

Proverbs, Wisdom, and Sex

June 30, 2019

Steve DeWitt

Funny things happen as a pastor. I had one recently as I am due for my first colonoscopy (this week). It's kind of like setting up your root canal appointment. I've been conveniently putting it off, but decided I had better get it done. I called the folks who do such things and make the arrangements. On the other end of the call was a nice woman who said, "*Now I'll need some information for your colonoscopy. Name?*" Steve DeWitt. "*Wait, Pastor Steve?*" I don't remember who she was, so if it was you, we're good.

We saw last week in our background look at Proverbs that Proverbs is not so much a book as a collection of wisdom sayings. We could call it Old Testament Twitter. Proverbs introduces three main characters: the wise, the fool, and the simple. The fool has no moral or spiritual capacity to live by wisdom and suffers the consequences his or her whole life. The wise are those who live by God's wisdom and God's will found in God's Word. They don't lean on their own understanding but rather trust in the Lord as they reverence him (fear) above all things. Since their starting point is right, the directions of their lives tend to be right too (and blessed). The third character is the simple. The purpose of Proverbs is to make the simple wise. They are naïve, and immature. They may end up the fool, but Proverbs provides instruction that can lead to a life of wisdom and all its correspondent blessings. Proverbs is practical Christian living.

Proverbs is unblushing about applying wisdom to the most intimate aspects of life. And what category is more personal and private than our sexuality? Proverbs dedicates as much to this category as any other. Proverbs is a love letter from a dad to his sons. In the area of sexuality, we see the wise father understanding how massive the implications are in this area of human life. He isn't afraid to talk about it. Just reading some of what this wise father says will cause some blushing in the room today; perhaps in the pulpit too.

Before I get into what he says, just learn from the fact that he says it. Parents, who will teach your children about sex, gender, and related issues? The schools? They aren't teaching biblical sexuality. The media? Pop culture? They are completely secular. You have two hopes for your child to learn a Christian view of sex—your home and your church. Have the talk and keep talking about it.

Sex and Wisdom

We have done many messages over the years on sex and this isn't a whole theology of sex. I simply want to walk us through what Proverbs 5 says about it. Most of 6 and 7 are also on this subject. Here is our outline. Sex according to Proverbs wisdom involves a great defense, a great offense, and the wisdom to see consequences. Offense. Defense. Consequence.

"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 ESV)

We are introduced to a woman who is prominent in Proverbs. *The forbidden woman*. Other translators call her the immoral woman, the adulteress woman, the loose woman. Who is she? She is the sexually forbidden woman, essentially any woman not your wife. She is forbidden in that God's law forbids sex with her and devastating consequences should as well. Remember, this is a dad writing to sons. We can flip the gender here and the principles still apply. The forbidden man, for example. But it was written originally to sons.

Notice that it first says that her lips drip honey. One pastor calls her "honey lips."¹ Possibly a double meaning as often the seductress seduces with her words and the kisses of her lips. Honey was the sweetest thing the ancient world had. Today, we might use sugar lips. Candy lips. Milk Chocolate lips. The point is that the forbidden woman is desirable at first, on the outside, on the superficial level. Her lips drip honey. Sounds good. Feels good.

The forbidden woman appears very desirable. She flatters and flirts. *"But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword."* I've never eaten wormwood but then I don't need to. It just sounds terrible. Wormwood. That's the point. The forbidden woman seems to be desirable. But the experience after being with her leaves you feeling like you just got a double-edged sword through the gut. It gets worse.

"Her feet go to death." She will end life as you've known it. *"Her steps follow the path to Sheol."* She will take you to hell. Verse 6, *"She does not ponder the path of life."* She has no wisdom and no discretion. All she has is a body and she uses it to destroy. Just the sort of person you want a long-term relationship with.

Parents, what do you say when you talk about illicit sex with your kids? Perhaps we should use stronger language. Wormwood. Death. Hell. What they are hearing all day from the world is the opposite. *Sex outside of marriage is heaven, ecstasy, totally fulfilling, expected, you should be embarrassed if you haven't had it.* The wisdom of God tells a much different tale.

