

THE PATHOLOGY OF ADULTERY PROVERBS 5-7

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

It is a crazy world in which we live. I saw the report of a survey this week done by the Public Religion Research Institute. (*Christianity Today*, 3/9/2024) It found that almost 30% of Generation Z adults, those between 18 and 25, now say that they fit somewhere in the category of LGBTQ. That compares to just 4% of my baby boomer generation who say that they are anything other than heterosexual. Such is what our current culture, social media, and modern education is producing in our young people.

Figuring out how to deal with sexuality is an issue which has been with us from the time of Adam and Eve. The Bible has a lot to say about it. The basic message is that sexuality is a great gift. But to get the most out of it, it must be used in the proper way. The Book of Proverbs has much helpful information and instruction in that regard. We have begun working our way through this book. It is not the kind of Biblical literature which easily lends itself to a verse by verse exposition. But we want to deal with the subjects which it raises.

As we have seen already from our study, it is wisdom, or skill in daily, godly living, which is the theme of the Book of Proverbs. The compiler of the proverbs, King Solomon, says that one of the chief threats to wisdom is marital unfaithfulness. We saw last week in #2 that adultery is a danger. Today we shall find this subject occupying center stage in #5, #6, and #7.

Why is such a big deal made about it? It seems to me that there are two reasons. First, there is nothing that so clouds the judgment and makes such fools of people as adultery. Second, as we have seen, the editor of this book put these wise sayings together for the purpose of training young men for government service. He knew that one of the greatest dangers that they would face would come from the temptation of sexual promiscuity. Many of these men would obtain positions of power. Solomon knew that some women would see them as targets of opportunity, and these men could likewise abuse their positions of power to get women whom they wanted. Solomon had been an eyewitness to the damage that adultery did to his father David and to his kingdom.

Given that background we find that the text before us is largely addressed to the dangers that face men in yielding to temptation. But there are also applications to be made to women. If I was a father of daughters, I would be careful to point out to them that some men can be just as dangerous in tempting women to step outside of the boundaries of Biblical sexuality. The basis for our study will be primarily Chapter 5, but we shall also refer to Chapters 6 and 7.

I.

Let's look then at our outline on the back of the bulletin at THE IDENTITY OF THE ADULTERESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE IDENTITY OF THE ADULTERESS) There are three primary terms which are used in these three chapters to describe the woman of ill-repute. The first one appears in vv. 3 & 20 of #5 and #7 v. 5. Chapter 5 v. 3 says, **"For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, / and her speech is smoother than oil..."** The NAS translation uses the term "adulteress." The original Hebrew word literally means "to distance oneself," or "to be a stranger." Some scholars have translated it as "strange woman." The idea seems to be that the woman in question is a stranger to the acceptable behavior of a Jewish woman. She is estranged from the law of God.

The second term is translated in #6 v. 26 and #7 v. 10 as "prostitute." Proverbs 7:10 reads, **"And behold, the woman meets him/ dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart."** Some translations have "harlot." At least in some contexts in the Old Testament this woman is paid for her services. This is the same word that is used to describe Rahab in the Book of Joshua, the woman in Jericho who hid the Jewish spies.

The third Hebrew term is translated in #5 v. 20 and #7 v. 5 as "adulteress." Proverbs #7 v. 5 says, **"...to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words."** The basic meaning of this word is "foreign," or "alien." It may be used of the adulteress here because the first prostitutes in Israel were women from other countries and tribes. It is noteworthy that one of the problems with our open southern border is that there are reports that young women are being sex trafficked from other countries and being put to work here as prostitutes. Some scholars claim that the adulteress pictured in our text is not necessarily a foreigner but rather she is an unchaste wife who stands outside of the community of the wise.

What we have then in these three chapters is a description of a loose woman, an adulteress. What could be included in this category is both the prostitute and the woman who is simply promiscuous. Chapter 7 specifically describes a married woman who is wealthy and is looking apparently for fun rather than for money. But Chapters 5 & 6 include references to those who are paid for their services and those who are not.

II.

Consider then THE METHODOLOGY OF THE ADULTERESS. (II. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE ADULTERESS) Again this is not to imply that there is no problem with women being ensnared by seductive men. That is a problem in our world. The "Me Too" movement has rightly brought attention to men who take advantage of women. But the context here involves the instructions of a father to his son.

