

**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; 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 honour to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labours 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 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? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. 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.**

**(Proverbs 5:1–23)**

## Introduction

There seems to have been an uptick in recent years in what you would think would be unnecessary warning labels. For example, a warning label on a wheelbarrow some years ago read, "Not intended for highway use." A carpenter's electric drill carried the following warning: "This product is not intended for use as a dental drill," and the warning on a collapsible pram read, "Remove child before folding." A hairdryer warned, "Do not use while sleeping," and one label read, "May cause drowsiness. Use care when

operating a car,” which sounds perfectly reasonable until you learn that this was printed on a bottle of dog medication.

Some of these warnings are so ridiculous that I am convinced they are deliberately placed by manufacturers just to see who reads the labels. Truth be told, while most products carry a warning of some sort, humans are adept at failing to read, or possibly failing to adhere to, warnings – sometimes with dire consequences.

Proverbs 5 is a warning, specifically a warning against unbiblical sex and a call to biblical sex. Solomon urges his son to keep his hands off other women, but to keep them on his wife. There is one type of sexuality that must be avoided at all costs, and another that must be embraced with fervour.

Spoiler alert: The kind of sex that must be embraced is sex within the context of a lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. All other expressions of sexuality are to be avoided.

Perhaps the irony is not lost on you that it is *Solomon* enjoining his son to express sexuality only within the confines of a monogamous marriage. This is the man, after all, who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3) – though, as far as we know, only one son! His own failures in this area did not undermine the truth of God’s word. Even though he had failed sexually himself, he was still able to speak to his son about what biblical sexuality looks like. We need to beware of judging sins in others when we are guilty of those very sins ourselves (Matthew 7:1–6), but even if we have failed, God’s truth remains God’s truth, and we are accountable to it.

Parents, you may have sexual failings in your past, but that does not mean that you cannot or should not teach your children what pure sexuality looks like. God’s standard remains the same, even if you have violated that standard, and you need to be firm in instructing your children according to what God says.

Having said that, my goal in this study is really to overview the argument of this chapter. I will not get into the nitty gritty details. We can return to the various sections of this chapter in future studies if necessary, but for now it is helpful to gain an overall picture of Solomon’s plea to his son.

The chapter can be divided into four broad sections.

First, Solomon warns his son of the consequences of unbiblical sex. Sexuality is not a free-for-all, and ignoring God’s divine rules for sexual expression will have dire consequences (vv. 1–6). Second, having explained the consequences of illicit sexual expression, Solomon shows what unbiblical sex looks like (vv. 7–14). Third, he paints a picture of what God-

honouring sex looks like (vv. 15–19). And then, fourth, he calls his son to make a choice (vv. 20–23).

## The Consequences of Unbiblical Sex

Solomon opens this chapter with a warning of the consequences of unbiblical sex. Before he even deals with practicalities he first wants to show what is at stake. According to these verses, *everything* is at stake!

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

(Proverbs 5:1–6)

Solomon begins by exhorting his son to listen to him, for this is a matter of the utmost importance. If he heeded Solomon's warning, he would both "keep discretion" (i.e. live a life in keeping with God's ethics) and "guard knowledge" with his lips (i.e. speak in a way that honours God's truth).

The "forbidden woman," on the other hand – that is, any woman who is not your wife – speaks with lips that "drip honey" and "her speech is smoother than oil." She is not interested in truth; what she promises appeals only to the senses. She promises physical pleasure. She knows what to say in any given moment. She knows how to seduce. But the son who has "wisdom" and "understanding" (v. 1) will realise that "in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (v. 4). All she can deliver is bitterness and stabbing conviction.

Ultimately, she leads astray and takes those she seduces to death. "Sheol" is a reference to the grave and is synonymous in this context with "death" (v. 5). The sexual expression that she offers satisfies in the moment, but ultimately it leads to death.

Verse 6 is perhaps better translated in the NKJV: "Lest you ponder her path of life – her ways are unstable; you do not know them." The KJV may be even closer to the point: "Lest you ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, so that you cannot know them." (I have slightly updated the archaic language of the KJV to make the point, I trust, a little clearer.) She cannot afford to allow her client to think about God – because when we think about God, we steer clear of sin – so she adapts in order to keep him distracted.

It perhaps needs to be said at this point that, as dire a picture as Solomon paints of the consequences of sexual impropriety, we must not imagine that sexual sin is somehow in a category of its own – as if it is categorically a worse sin than others and cannot be forgiven. Solomon is really painting a picture that the Bible draws for all sin: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Sin – sexual or otherwise – always promises life and always leads to death.