It begins with strong warnings. There are some people who wrongly accuse the Bible of being only that with respect to sex, warning. They say Christians are just prudes, puritans, and pleasure killers. Sex is only for marriage and only to produce more puritans. So, if a Christian family is godly and has three children, that means the parents did it three times.

This is sad because God designed sex and intends it to be a blessing within marriage. Outside of marriage, sex is destructive in unintended ways. I'll give you one example. I'm reading that marital couples are increasingly struggling with sexual satisfaction because of pornography's impact on the men's ability to be aroused by their wives. Our counseling pastor, Stephen Ganschow, has affirmed this observation in his counseling as well. Think of that as a tragic consequence. By looking at other people's naked bodies, you can no longer enjoy your wife's body. What if all the strip clubs, and porn sites, and R-rated movie exposure disables your sex drive and your ability to properly enjoy it? If you knew looking at a picture of a naked woman would eliminate your ability to enjoy your wife sexually, who would do that? But this is what sin does. Sin is a destroyer.

I use this quote all the time, but it is so true -

"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not

¹ Jon Akin, as quoted in "Resisting Lips That Drip Honey: Wisdom on Sexuality from Proverbs," www.erc.com, March 4, 2014.

too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”² (C.S. Lewis)

Would that our young people would be so convinced that the greatest sexual pleasure to be had is a long-term sexual relationship with your spouse in which you enter relationship virgins and the first naked body you see is your spouse who has covenanted with you for the rest of your life. Would that Christian sex in marriage had the reputation for being the best. Would that our young people and singles were completely convinced that sex in that covenant of love is better than any back seat or one-night stand could ever be. Marital intimacy is honey lips with no wormwood. That’s why they call it a honeymoon. You are over the moon with your honey.

Can we honestly view sex outside of marriage as lame and second-rate? We should feel bad for the mostly naked woman on the billboard and her parents. We should feel sad for the men walking into the strip clubs along the interstate and the woman performing there. In the words of C.S. Lewis, they are settling for so much less than what they could have.

Defense. Offense. Consequence. Here is how Proverbs 5 urges defense.

“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 honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors 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)

Defense - Don’t Play with Fire

“Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.”

I think we understand what this means. Mark Twain once said, “There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice.”³ It is the application of the Lord’s prayer, *“lead me not into temptation.”* If I pray that and then knowingly or foolishly put myself as near to temptation as possible, I shouldn’t be surprised with what happens.

Others have said, sexual desire is like fire in the house. In the fireplace it keeps the house warm. Outside the fireplace it burns it down. God has put the fire of sexual desire within us. We must have a holy respect and fear of that fire being inflamed outside of God’s will.

Stay away from honey lips and don’t go near the door of her house. *Why? Who says I can’t go near the door? Who says I can’t meet a woman for lunch? Who says I can’t have strong and independent friendships with the opposite sex? There you Christians go again.*

Underlying these warnings is the greater desire for maximum sexual fulfillment. Honey lips is not that. She represents the distortion and destruction of it.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 26.

³ Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (1897), Chap. 36

See your sexuality as a precious and delicate gift. A piece of fine china God gave you. So delicate and so precious that you don't even want to risk it being broken. Are there any present habits of life or relationships with the opposite sex that pose a threat to you experiencing the fulness of God's desire for your sexuality?

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Romans 13:14)

A strong defense begins with the wisdom to see how one thing can lead to another and to not put ourselves in that possibly compromising position. Don't sit on Honey Lips' front porch. Don't be active friends with her on Facebook. Don't "happen" to be in the company lunchroom with her if you can avoid it. As you feel temptation or thoughts that if you acted on them would be sin, run away. Defense always has its running shoes on.

Offense – Drink Deeply of Marital Intimacy

So, what about offense? Proverbs places the blessed experience of marital intimacy as a motive to not ruin it with the forbidden woman. The language sounds a lot like Song of Solomon. I'm going to simply read what the Bible says.