A.

Look at #5 v. 3: **"For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey; and her speech is smoother than oil..."** Honey was supposedly the sweetest substance in ancient Israel, and olive oil was the smoothest and slipperiest. The proverb is describing FLATTERY. (II. METHODOLOGY... A. FLATTERY) This is the first technique of the loose woman.

Last week we read in #2 v. 16: **“So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,/ from the adulteress with her smooth words...”** This gal knows how to sweet talk a man. She knows how to reach a man’s ego. She understands as well as any psychologist that a man’s deepest psychological need is to be regarded as significant. We men love to be built up. We like to have our egos stroked. But if that flattery comes from a coworker, or an old girl friend, or a neighbor, we better look out. We are faced with a potentially dangerous situation.

The lesson here, married ladies, is for you to build up your hubby’s ego. If he is getting built up and encouraged by you, the chances are much less that he will look for it elsewhere. The danger for women from tempting men is that they may appeal not just to a woman’s ego but also to her need for security. Women want to know that they are loved and secure. The potential danger comes from another man who is a little too attentive, a little too supportive, a little too complimentary.

B.

A second technique of the adulteress is found in #6 v. 25. It is THE APPEAL OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS. (II. A. B. THE APPEAL OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS) This verse says, **“Do not desire her beauty in your heart,/ and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes...”** The adulteress tries to catch the attention of her victim. A primary way that she does that is through the effective use of her physical assets. She knows how to use her body. She is seductive in her dress, and she tries to catch a man’s attention with her eyes. Men need to look out.

C.

The entire seventh chapter proceeds to give an even more detailed analysis of the methodology of at least one adulteress. (II. A. B. C. THE WILES OF THE WOMAN IN #7) We can’t take the time to examine that chapter in detail. But let me skim through it with you and make a few comments along the way. Let’s begin in v. 6

Proverbs 7:6-23....

6 For at the window of my house
I have looked out through my lattice,
7 and I have seen among the simple,
I have perceived among the youths,
a young man lacking sense,
8 passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
9 in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.

10 And behold, the woman meets him,
dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. **[Notice the second tactic--- the appeal of physical attractiveness]**

11 She is loud and wayward;

her feet do not stay at home;
 12 now in the street, now in the market,
 and at every corner she lies in wait.
 13 She seizes him and kisses him, **[Shock treatment]**
 and with bold face she says to him,
 14 "I had to offer sacrifices,
 and today I have paid my vows; **[She claims to be a religious person. It is a special occasion. She has just made her peace offering. According to the Old Testament the meat from the peace offering was to be consumed on the day of the offering and the next day. So she may be saying, "I've got a big steak that needs to be eaten. Come on over to my house and help me eat it."]**
 15 so now I have come out to meet you,
 to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. **[Flattery. Though clearly promiscuous she claims to be interested only in him.]**
 16 I have spread my couch with coverings,
 colored linens from Egyptian linen;
 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
 aloes, and cinnamon.
 18 Come, let us take our fill of love till morning;
 let us delight ourselves with love. **[The sensual appeal]**
 19 For my husband is not at home;
 he has gone on a long journey;
 20 he took a bag of money with him;
 at full moon he will come home." **[There is nothing to worry about. Nobody will find out. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.]**

21 With much seductive speech she persuades him;
 with her smooth talk she compels him. **[Flattery again]**
 22 All at once he follows her,
 as an ox goes to the slaughter,
 or as a stag is caught fast
 23 till an arrow pierces its liver;
 as a bird rushes into a snare;
 he does not know that it will cost him his life.

This is the dangerous and all too often effective methodology of the adulteress.

III.

Consider then THE PROGNOSIS FOR ADULTERY. (III. THE PROGNOSIS FOR ADULTERY) What is the outcome of this course of behavior? That is what the author wants the young men to understand. That is what they need to grasp in order to have a right perspective.

In #5 v. 3 the author says, **"For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,/ and her speech is smoother than oil..."** There is excitement and mystery and delight. But the next verse says, **"...but in the end she is bitter as wormwood/ sharp as a two-**

edged sword.” The sweet honey ultimately becomes bitter wormwood. The smooth oil becomes a sharp sword. What initially seems to be so great and wonderful will end up as a disaster.

