



Proverbs 6:20-35

Adultery

We are going to Proverbs chapter 6 again today.

This is our third week in just this chapter of Proverbs. And most of Proverbs 6 is a warning about being those who tear down what wisdom builds. Wisdom builds community, it builds society, it builds families. And folly, in its many forms, can tear down.

So we looked at the sluggard, whose laziness tears down. We saw last week the list of character traits that God hates, all of which eat away at the fabric of community that wisdom is building. And today we will look at the last part of this chapter which deals with adultery, which tears down marriage and families that wisdom builds.

And this, of course, hits home for many of us - we all know and love people who have been affected by adultery - spouses who've been betrayed, children whose families have been ruptured by it. Maybe you've been betrayed and crushed by this sin.

And there are also some here who have not only been affected by this sin, but have committed it. And you carry the weight, the guilt, the shame, and may also be experiencing many of the consequences here on earth from that sin in your past. Or maybe it's still unconfessed and un-found-out and you live with the fear of exposure.

Or maybe you are knee-deep in it, believing you can handle it, convincing yourself God will look the other way at it, thinking it's somehow justified in your case.

Most of us will one day come alongside someone who has somehow been affected by this sin, or who is confused about this sin. We'll need to instruct our kids about this sin and be on guard against it ourselves. So it'll be another heavy passage and topic today, but Proverbs warns about this one quite a bit and it's a worthwhile discussion for the strengthening of our homes and our church.

Proverbs 6:20-35

**[20] My son, keep your father's commandment,
and forsake not your mother's teaching.**

- [21] Bind them on your heart always;
tie them around your neck.
- [22] When you walk, they will lead you;
when you lie down, they will watch over you;
and when you awake, they will talk with you.
- [23] For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light,
and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,
- [24] to preserve you from the evil woman,
from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.
- [25] Do not desire her beauty in your heart,
and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;
- [26] for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread,
but a married woman hunts down a precious life.
- [27] Can a man carry fire next to his chest
and his clothes not be burned?
- [28] Or can one walk on hot coals
and his feet not be scorched?
- [29] So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife;
none who touches her will go unpunished.
- [30] People do not despise a thief if he steals
to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,
- [31] but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold;
he will give all the goods of his house.
- [32] He who commits adultery lacks sense;
he who does it destroys himself.
- [33] He will get wounds and dishonor,
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.
- [34] For jealousy makes a man furious,
and he will not spare when he takes revenge.
- [35] He will accept no compensation;
he will refuse though you multiply gifts.

So it's a hard passage, with some confusing statements, but this is God's word, so we can trust that there is wisdom from God for us here.

And the passage starts by reminding the son that it is addressed to that it is vital that he keep the commandments that have been passed on to him by his father and mother:

**Proverbs 6:[20] My son, keep your father's commandment,
and forsake not your mother's teaching.**

He says to keep these vital commandments close to you:

**[21] Bind them on your heart always;
tie them around your neck.**

It goes on to say that if we keep the commandments close, they will lead us. Following them will protect us. And even that the commands talk with us- they provide some of the truths that we can speak to ourselves as we go through the day:

**[22] When you walk, they will lead you;
when you lie down, they will watch over you;
and when you awake, they will talk with you.**

And they are a light, and a lamp to guide our way, and even the reproofs - the hard words of correction - will give us a way to live:

**[23] For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light,
and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,**

So in warning their son about the destructive power of adultery, this father and mother here start by telling him to immerse himself in the commands of God. (It doesn't directly say these are God's commands, it just says they are mom and dad's teachings, but if you read Psalm 119 you'll see tons of parallel language describing God's commands with many similar labels and promises to what you find in Proverbs 6. So mom and dad here are teaching their son the commands of God.

So God has given us commands that lead us on a path away from adultery.

The fact that God has made any commands in this regard means that there is a divine order for sexuality. God has made us a certain way, and the wise will learn that order and strive to live our lives accordingly. There is a way God made things when it comes to sex and marriage. There's a design, a right use of sex that is according to God's design and a wrong use that goes against it.

And from the beginning of scripture, you see that God made them male and female. Within the confines of the covenant of marriage, sex can be good and God-glorifying and fruitful, and outside of those confines it is sinful and destructive. So husbands and wives can cultivate a mutually happy and God-glorifying sex life with one another, and that same thing should never be cultivated outside of the husband/wife union. All other forms of sex should be resisted. God has given commands and a design for sexuality and marriage.