One of the reasons that Solomon highlights sexual sin in particular is because, unlike many other sins, people – even Christians – sometimes want to argue blatantly contrary to God’s standards for sexuality. Even if we know what God’s word teaches about sex, we sometimes argue against it because it is a sin that is so appealing to the flesh.

### The Caution against Unbiblical Sex

Having explained the inevitable consequences of unbiblical sexual expression, Solomon goes on to caution his son against involvement in this destructive behaviour. In essence, he argues that his son should keep his hands off other women.

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 honour to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labours 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.”

(Proverbs 5:7-14)

Solomon had his son, Rehoboam, particularly in mind as he delivered this caution, but he now broadens his exhortation to “sons.” This does not necessarily suggest that Solomon had more than one son (though that is a possibility); he is, instead, applying this generally now to young men. The words that he speaks to his son are words that young men in general need to heed.

Let me pause here quickly to make an important observation. In the picture that Solomon paints, there is a lustful young man seduced by a godless woman. Solomon’s generalisation is not intended to condemn all women as seductresses and all men as uncontrollably lustful. He does not intend to teach that, in any given act of adultery or fornication, the woman was the seducer and the man the victim. No single passage of Scripture can address every possibility. Solomon’s warning to young men should also be taken to heart by young women, and his words against the seductress should likewise be

applied to their male counterparts. Sexual sin is not exclusively a male issue, and men and women both need to carefully consider his words.

Solomon's counsel is clear: "Keep your way far from her." In New Testament terms, "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). When it comes to sexual temptation, the Bible does not suggest that you stand and resist it. The New Testament encourages believers to resist the devil (James 4:17; 1 Peter 5:8–9), but it does not imagine that we can resist sexual temptation.

Do you think you can "handle" sexual temptation? Don't be so foolish! Flee from sexual immorality. Steer far clear of the seductress. Don't go near the door of her house.

Sexual purity requires deliberate, often drastic, steps. If we want to avoid the death that sexual impropriety invites, we must do what is necessary to steer clear of temptation. That may mean installing accountability software on your electronic devices. It may require going out of your way not to be put into compromising situations. There has been a lot of criticism recently about the Billy Graham Rule (or the Mike Pence Rule). During his ministry, Billy Graham made the public commitment that he would never be alone with a woman who was not his wife. Today, that rule has come under severe criticism, both from within and without the church, but Billy Graham (and Mike Pence) was just taking seriously the injunction to steer far clear of sexual temptation. Wisdom may look different from person to person, but whatever it looks like for you, do what you must to "keep your way far from her." Do what you must to avoid the place where you are tempted to give into temptation.

It does little good to pray, "Lead me not into temptation," when you are putting yourself in the path of temptation. As Matthew Henry said, "Those who would keep themselves from harm must keep out of harm's way."

Solomon proceeds to reiterate the cost of giving into sexual temptation. In quickfire fashion, he lists three broad consequences.

First, the adulterer will find himself exploited by others (vv. 9–10). Any "honour" that is otherwise due to the adulterer is voided by his act of sexual impropriety. "The price of impropriety may be high; for everything one works for—position, power, prosperity—could be lost either through the avaricious demands of the woman or the outcry for restitution by the community" (Ross).

Second the adulterer will find himself condemned by his conscience (vv. 11–13). People who embrace wisdom know that the sexual sin in which they are entangled is wrong. A recent survey showed that eighty percent of people who admit to regularly viewing

pornography know that it is not right. Solomon points to the same truth here. When the adulterer honestly evaluates his behaviour, he does not blame others. He admits that he fell into sin because *he* hated discipline and despised reproof. “I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.”

Third, the adulterer will find himself on the brink of public ruin (v. 14). Sexual temptation promises pleasure and freedom, but it delivers “utter ruin.” Observe that this individual is not one who has abandoned the faith and given himself over to sexual liberty but is one who remains “in the assembled congregation.” When he gathers with God’s people, he finds himself “on the brink of utter ruin.”

## The Context of Biblical Sex

Perhaps at this point the son is thinking, “Should I then just avoid sex completely?” Everything Solomon has said about sex is negative. Does sex only lead to destruction and ruin? Lest his son think that, Solomon now turns to the proper context for biblical sex. In essence, even as he keeps his hands off other women, Solomon urges his son to keep his hands on his wife.

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.

