

1. The Preservation of Chastity: Lust and Love in Proverbs 5

We live in a culture that does not prize “sexual discipline.”

Our culture encourages “free expression” of sexuality.

We sometimes forget that our culture is not especially different from other cultures.

The reason why we have Proverbs 5

is because ancient Israel was so much like us!

The reason why the father warns his son against the “forbidden woman”

is because he has seen so many fall prey to her –
led astray by their own desires.

God’s commands are not burdensome.

Jesus calls us to take his yoke upon us –

for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

When we walk willingly in God’s ways, then we find out how easy it is!

But when we grumble and rebel –

then we find out how heavy and burdensome *disobedience* can be!

God’s law is not a straitjacket to bind you,
but the path of true freedom and contentment.

The seventh commandment is an excellent example of this.

The sexual revolution promised freedom and happiness to all.

All manner of sexual sins—from adultery to homosexuality to fornication—
have been encouraged and rewarded.

But what has it produced?

The self-indulgent quest for pleasure invariably reaps a harvest
of pain and anguish.

Divorce rates have skyrocketed (and no divorce is ever pleasurable!).

Sexually transmitted diseases have brought both fear and death.

Unwanted pregnancies have resulted in a meteoric rise in the abortion rate as well.

In order to hide from the consequences of breaking the seventh commandment,

people frequently break the sixth commandment as well,

murdering the unborn, hoping to escape

from the consequences of their sins.

Sin produces fear, misery, and death.

That is the message of Proverbs 5, as it reflects upon the seventh commandment.

Q70: Which is the Seventh Commandment?

A70: The Seventh Commandment is, You shall not commit adultery.

In Proverbs 1-4, the father introduced his son to Lady Wisdom.

He reminds his son that she is the source of life and of blessing.

Every good thing comes from Wisdom.

If you find her, you will find life.

Therefore everything in life hinges on getting wisdom!

Now in Proverbs 5-7 the father will tell his son about Dame Folly.

Here she is called the “strange woman” or the “forbidden woman.”

She is described as a temptress,

a stock character is morality plays from all throughout human history.

“The lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil.” (5:3)

She sounds good!

“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.” (5:4-5)

I want you to see something here.

The “forbidden woman” in chapter 5 does not *appear* as a predator.

She appears rather sweet – her lips “drip honey”!

In some cultures she might be called the woman of “loose morals.”

In our culture she is looking to “hook up” –

or maybe be “friends with benefits.”

It is not that *she* is a predator.

But *sin* is a predator.

She does not ponder the path of life;

her ways wander, and she does not know it.”

Sin captures and ensnares precisely those who do not ponder –

who do not think carefully about the path of life.

One of the best ways to deal with sin is to consider carefully the consequences.

Preferably, consider them *before* falling prey to temptation!

The father in Proverbs 5 wants his son to understand the danger of the path.

If you follow the path of folly and live a life of sin,

then you will surely wind up enslaved to your sin.

Sin is not the sort of thing that you can “play” with.

You may be able to pet a cute little tiger cub,

but before long, that cute little tiger cub will grow up,

and then who is in charge?

Proverbs uses sexual sin as the chief example here,

partly because of the nature of sexual sin.

It is addictive.

It promises pleasure and happiness,
but before long it enslaves you,
until “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!’” (v11-12)

Now, when God commands something,
the commandment has two sides—both what is required, and what is forbidden..
So, for instance, when he commands us to honor our father and mother,
there is an implied command not to dishonor them.
Likewise, when he commands us not to commit adultery,
there is an implied command to promote the chastity of our selves and our neighbors.

Q71: What is required in the Seventh Commandment?

A71: The Seventh Commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.

Q72: What is forbidden in the Seventh Commandment?

A72: The Seventh Commandment forbids all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.

Proverbs 5 includes both the negative and the positive sides of the commandment.

This is one of my favorite descriptions of the marriage relation.

I will not explain all the euphemisms to you.

The Bible was intended to be read to children,

and I will not spoil the beauty of its language with crass scientific language!

But I expect that you understand it quite well, thank you!

Verses 15-20 focus on the positive:

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 deer, a graceful doe.*

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?*

Husbands, do you delight in your wife?