Now, the prevailing notion in our culture is that this is unhealthy, and that we shouldn't feel guilt for sex between consenting adults in any of its forms. Our culture considers sex not just something you do, but an identity, and to resist what you want to do is to deny your true self. You define you, and you make the rules.

To someone who thinks that way, Christianity could look appalling. And many Christians wonder, "If they say this is unhealthy and they seem smart and it seems like I was made for this other person outside marriage, maybe I should break free from that Christian paradigm. Whether it's through adultery, divorce without grounds, pornography use, sex outside marriage and living together, or through redefining gender or righteous sexuality, we can hear the voice of the culture telling us, "The Christian way is unhealthy. It's only because of these ancient religious assumptions that you think this way."

And it's true, our religious assumptions do give rise to our view of sexuality. (And so do everybody else's. The religion of the self, the primary religion of our day, assumes that you are able to make the rules, define yourself, decide on who you are. It assumes that sex is vital to whole personhood, and if you don't live according to your desires you will be harmed.) While Christianity says God made you, defines you, gives you your purpose, gives you commands, and its all for your good.

We are choosing which religious assumptions we will accept when we think through sexual morality. What do we believe by faith? That God made us and gave us purpose and design and rules? Or that we are essentially uncreated and we make the purpose and design and rules based on how we feel? We all believe something by faith.

And Christians believe God has given order and commands for us to follow.

But don't Christians jettison commands?

Aren't commands just for the Old Testament, and in our day it's just grace and freedom?

And can't we get that feeling even at church, that if we're striving to obey, it seems we'll be accused of being legalistic fuddy-duddys who don't get grace. If we say it matters who you sleep with, are we just being cold and religious and not really getting what grace is all about? Grace and love eliminate the commands, don't they?

And if so, then how do we raise our kids? What do we teach them about how to live? About who they are? About their gender when they get confused about it? About marriage and sex? If there are no more commands, what are we supposed to be teach our kids about right living?

It's true that to be a Christian is to have a different relationship with the laws and commands of God than when we weren't Christian. Because the rules don't save. But they are vital. For a few reasons.

THE COMMANDS TEACH US GOD'S HEART

God's commands teach us what God, who doesn't change, is like, and what pleases Him. They show us his holiness.

Each law that God gives tells us something about God's character.

We can't see God, but we know he said "don't lie", so He must be true, He must be a God we can trust, He must tell us the truth.

He said "don't steal", he must be a God who would never cheat us out of anything, and He must be a generous God. He must be a God who is not out for himself, but to overflow in kindness.

That's what God is like. And God giving commands in this category tells us his love for marriage, and Ephesians 5 tells us that's because it is a Union that reflects Jesus and the church. Marriage is loved and protected and treasured by God because it was designed to paint a picture of the self-sacrificial love of Christ.

So the command show God's heart.

THE COMMANDS GUIDE OUR LIVES

God's moral laws don't change with the times, or even from the old to New Testament.

We are still guided by them because they still show us God's will for our lives.

Finding God's will for us is a hot topic among Christians, and in God's moral law we know what His will is for us.

But isn't the command that we should just love? Isn't that the command, and isn't that enough?

John Stott wrote, "love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard."¹

Love needs law for its direction.

I love my wife. And I need from her some law, some direction, as to what makes her feel loved. I have learned that she feels more loved when I'm home for dinner most nights. I've learned from what she has told me what communicates love to her and what doesn't. I'd like to say that I don't need any of that, that if I just love her I'll always know exactly the right thing to do. I, however, have learned that I don't always understand how her mind works. And I need her to communicate to me some laws that will express love.

And if I can't understand my wife on my own, when she is only slightly above me in terms of how her mind works, how am I to understand God who is infinitely above me?

God's laws express his will for us, how to love Him and others well.

Knowing how to walk in love requires guidance from God's commands. So the commandments are for today in that sense. We still have law, we still have commands, we still have do's and don'ts, shoulds and shouldn'ts, but they function very differently in our lives than they would have without the cross.

AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE COMMANDS POINT US TO JESUS

We need the commands and do's and don'ts of scripture because they point out our need for Jesus. Without them we don't see how desperate our situation is.

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity, 1994). 349.

“God commands what we cannot do that we may know what we ought to seek from Him”² - Augustine.

When we hear the commands of God and see how we’ve fallen short, that sends us running to Christ. So we need the commands. We need to teach our kids the commandments, morality, right and wrong. Because you have to see you fall short to run to Jesus.