Verses 27 and 28 of #6 put it this way, **“Can a man carry fire next to his chest/ and his clothes not be burned?/ Or can one walk on hot coals/ and his feet not be scorched?”** In other words, we are going to get burned.

A.

In #5 v. 5 there is a reference to the first way in which we may get burned. That is by DEATH. (III. A. DEATH) **“Her feet go down to death;/ her steps follow the path to Sheol...”** The adulteress leads us to death. In vv. 26 & 27 of #7 we are warned, **“...for many a victim has she laid low,/ and all her slain are a mighty throng./ Her house is the way to Sheol,/ going down to the chambers of death.”**

Adultery can, and does, lead to death. There are 30 some sexually transmitted diseases. Some lead to cancer. Some result in death. Some affairs produce unwanted pregnancies, which then are terminated by death.

Steve McNair (STEVE MCNAIR) was a successful quarterback for thirteen seasons in the NFL. Air McNair, as he was known, achieved his greatest success with the Tennessee Titans. He led his team to the Super Bowl in 2000. In 1997 he got married and then had two sons. But a tragedy was discovered on July 4, 2009. It seems that Air McNair had rented a condo for a twenty year old gal with whom he had become acquainted. Late one evening after putting his kids to bed, he went to see her. It seems that she had asked him for \$2000 that day to cover a phone bill. Records indicate that he paid it. Apparently he fell asleep on this woman’s couch. According to police she shot him dead and then turned the gun on herself. Such was the result of his foolishness. There were other warning signs. Before Steve McNair got married he had two children by two other women to whom he was not married. Steve McNair was dead at age 36.

B.

The second product of adultery is described in #5 v. 9: **“...lest you give your honor to others/ and your years to the merciless...”** I would describe this as THE WASTE OF TIME AND ENERGY. (III. A. B. THE WASTE OF TIME AND ENERGY) The word “vigor” refers to the freshness of youth. The point is that the energy and time of the young man will become occupied by an adulterous relationship. In the end it is wasted effort. It is energy that should have been directed positively toward one’s wife and family and career and relationship with God.

C.

Thirdly, adultery means WASTED MONEY. (III. A. B. C. WASTED MONEY) Verse 10 of #5 says, **“...lest strangers take their fill of your strength,/ and your labors go to the house of a foreigner.”** Why is this relationship financially draining? It may be because of the foolish generosity of the man. It may be due to the demands of a woman.

Some commentators also see the hint of blackmail. Chapter 6 v. 26 speaks of the situation of a prostitute who demands money. I prefer the NAS translation here which reads, **“For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread,/ and an adulteress hunts for the precious life.”** In our modern world we could add to the additional financial cost the expenses that result from divorce.

D.

A fourth effect of adultery is GUILT AND SELF-CONDEMNATION. (III. A. B. C. D. GUILT AND SELF-CONDEMNATION) Look at vv, 11-13 of #5: **“...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.’”**

Last week I told you the story of a young man whom I knew who had a one-time experience with a prostitute. Years later he was still covered over with guilt about it and, at times, incapacitated. Psalm 51 describes the psychological and physical and spiritual anguish that David experienced as a result of his sin with Bathsheba and its cover-up. Solomon knew from the experience of his father about how destructive guilt and self-condemnation could be.

E.

Fifth, there is a LOSS OF REPUTATION. (III. A.B.C.D.E. LOSS OF REPUTATION) Proverbs #5 v. 14 declares, **“I was almost in utter ruin/ In the midst of the assembly and congregation.”** People start out thinking that they won’t get caught. But the truth usually comes out. The public reaction is especially negative when it happens to those who profess to uphold the sanctity of marriage and who hold positions as Christian leaders.

Bill Hybels (BILL HYBELS) was one of the most recognized pastors in the country. He was involved in the founding of Willow Creek Community Church in northern Illinois. The church grew to include some 25,000 members and multiple campuses. It spawned the Willow Creek Association of Churches. But then it came out that he was involved in various inappropriate sexual activities. He was forced to retire early. He denied the allegations. But in February 2019 an investigation led by four evangelical leaders found the accusations made by multiple women to be credible. It appears that he was the one luring and taking advantage of women rather than the other way around. What a fall this has been to him. It is a ruined reputation.

F.