The exclusivity of the marriage relation is firmly stated.

I especially like the verb “intoxicated” in verses 19-20.

This is the verb “to go astray.”

Your wife is to cause you to stray—

no, not to someone else—but to her!

In other words, you are to be so smitten with your wife,
that there is no place for another woman to lead you astray.
Proverbs 5 does not suggest that this will happen naturally.
It takes discipline.
(Verse 23–“he dies for lack of discipline.”)

“Oh, great! The pastor just took the romance out of marriage!”
Well, yes.

If you mean by romance those mushy feelings that you had when you first got married,
then it’s true:

I’m not particularly interested in keeping romance in marriage!

Feelings are notoriously unreliable.
But the path of wisdom calls you to rejoice in the wife of your youth.
You are to let her breasts fill you at all times with delight.
And as is the case with all God’s commands,
if you obey him and devote yourself to your wife,
you will find it (and her!) a true delight.

So how should we think about beauty and delight in marriage?

We see how all this is connected to Christ and the church in Psalm 45:

Sing Psalm 45

Read Matthew 5:17-32

2. Adultery and Idolatry: Why Does the Bible Connect Sex and Worship?

Sexual sin is inherently predatory.

Sexual sin is all about power – getting what I want.

You often hear that “rape” is not about sex, but about power.

The problem with this statement is not that it is false,

but that it implies that other sorts of sexual acts are *not* about power.

Let me put it this way:

every sexual act (or thought) that arises from lust

is about power.

Sexual sin, in all its forms, is inherently predatory.

This is not to say that the nice young man sitting across the table from you is a wolf!

Rather, he may be stalked by the same predator that you are.

The predator is sin.

Think of God’s words to Cain which we read last week –

“Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

(Genesis 4:7)

But it gets worse.

No matter how sweet and kind the sexual sinner is –
the sexual sinner *becomes* a predator
by being the one through whom sin obtains mastery over another.
This is why the line between “sex” and “violence” in our culture can be hard to ascertain.

Our culture wants to draw that line at “consent.”
So long as you have two consenting adults, our culture says, “it’s okay.”
And that works – so long as the end and goal of sex is pleasure.
If one person isn’t “having fun” – then that’s “bad.”

But what if sex isn’t primarily about pleasure?

Psalm 45 speaks of the beauty of the king – and the beauty of the queen.
Their beauty reminds each other (and all Israel) of the beauty of God.
When you see the image of God you love that image
because it reminds you of God.

Indeed, this is why we should love all people – because all people are created in God’s image!
You cannot love God, and simultaneously *hate* that which reflects God.

We saw last time that murder is rooted in hatred for God
and an attempt to destroy his image.

Today we see that adultery is also a form of hatred for God –
but rather than destroy his image (as in murder),
in adultery we instead put that image in the place of God;
we worship the creature rather than the creator.

This is why the scripture regularly connects adultery and idolatry.
From Eden’s Garden to the present,
the pattern has been that we *see*, and then we *covet*.
We construct idols because we have discontented hearts.

And in adultery, we take the created image of God (a man or a woman)
and we put that image ahead of God in our hearts.
That is what *lust* is all about.

By the way, this is why it is not a good thing to “lust” after your wife.
It is possible for a husband to lust after his wife.
It is possible for a wife to lust after her husband.
But it is not a good thing.
If you are simply using your spouse for your own sexual pleasure –

that is not the self-denying love that Christ calls us to!

Rosaria Butterfield – a former lesbian – puts this very well.

“Too often good Christians see sexual sin as merely sexual excess.

To a good Christian, sex is God’s recreation for you
as long as you play in God’s playground (marriage)....

What good Christians don’t realize is that sexual sin
is not recreational sex gone overboard.

Sexual sin is predatory.

It won’t be “healed” by redeeming the context or the genders.

Sexual sin must simply be killed.

What is left of your sexuality after this annihilation is up to God.

But healing, to the sexual sinner, is death: nothing more and nothing less...

[T]oo many young Christian fornicators plan that marriage will redeem their sin.

Too many young Christian masturbators plan that marriage will redeem their patterns.

Too many young Christian internet pornographers think that having legitimate sex
will take away the desire to have illicit sex.

They’re wrong.