And these commands that show us God’s holiness and show how we fall short make the good news of Jesus really good news.

Solomon here instructed his son in the way of righteousness, but his sons inevitably fell short. But a True son came, who always kept the commands of His Father close. Whose way was perfect. And who, though he didn’t deserve it, was punished in our place.

And when the law exposes us, shows us our sin, shows us that we deserve to spend eternity under God’s wrath, how much sweeter does Jesus become when we know what He saved us from? When we know what the true Son did?

How much greater is His love to us when we know how unlovely and unlovable we were on our own? How much better is our redemption when we see what we were redeemed from.

So Solomon says here, “Bind the commands on your heart - keep them close.”

And because they guide our steps:

**Proverbs 6:[24] to preserve you from the evil woman,
from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.**

Now, this can sound very one-sided and chauvinistic. “You’re the good son, watch out for the evil woman.” And many Christian men have taken this to mean that all women in all circumstances should be viewed through this lens: she is just a temptation. And there can be a real dehumanizing of women if we think that way.

But we need to read all of the Proverbs and all of the Bible. And this book is certainly not grouping all women together. In Proverbs, wisdom again and again is described as a wise

² Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* 16.32.

woman. The whole book of proverbs culminates with a description of the woman who is wise because she fears the Lord.

It warns against some evil women, and it warns against some evil men: predators who lie in wait, sluggards who don't contribute, divisive men who sow discord. And it commends wise men who fear the Lord and shun evil - they exist too.

So it doesn't treat all women as the same or all men as the same - it's wise, it knows that different people are different.

And this is just what this father and mother are teaching their son. This section doesn't include their direct teaching to their daughter. So it looks one-sided, because this passage is just that one side.

And this passage also doesn't allow us to do what many people do, which is blame her for the son's temptation or give him a pass.

Look where Solomon puts the responsibility for faithfulness in this: on the son he's talking to.

He's saying that if you are led astray by the adulteress, it is because of something wrong with you. Your folly. Your failure to love wisdom. Its not her fault. Its not her fault you lust, it's not her fault you commit adultery. It's you. In verse 32 he says to his son that if you commit adultery, you lack sense. Literally you are "brainless."

He says to the son that there is folly in you that needs to be driven out by God's word. And if you fail in this regard it is always because of your own moral failing.

Not because of insurmountable biological impulses. Not because of a seductive person. Not because of how she's dressed. Not because your spouse doesn't fulfill you. It's sin and folly in you - not in anybody else. And he doesn't excuse it because, "Well, you're a guy," or "well, it's inevitable." He says cling to the commands, embrace them, you don't have to fail here.

**Proverbs 6:[25] Do not desire her beauty in your heart,
and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;**

So he says, "Even in your heart, don't lust after her beauty." He doesn't limit the sin to when you outwardly commit adultery, but commands even at the heart level to stay away from the sin. Which is not a command to obsess and freak out and be paranoid about seeing or noticing beauty. That isn't lust. It's when desires are fed and fantasies are engaged in that sin begins.

Recently, Dennis Prager, who is a Jewish author and talk show host, said that there is nothing immoral about pornography by itself. Because Christianity commands us to care about what goes on in our hearts, but he said Judaism is more concerned with outward actions. It's a behaviorist religion.

And I'm certainly not a Jewish scholar, but Solomon was pretty Jewish, and he said the sin starts in the heart.

And the ten commandments include a command not to commit adultery (Exodus 20:14 - the seventh commandment.) But they also prohibit wrong desires - the tenth commandment, "Do not covet" includes an explanation, "You shall not desire your neighbor's wife." (Exodus 20:17)

So Old and New Testament are concerned with our hearts, with our inner life. Morality is not just what we end up doing with our thoughts, but includes the thoughts themselves.

But even if Prager was right that OT God didn't care about anything but behavior, there's a lot of immoral and often predatory behavior that goes into the production of pornography. Those are actual people, many experiencing horrendous abuse and injustice, just to produce it. Not to mention all of the negative affects on the actions of those who look at it - it is dehumanizing, feeds adultery, it lies about sex, it catechizes people into the kind of sexual ethic that is broadly accepted in our world, it treats men and women as objects, it is made to create lust in the heart.

It is destructive and wicked, and Christians should fight to stay away from it.

Every year I meet with someone else whose marriage is torn apart by pornography. Several times per year I sit with couples where a spouse is weeping over the betrayal they feel at their spouse's use of pornography.

