem. You don't know well to shun the "heaven" that leads straight on to Hell.

Listen to God and to the people around you who rebuke you! That's the way to life.

#### **d) A church discipline problem, v. 14**

Finally, this John had a church discipline problem. Though most major translations say "almost" in this verse, the word also means "soon," and that is definitely its meaning here. Fall into sexual sin, and it doesn't take long for you to be handed a notice of excommunication by the gathered church.

Do you want to be totally ruined in church? Do you want to be thrown out of this body for your hardness of heart? Then listen to the strange woman. Notice how this John has been

ruined in his civic life (lost his money and his strength and vigor and work) and in his church life (thrown out, utterly ruined). It's all because his heart and his ears didn't care to listen.

This is a big theme through Proverbs because it's a big theme in life! Remember what Solomon's one request was when God told him to ask for anything? Solomon asked for a hearing heart. Brothers and sisters, do you want a hearing heart? Or do you want a heart that doesn't give a damn and so gets damned?

#### **IV. Pursue Sexual Glory, vv. 15-20**

Well, we will talk at much greater length about this next passage. But this is the great antidote to adultery and really to all forms of sexual sin. Get married and cultivate a great sexual relationship with your wife!

##### **A. Sexual Intercourse Is not something to be shared wantonly, vv. 15-17**

The metaphor of waters, as we will see next week, basically makes the point that sexual intercourse is not something to be shared wantonly. It should not run down the street.

##### **B. Your own wife will lead you astray, vv. 18-20**

Rather, if you want excitement and sexual pleasure, don't look to the strange woman. Look to your own wife. Again, we'll talk about this more next week.

#### **V. Remember the End, vv. 21-23**

Finally, remember the end! Listen to your Father. Speak the truth. And remember the ultimate outcome of all these things!

##### **A. God Is Watching, v. 21**

God is watching. He is assessing all your activities. He sees you flirt with sexual sin. He sees me flirt with sexual sin. He knows what we're doing, and He hates it. Though this verse doesn't say it explicitly, it doesn't need to: God will judge those whom He sees doing what displeases Him. The John in this passage was a member of the church who was ruined in the sight of the whole congregation. That judgment on earth is merely a preview of the judgment to come in eternity.

##### **B. Natural Consequences Are Inescapable, v. 22**

But in addition to the supernatural justice of God that you will undoubtedly meet, natural consequences are inescapable. Your sins will tangle you up, catch you in a net, put you in a situation from which you absolutely cannot escape. Whether that's the poverty that's likely to befall those who have children out of wedlock, or the diseases, or the gnawing regret and emotional pain, or the sheer inability to stop sinning such that pursuit of diminishing sexual pleasure becomes the thing to which you dedicate your entire life, you will experience consequences for your sin.

##### **C. Folly Will Lead You Astray, v. 23**

Lack of the discipline of wisdom will kill you. Folly will lead you astray, first into the arms of the strange woman and then into the pit of Hell. Brothers and sisters, the message of this chapter is obvious: The only way to escape the folly of sexual sin is to apply your heart to the discipline of wisdom. As we have already seen over and over, the only way to get internalized wisdom is to spend time with personified wisdom, listening to Him. You can know Jesus as personified

wisdom and still sin. We all do. But the goal is to take Him as personified wisdom and internalize His wisdom. It will protect you from sin. It will protect you from the folly which is deadly. Do you know Jesus? And are you seeking to discipline yourself in the discipline of wisdom? Brothers and sisters, if you don't, you'll die. But if internalize and act upon the wisdom that God has for you, you will live.

Don't be led astray by sin. Be led astray by delighting in your wife, and by delighting in Wisdom. Amen.