And the marriages that result from this line of thinking are dangerous places.” (p83)

She points out that half of Christians marriages end in divorce –

and she claims that that is largely because “Christians act as though marriage redeems sin.

Marriage does not redeem sin.

Only Jesus himself can do that.” (p83)

And this is what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5.

Jesus is saying that *something* must be cut off and thrown away.

If you are to live, something must die.

In Proverbs 5, the father warns the son that if he despises discipline, he will die.

Part of the discipline of wisdom is what you do with your eyes.

We saw last week that murder starts as hatred in the heart.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says that adultery starts as lust in the heart.

The outward act results from an inward disposition.

Just as hatred and murder is striking out against the image of God in man,
so also lust and adultery are rooted in a refusal to worship God.

You were created to belong to God.

You often hear that you reflect your fidelity to God through your fidelity to your spouse.

And that is true, but if you start there, then you don’t really get at the heart of faithfulness.

After all, what about those who are single?

You belong to Christ.

Look over at 1 Corinthians 6:13.

Paul says, *Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food –
and God will destroy both one and the other.*

*The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body.*

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?

Never!

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’

But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

Flee from sexual immorality.

*Every other sin a person commits is outside the body,
but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.*

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
whom you have from God?*

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

So glorify God in your body.

Notice that Paul doesn’t seem to care whether he is talking to married or single persons.

Paul does not say, “your body belongs to your spouse – or to your future spouse.”

After all, Paul is about to say in the next chapter that he thinks it’s a good thing
for a person to remain single all his life!

Whether you are married or single, the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.

I cannot help but say it again.

Paul does *not* say that the body was made for married sex.

Paul does *not* say that the body was made for married sex –
therefore don’t have sex outside of marriage.

What he says is that the body was made for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

If you are engaged in sexual immorality,
then you are uniting a body that belongs to Jesus with a prostitute.

You are not your own – you were bought with a price.

All of you – married or single – are called to glorify God with your bodies.

Celibacy is a *profound* sexual act.

Why do I say this?

Many are saying today that abstaining from sex is like abstaining from food.

But think about how Paul sets up the parallel between food and sex:
“food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.”
The stomach was designed for food – and vice versa.

But then he says, “the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body.”
Again, Paul doesn’t say, “the body is meant for marriage” –
he says, “the body is meant for the Lord.”

Every Christian must eat.
But not every Christian must have sex.

Paul will go on to say in chapter 7 that “because of the temptation to sexual immorality
each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”

As revealed in the garden of Eden,
the sexual relation was designed for one man and one woman.
The command to Adam and Eve was to “be fruitful and multiply,”
which includes childbearing as one of the primary goals of marriage.
The purpose of sexual relations is to reflect something of the image of God.
God created a son after his own image and likeness.
And then in Genesis 5 we are told that Adam
had a son in his image and likeness.
In the sexual relation, God has given to his image-bearers
the ability to reproduce the image of God.
To use our ability to reproduce the image of God
in any other way than that which God commands,
is a perversion of the sexual relation.

This is why the Bible regularly condemns homosexuality, bestiality, and adultery,
and Jesus says that polygamy was not included in God’s design for marriage
–Mt 19:4-6–and Paul insists that elders must be monogamous.
From which it appears that a polygamist could become a Christian,
but a Christian may not become a polygamist!)
But it is also the reason why the Bible insists that adultery is first a matter of the heart.

3. Unchaste Thoughts, Words and Actions: The Adultery of the Heart in Matthew 5

Jesus insists that if you want to understand God’s law,
you must understand that the law is not simply about
regulating your outward actions.
The law cuts to the heart.

If you are looking at a woman with lustful intent—
in other words, if you are desiring her,
then you have already committed adultery with her in your heart.

The ESV says “lustful intent.”

You could translate that as “strong desire” –
or “coveting.”

In fact, the LXX uses the same word in the 10th commandment – for coveting.
So, if you look at a woman, and you want her for yourself – that is sin.

Jesus has some pretty strong words for you.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of your members
than that your whole body be thrown into hell.” (5:29)

Now, some people have taken this too literally.

It appears that Origen may have actually castrated himself
in his desire to obey Christ in this matter. (Something he later regretted)

Why should we take this figuratively?