And because it is widespread, I wonder how much porn use is upstream of many of our other spiritual ills - why we lack virtue, why we lack belief that God is for us (when we're carrying this guilt and a fear of his judgment,) why we are cruel to one another (if we've

been taught to dehumanize people,) why we sometimes fight each other over ridiculous things (it seems those with hidden sins often have to go overboard going to war against others to shout down their conscience and provide a diversion from their own sin.)

Porn is always evil.

So confess this sin to the Lord - he does forgive. Confess it to your spouse - it is adultery. And there is hope on the other side of confession and repentance and forgiveness. It is not too late to be right with God, it may not be too late to save your marriage. It isn't too late to develop virtue and purity of thought. Don't treat this like it doesn't matter.

If there's any doubt about the adulterous sinfulness of lust, listen to what Jesus said:

Matthew 5: 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 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.30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Lust? How can it be just as bad as outward adultery?

If adultery hits your marriage, you're not going to say lust is just as bad. You're going to say, "I wish we had caught this when it was lust and stopped it then."

Jesus is NOT saying lust is just as destructive as adultery - obviously full blown adultery does a lot more damage.

But Jesus is getting at a heart issue here: An adulterer is someone with lust in his or her heart that overflows.

If you have lust in your heart but it hasn't overflowed into adultery, is what is in you any better than what's in a person who commits adultery?

Is sewage in a pipe any less disgusting than sewage on a floor?

No, its just as disgusting, but it is contained.

So Jesus here says that, "Maybe the sewage hasn't broken out of your heart yet, so it is not causing as much damage, but its still full of the same crud that's in an adulterer's heart."

God cares about the inner life. So lust, feeding fantasies, 50 shades, porn, sexting, are not harmless fantasy and fun. They are adultery.

Jesus said people go to hell for this stuff. To make peace with adultery, to not declare war on it, to settle in to it, is to give evidence that we are not Jesus's.

Look at verse 30 again "30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Which doesn't mean we earn our way to heaven by fighting lust.

It means that those who know the faithfulness and purity of God and worship that God will grow to exhibit a similar purity.

There should be a war within all of us for purity of thought and action.

And if there is no war - if there is no aggressive attack of this sin in our lives, it is giving evidence to the fact that we don't know God.

You don't know the covenant faithfulness of God if you don't fight for this kind of cleanness yourself. The reason we're OK with adultery or OK with porn is we don't know God like we should.

So that's what Jesus had to say about it. There are eternal, spiritual consequences to making peace with sin.

It is not that you can be saved by living morally in this category. But making peace with living immorally is evidence of something frightening in regards to the state of your soul.

God offers great grace to the broken and repentant. And great warnings to the unrepentant.

In the rest of Proverbs 6, though, Solomon deals more with some of the earthly consequences of adultery.

I'll show you what I mean:

**Proverbs 6: [26] for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread,
but a married woman hunts down a precious life.**

**[27] Can a man carry fire next to his chest
and his clothes not be burned?**

**[28] Or can one walk on hot coals
and his feet not be scorched?**

**[29] So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife;
none who touches her will go unpunished.**

This doesn't sound very spiritual. It seems like he's saying, "If you commit adultery, it will get found out, and it will really mess up your life - you will be punished, especially by your wife (verse 26). That can't be the reason not to commit adultery!

Definitely not. Jesus's reason in Matthew 5 is a reason. The nobility of the covenant of marriage is a reason. Love for your spouse is a reason.

But the Bible is meant to be read as a whole, the wisdom is rich and varied. And when there's temptation, we should use every tool we have (in the moment) to resist it. The fear of the Lord, eternal consequences, our having to answer to God, and the fact that God won't let us get away with it here either. It's OK to use fear of the chaos you could cause as an in-the-moment encouragement to stay away from sin. The pain you will cause your spouse and family should be considered as one tactic in your struggle against sin.

Now that probably won't last -you need real heart change from the Gospel and love for God to endure. But in the moment, understand that you will bring wreckage here, too.

One of the costs to count is the cost of the pain you cause your spouse and the utter chaos that can ensue.

I sit with people every year who catch a spouse in adultery, in person or via pornography. And anyone who sits there will tell you it isn't worth it.

You won't get away with it, any more than your feet get away with walking on hot coals.

**Proverbs 6:[30] People do not despise a thief if he steals
to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,
[31] but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold;
he will give all the goods of his house.**

By itself, this Proverb taken out of its context can be interpreted a dramatically wrong way.