"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)

The imagery here is poetic, but it's not hard to see behind the poetry how it all works. Rather than honey lips, drink from your own cistern. A cistern is a well that provides water. If God has given you a well, a wife, drink deeply. If he hasn't, perhaps pray for one. Go online to see *The Bachelor Pastor*⁴ sermon. He says, should your streams run in the streets? It's debated exactly what it means but the point is easy enough. Sex is sacred. Should what is sacred to you run in the sewers and streets? That's for common things, not sacred things.

One commentator breaks this chapter down as 1) Keep your hands off the forbidden woman. 2) Keep your hands on your wife.⁵

Indeed, here is a powerful picture of rejoicing in your wife. Wives, how do you feel about being compared to lovely deer and graceful does? That's first century pillow talk. *"Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight."* The ongoing pleasures of marital intimacy.

As many of you know, I didn't get married until I was 44 and one of the strange realities for me was all those years of sexual red light. Then you go to a church, say a few words, are married, and now it's green light and it's green light 24/7. Young people and single people, as a weapon of pastoral offense, I want to put before you that if your sexual desire is so strong that you feel you cannot contain it, there is a solution. Marriage. Not serial dating. Not porn. Not masturbation. Not living with someone.

God's provision is marriage and in marriage it's green light all the time. No shame. No fear of unwed pregnancy or complications. No fear of abandonment. No worries about performance or comparison. When you really think about it, marriage perfectly provides for

⁴ <https://media.bethelweb.org/media/210/>

⁵ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, p. 91.

our sexual desires and also accommodates our sexual fears. Anything outside of marriage is not only immoral but is truly settling for a far inferior sexual experience.

Let me add another thing. Don't make sex too important. I wouldn't get married only for sex as that asks more of it than it can deliver. Marriage is about much, much more than sex and it's a lie that sexual attraction is all you need. Look at all the beautiful Hollywood types whose marriages are disasters. Marriage is about covenant and Christian marriage is about reflection of Jesus and the church.

Sex is a means for reproduction and a pleasure gift from God for married couples that helps keep the glue of love sticky.

Consequence

"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)

Proverbs urges us to realize that we live our lives before the eyes of the Lord. What happens in secret is not hidden from him. Fear or reverence for the Lord is also a strong deterrent to immoral sex. And finally, a chapter that begins with urging wisdom ends by noting the folly of sexual sin. Sexual sin is like a prison. Sexual sin is deadly. Sexual sin leads us astray. Its consequences are far worse than any positives it may have.

Randy Alcorn created a list of consequences for immorality.⁶ A long list which includes:

- *Grieving my Lord; displeasing the One whose opinion most matters.*
- *Dragging into the mud Christ's sacred reputation.*
- *Loss of reward and commendation from God.*
- *Untold hurt to Nanci, my best friend and loyal wife and loss of her respect*
- *Hurt to and loss of credibility with my beloved daughters*
- *Shame to my family.*
- *Shame to my church family.*
- *Shame and hurt to my friends*
- *Guilt awfully hard to shake—even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?*
- *Plaguing memories and flashbacks that could taint future intimacy with my wife.*
- *Laughter, rejoicing and blasphemous smugness by those who disrespect God*
- *Possible diseases, possible pregnancy, with its personal and financial implications.*
- *Loss of self-respect, discrediting my own name, and invoking shame and lifelong embarrassment upon myself.*

Proverbs says, that's thinking wisely about sexual sin.

The New Testament reiterates the call to purity. It also emphasizes that Jesus died for all our sins including our sexual ones. Sexual sin is serious sin and all sin is serious. Jesus offered forgiveness to the sexually broken including the adulterous woman in John 8 and multiple prostitutes. He offers it today. Repent. Confess. Receive. None of us should leave here smug in our sense of self-righteous sexual purity or look down on those who have

⁶ Randy Alcorn, *The Purity Principle: God's Safeguards for Life's Dangerous Trails*, p. 89.

fallen. Rather we need to embrace forgiveness for our sexual failures and heed the call to wise defense, offense, and serious thinking about consequence.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016)*.
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

© 2019 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.