Just because it is too extreme?

No.

Rather, because physical self-mutilation does not go far enough!

I’ve torn out both my eyes and yet still I lust!

Jesus has made it clear that the problem is in my heart!

So what does it mean to tear out your eye and throw it away?

It means that you have to die!

It means exactly the same thing that Paul means when he says

That “those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5:24)

This is not a literal statement either.

I have never been physically crucified.

Rather it means that in your union with Christ,
your old self was crucified.

So if your right eye causes you to sin,
tear it out and throw it away.

The statement is designed to cause you to despair in yourself,
flee to Christ and look to him.

After all, think about what Paul says earlier in 1 Cor. 6:9-11

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.
And such were some of you.*

Paul says that there were those among the Corinthian church who *were*
adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, swindlers.

*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.*

You are no longer who you once were!
You are not your own – for you were bought with a price.
Therefore, glorify God in your body.

Conclusion

So what are you doing with your eyes?

What are you looking at?

For many years I was looking for a wife to be my savior.

I believed that if only I could find a good wife,
that would take away my problem with lust!

It didn't.

Those of you who are married already knew that.

Those of you who are single need to know that.

The reason why marriage does not solve the lust problem
is because marriage was not designed to solve the lust problem.

Marriage was designed for Adam and Eve—
two sinless persons.

Marriage is not God's answer for lust.

Lust is man's perversion of marriage.

So how is marriage going to "solve" the problem of sin?

The problem of lust is solved the same way as any other sin.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yes, you are commanded to delight in your wife,
you are commanded to find pleasure in her.

But that has nothing to do with lust!

The way to deal with lust is through repentance and faith.

When your enemies close in on you.

When temptation calls you to look upon a woman with lustful intent,
then remember what Psalm 27 says:

"One thing I'll plead before the LORD, and this I'll seek always:

That I may come within God's house and dwell there all my days.

That on the beauty of the LORD I constantly may gaze,

And in his house may seek to know direction in his ways.”

The final solution to lust is nothing else than gazing upon Christ –
the one who was cut off and thrown away,
so that we might escape the fires of hell!

Because here we are called to seek God’s face.
When you are tempted to look in the wrong direction,
seek the face of God.
For he will not hide his face from you.
And he will teach you the way in which you should go.

And in our Lord Jesus Christ God has indeed poured out his goodness and grace upon his people.
Therefore when you are tempted to lust,
remember that you are the bride of Christ (remember Psalm 45!).
He is your bridegroom!
(There’s a great image to blow your mind–
you, men as well as women—are the bride of Christ!)
He is the one who loves you and delights in you,
and gives to you the peace and pleasure of his heavenly kingdom.
All his goodness is now yours.

So what do you do when you are tempted to lust?
Remember, if you look at a woman for the sake of your own selfish pleasure – that is sin.
That is the exercise of the predatory power of sexual sin.
If your “looking” is about your personal, private, pleasure –
then you are *not* loving that person.

So what do you do?
If your answer is “don’t look,”
then you may succeed at avoiding that particular instance of lust,
but you are not really dealing with the issue.
Indeed, if you are constantly focused on “not looking”
then you are *ruled* by lust – controlled by your obsession with “not looking”!

The only way to *kill* the sin of adultery is through *humility*.
Since adultery and lust are all about *power*,
the only way to love and serve God in the face of the temptation to lust
is by the way of the cross.
Her beauty is *not* for you.
Humbly accept that –
and glorify the one who created her beauty.

So when tempted to lust remember these two lessons.

First, remember that folly always leads to death.

Sexual sin is always predatory.

I really like Rosaria Butterfield's way of saying it:

“besetting and indwelling sexual sin is predatory, and it will not stop until it kills.

Therefore, have no contact with pornography or with secret lovers—
physical, non-physical, virtual, or real.”

<http://rosariabutterfield.com/#about>

All of the sweet nothings that folly whispers in your ear are lies.

Her path is the road to the grave.

Sin always produces misery.

Sin always leads to death.

And second, remember to look to Christ.

But your only hope and comfort is the cross of Jesus Christ,

the place where God's face is revealed,

and his love for you is displayed.

The body was made for him – and he for the body.

Ps 119:57-64