That wrong way is to say, “Sex is just an appetite, and nobody is going to get mad at you if you satisfy it. Just don’t get caught.” Again, that’s the wrong way to interpret this, and not what it’s saying.

Because there is context:

**Proverbs 6:[32] He who commits adultery lacks sense;
he who does it destroys himself.
[33] He will get wounds and dishonor,
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.
[34] For jealousy makes a man furious,
and he will not spare when he takes revenge.
[35] He will accept no compensation;
he will refuse though you multiply gifts.**

And he says that thieves sometimes steal because they’re starving. And they have to pay the consequences when they get caught, but you really just pity a thief in that situation because you have to eat, he may have had almost no choice, and in choosing between theft and death he chose theft. Who can blame him?

He doesn’t say, “Adultery is like that.” He says “adultery is not like that.”

Verse 32 - he lacks sense. Literally, he is brainless. He didn’t have to do this - it’s not like stealing because you have to eat and its understandable. If he had used his brain, he would know he didn’t have to satisfy that desire. It’s not the same as food.

(This is also surprising in our sex-obsessed culture - we don’t have to have sex to be complete people! But Jesus was single, and complete.)

And he doesn't just have to pay back 7-fold, he destroys himself. This price will be wounds (her husband will find out and beat you,) dishonor (everybody will know) and the label sticks in peoples' minds (his disgrace will not be wiped away - verse 33.)

You will incite vengeful jealousy, and there is no way to pay for that.

So Solomon gives some hard words of warning against adultery.

And when you walk with someone who is impacted by it, you know he didn't speak too harshly.

But again, in applying the commands of God not just to the actions but to the heart, we are kept from getting too haughty and "better-than" others. This is convicting for us.

We are sinful, adulterous people - in heart, in word, and sometimes in deed. Some have fallen despite decent efforts, some have fallen because of little effort. But we almost all carry a certain weight of guilt and shame.

But that sends us running to a very good Savior.

We've failed to be the sons who keep the commands, so we run to the true Son.

Who was always only completely pure inside and out. He had no shame of his own. But who was naked and ashamed for us on the cross. He bore all of our guilt. All of our defilement. All of our sins.

We had broken the covenant, but he was a faithful husband. Who stuck with us, and pursued us, and gave himself to forgive us.

Christ died for our sins. Christ washes us white as snow.

And the deepest, darkest, most shameful thoughts and actions, the secrets that are rotting us from the inside, were all covered by Christ. And we can be free and pardoned.

This is an area where, for many, it feels harder to get rid of the sense of guilt and shame, even after we've recognized our forgiveness by Jesus.

We feel guilty and carry that guilt with us, but we are paying for our sins a second time if we do because Jesus died to take our guilt. We feel shame, but we need to believe in Jesus who became ashamed on the cross so that we can be free from our shame.

He has freed you from the condemnation that should be yours - he was already condemned for you. And he calls you to live as someone who has received that freedom from sin by living free from it.

We need to believe in his grace, and find our affections for Jesus rekindled so that we know a greater pleasure than sexual sin, the pleasure of God's presence.

When we see our sins, and they are many, we look not first to our efforts to fix it, but to His salvation.

Now if we really see them, we will confess them - to God, and if we are sincere in our confession to God we also confess them to the people we've wronged: our spouses, if we have them.

Confessing sin and renouncing it will lead us to a renewed commitment to living out our marriage vows, a renewed transparency with our spouses and those we've wronged, renewed zeal in living differently.

But for that fruit to ever grow, it needs to start with a root of faith in the faithfulness of God, of the God who keeps his covenant, of Christ who died for sinners like us.

You've sinned, but He loves you. If you confess and turn from your sins, He forgives you - completely. Perhaps, on earth, to many, your disgrace will not be wiped away.

But Jesus is better than Solomon, He offered the way for disgrace to be completely obliterated. And when that happens, it's real - you're free, you're clean, you have God for you.

So let's take a moment to confess our sins in silence.

Assurance:

Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does Proverbs contain so many warnings about adultery?
- 2) Does it seem strange that Solomon seems to emphasize the earthly consequences of adultery in chapter 6 of Proverbs? Why? What is the answer for that?
- 3) Why do you suppose marriage matters so much to the Lord?
- 4) Could teaching about adultery breed arrogance in those who haven't committed it? What is the remedy for that?
- 5) How are God's commands about these things are good for us?