The sixth thing that adultery often produces is ANGER FROM THE INJURED PARTIES. (III. A-E. F. ANGER FROM THE INJURED PARTIES) In #6 vv. 34 and 35 we are told, **“For jealousy makes a man furious,/ and he will not spare when he takes revenge./ He will accept no compensation;/ he will refuse though you multiply gifts.”** The angry man here seems to be the husband of the adulteress. Certainly the

wife of the adulterer would also be angry. Many marriages never recover from such behavior.

If we think that we are immune to the danger, we may be the nearest to a fall. There is forgiveness. God does forgive sin, including the sin of adultery. But as we see in the Old Testament story of King David, there are still natural consequences for our sin that we will have to confront. They do not quickly disappear.

IV. A.

(IV. THE VACCINE FOR ADULTERY) The best way to avoid the devastating effects of adultery is to take THE VACCINE FOR ADULTERY. I find in Chapters 5-7 four ingredients for this vaccine. The first is to GUARD YOUR HEARTS. (IV. A. GUARD YOUR HEARTS) Chapter 7 v. 25 says, **“Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;/ do not stray into her paths...”** Today we might translate this admonition as “guard your mind.” There is equal application to both men and women. Adultery starts in the mind. It begins with idealizing a person of the opposite sex. It progresses to sexual fantasy.

The Tenth Commandment (EXODUS 20:17) begins, **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...”** We are to guard our heart and mind. We are to be careful about what we do and look at on the Internet.

B.

The second ingredient is found in #5 v. 8. I label this as STAY AWAY. (IV. A. B. STAY AWAY) Verse 8 of #5 says, **“Keep your way far from her,/ and do not go near the door of her house...”** Keep away from the object of temptation. Don’t go out to lunch with the person. Don’t call this person up just to talk. Don’t look for emotional support from that person that you should be getting from your mate. Don’t seek this person out. Don’t put yourself in a dangerous situation.

C.

(IV. A.B.C. FIND SATISFACTION IN YOUR MATE) Thirdly, FIND SATISFACTION IN YOUR MATE. That is the message of #5 vv.15-19. Look at #5 beginning with v. 15: **“Drink water from your own cistern,/ flowing water from your own well.”** Cisterns and wells were valuable in the Ancient Near East because of the arid climate and lack of water. A cistern is a manmade receptacle for catching runoff water. In the second line the wife is described as more than that. She is a well which supplies fresh water from underground streams.

Verses 16 & 17 say, **“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.”** Not only should the wife be recognized as a well of fresh water but also as a bubbling fountain. She is more than capable of quenching the young man’s thirst. She could attract additional men, like the loose woman. But her abilities belong to her mate.

Verses 18 & 19: **“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.”** Husbands are to enjoy their wives. We are to love them so that they can respond to us. We are to show them romantic love. Wives are to enjoy their husbands and to show them physical love. Notice here that sexuality is portrayed here not as a gift from God just to produce kids, but also to produce pleasure in marriage.

D.

The fourth ingredient for this vaccine against adultery is to REMEMBER THAT GOD SEES. (IV. A.B.C.D. REMEMBER THAT GOD SEES) Look at #5 v. 21: **“For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord,/ and he ponders all his paths.”** We may be tempted to think that adultery can be covered up. But we need to remember that God sees everything. If we get involved, He will find us out.

The temptation and opportunity for people to be unfaithful in marriage is perhaps greater in our day than ever before. We have business trips, telephones, computers, chat rooms, men and women working together in their jobs, large cities where anonymity is possible, birth control methods which make pregnancy less of a worry, and a more liberal society. So we need the wisdom--- the skill in daily, godly living--- that these verses have to offer.

We need to consider carefully the issues at stake before we get wrapped up in something that we will regret. We need to weigh the short term excitement of adultery against the long term effects of death, wasted time and energy, wasted money, guilt, loss of reputation, and the anger of others.

The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. Our own lawn perhaps just needs a little more tender, loving care. We are not perfect people, and God has not given us perfect mates. But he has called us to a wholehearted commitment to them. In the last four verses of #7 the author reminds us: **“And now, O sons, listen to me,/ and be attentive to the words of my mouth./ 25 Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;/ do not stray into her paths,/ 26 for many a victim has she laid low,/ and all her slain are a mighty throng./ 27 Her house is the way to Sheol,/ going down to the chambers of death.”**