(Proverbs 5:15–19)

Solomon’s counsel at this point is not, “Sex is bad, but if you must, satisfy your desires with your wife.” He does not suggest that his son avoid water completely and only drink from his cistern if he really cannot manage without it. He issues a strong instruction: “Drink water!” But only “from your own cistern.” In fact, he should drink “flowing water from [his] own well.” Water is used here euphemistically for sex, and “your own cistern” and “your own well” euphemistically for his wife. Solomon suggests not only water, but *flowing* water. In other words, “Have sex – and lots of it – with your wife!”

Solomon reminds his son that his wife is his own. She is not a public water supply available to everyone in town (v. 16). She is his, and his alone (v. 17). He must value his wife and find sexual satisfaction in her alone (vv. 17–18). In fact, he should be completely intoxicated by her, rather than with an adulteress. Pornography and prostitution thrive on lust, but Solomon urges his son that those feelings should be reserved for his wife alone – and he should take full advantage of fulfilling those desires with his wife.

Notice that Solomon urges his son to take pleasure in “the wife of [his] youth,” not in his wife while she is young. The same pleasure that you found in her when you and she were still young should be the pleasure that you find in her at all times. Several years ago, a high profile Christian teacher suggested that it is acceptable to divorce your wife in advanced stages of Alzheimer’s “because she’s not the woman you married.” Solomon is saying the exact opposite. The wife of your youth is your “lovely deer” and your “graceful doe” even in your advanced years. As Mark Driscoll has often said, your wife is your standard of beauty.

### The Choice for Biblical Sex

Solomon brings this to a close by calling his son to make a choice:

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 paths. 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.

(Proverbs 5:20–23)

Having shown his son the consequences of unbiblical sex, having issued a strong caution against unbiblical sex, and having shown the beautiful context of biblical sex, Solomon now asks, “What choice will you make?” Given everything that is at stake, it makes no sense to give into the temptation for sexual sin. It makes every bit of sense to pursue sexual purity and to exercise sexual expression within the only context that God blesses it: the context of a lifelong marriage between one natural man and one natural woman. Why would he possibly choose anything else?

As he closes, Solomon offers two motivations for his son to make the right choice.

First, God sees your choices. Even if no one else sees, God sees. God knows your browser history. God knows what you watch on TV. God knows the books you read. You can “get away” with sexual sin for a long time – perhaps for a lifetime – but you can never escape the knowing gaze of the Lord.

Second, sexual sin is ensnaring. It is addictive. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you can stop at any time. Don’t fool yourself by thinking that you know how far is too far. Sexual sin has a way of ensnaring those who give into it. The time to stop is now – before your “lack of discipline” leads to death and your “folly” leads you astray.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that a text like this is deeply relevant to the day and age in which we live. We live in a day in which sexual “freedom” is encouraged. Any notion that restrictions should be placed on sexual expression is frowned upon. But wisdom dictates otherwise.

Wisdom dictates that God has designed sex for the lifelong covenant union between one natural man and one natural woman. Exercised within that framework, sex is beautiful and honouring to God. Sexual expression outside of that framework is destructive and, ultimately, damning.

Given the sexually promiscuous culture in which we live, there is also no doubt that there are Christians reading this who are guilty of sexual sin. Perhaps this has been an uncomfortable study for you, not because sex is taboo, but because your own sexual sin has left you feeling “at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation” (v. 14).

I don't want to leave you there. Feelings of utter ruin can be transformed into glorious hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the first century, the city of Corinth boasted one of the most sexually promiscuous cultures in the Roman Empire. Paul needed to deal sternly with the Corinthians regarding sexual impropriety. He wrote, “Neither the sexually immoral ... nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality ... will inherit the kingdom of God.” But he did not leave the Corinthians there; he closed with the good news of forgiveness and hope: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

Jesus came to earth to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)—including their sexual sins. If you find yourself ensnared sexual sin—held fast in its cords—know that there is hope! You can be forgiven (“washed”) by the gospel. Not only that, but you can be changed (“sanctified”) by the gospel. You can be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. All you need to do is call upon the Lord for forgiveness and cleansing, trusting the shed blood of the risen Jesus Christ to forgive and change you. Yes, you will need help to walk faithfully on the path of righteousness, and the church is there to give you that help, but forgiveness and change must be rooted in the gospel.

I have no doubt that there would be great value in us returning to this chapter for some more in depth study, but know as we conclude now that there is a divine standard of sexual expression, that violation of that standard leads to enslavement and, ultimately, destruction, but that the gospel holds out hope of forgiveness and freedom.

# Let's Talk about Sex

Proverbs 5:1–23

Stuart Chase

---

AMEN