



Proverbs - Chapter Five

II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father's Invitation to Wisdom (continues)

Summary of Chapter Five

This chapter provides a warning against the seductive arts of wicked women, enforced by considering the advantages of chastity, and the miserable end of the wicked.

II.i. Proverbs 5:1-23 - Warning against Impurity and Infidelity

After the introductory words in vv.1-2, the entire appeal concerns matters of sexual morality. First, the immoral woman is introduced: she is alluring but deadly (vv.3-6). An exhortation to stay far from such promiscuous women follows (vv.7-14). The text then gives a brief but powerful presentation of the essentials of biblical teaching on sexual ethics. It asserts that sexual pleasure is good but that it must be confined to marriage (vv.15-20). The passage concludes with a brief account of the woes that befall the immoral man (vv.21-23). This illustrates the principle of 'concreteness.' Of course other sexual dangers exist, such as a woman being tempted by an immoral man, temptations to homosexual conduct, incest, or sexual abuse of children, and the wise person applies this counsel by making the appropriate adaptations.

- ¹ My child, be attentive to my wisdom;
incline your ear to my understanding,
- ² so that you may hold on to prudence,
and your lips may guard knowledge.
- ³ For the lips of a loose woman drip honey,

and her speech is smoother than oil;
4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.

Proverbs 5:1-4

My child, be attentive to my wisdom. As previously, Solomon knew that his instruction would do most good when it was given attention and ear. Teachers must do what they can to gain and hold the attention of their learners.

So that you may hold on to prudence. Solomon wanted his son to hold on to discretion and to keep knowledge. The idea is that the son started in these things, but must face the challenge of remaining in them throughout life. If people ever gain discretion, it is difficult for them to preserve it. This is especially true in regard to the sexual matters described in this chapter.

One of the purposes of attending to wisdom is that the son's lips may guard knowledge, that is, his lips should not let anything go out from them that is inconsistent with true knowledge and wisdom. Such guarded speech has the best interest of both the speaker and the hearer in view: <<*For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*>> (Malachi 2:7), which is referring to the proper function of the priest. In contrast, the lips of a loose woman are flattering, they drip honey, and her words are persuasive, i.e. her speech is smoother than oil, but her own end proves her words to be hollow and destructive (vv.4-6).

Warning of smooth talkers can also be found in: <<*My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me with speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords*>> (Psalm 55:20-21), and: <<*Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister', and call insight your intimate friend, that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words*>> (Proverbs 7:4-5).

For the lips of a loose woman drip honey. Solomon's phrasing is poetic and powerful. The figures of lips and the mouth refer to the words a loose woman may use in her enticements and to her alluring kisses. The first steps towards immoral associations are almost always made by what is said or communicated. This speaks to the great need for men and women to guard their speech and communication with the opposite sex. Solomon here focused on the immoral woman, but it was not because he thought that men are always moral and it is mainly immoral women who seduce and corrupt moral men. Solomon - the likely author of the Song of Solomon - was far too wise and astute in the ways of romance and sexuality to believe that. Solomon focused on the immoral woman because he wrote this to his

son (v.1) and sensed this was his greatest, closest moral danger. In other circumstance he might have warned against an immoral man, and the principles of seduction he warned about can apply freely to women or men.

Honey, oil. In Solomon's day some women had the ability to attract and allure men with the sweetness of honey and the pleasantness of oil. Operating outside the covenant of marriage, some of those women used that ability for their own advantage. They might gain something emotional, something material, something sensual, something romantic, or other potential gains. These women were a danger to be warned against. This present is much like Solomon's day, or perhaps even worse. Modern western culture is saturated with images of alluring women and their enticement to gain something sweet and pleasant from them.

In the end she is bitter as wormwood. Honey is sweet, but wormwood is bitter: <<*He has filled me with bitterness, he has gluttoned me with wormwood*>> (Lamentations 3:15), and: <<*The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter*>> (Revelation 8:11). The sweetness in the allure of the immoral woman becomes bitter: <<*I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:26), and her smooth, oil-like pleasantness becomes sharp as a two-edged sword.

Wormwood is a plant native to Europe, Asia and North Africa, with a bitter tasting and poisonous extract and is referred to by the prophet: <<*Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!*>> (Amos 5:7). Wormwood is also the name given by CS Lewis to the nephew of Screwtape, as an agent of Satan in The Screwtape Letters. However, the star called Wormwood in John's vision (Revelation 8:11) is no satanic messenger. Rather, it is the personification of something God threatens to do to God's people when they allow themselves to be deceived by false prophets: <<*Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, And make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem Profaneness has gone out into all the land'*>> (Jeremiah 23:15 NKJV). Given the mischief of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6 and 2:15), and the immoral woman Jezebel in Revelation 2:20, the situation in Asia Minor in John's day was similar to the one lamented by Jeremiah, and can be seen throughout history into modern day cultures.

- 5 Her feet go down to death;
her steps follow the path to Sheol.
- 6 She does not keep straight to the path of life;
her ways wander, and she does not know it.

7 And now, my child, listen to me,
and do not depart from the words of my mouth.

Proverbs 5:5-7

Her feet go down to death. The path of the immoral woman leads to death. She promises to add life, but ends up taking it away. The wise man will ponder the path of life.

Her ways wander. The decision to entice someone else into immorality is not a decision made by a stable person who desires the best for either self or the one enticed. Those led into immorality often feel they know the motives of their partner in sin, but Solomon rightly observed, "she does not know it."

- If the sexual immorality is desired out of a perceived impulse of love, maturity and stability would say, "If I really loved this person I would not act against their interest and my own. I will reject this immorality because I do in fact love them, and will express my love only in ways that would honour God and his people."
- If the sexual immorality is desired out of desire for pleasure or adventure, maturity and stability would say, "My desire for pleasure and adventure must not reign supreme in my life. Whatever good I may think would come of this, it is not good and will not bring good."

These elements of instruction are repeated in one way or another throughout the book: recognise the right path and seek to stay on it. Taking in words of wisdom is itself a part of the path, i.e. do not depart from the words of my mouth or: <<*My child, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them escape from your sight; keep them within your heart*>> (Proverbs 4:20-21), as is the good sense to keep one's feet on the path by avoiding evil <<*keep your way far from her*>> (v.8). This is the message of: <<*Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil*>> (Proverbs 4:26-27). The reader senses the serious nature of Solomon's appeal. Perhaps he understood how adultery with Bathsheba brought disaster to his father, King David even though it resulted in his own existence; refer to 2 Samuel Chapter 11.

8 Keep your way far from her,
and do not go near the door of her house;
9 or you will give your honour to others,
and your years to the merciless,
10 and strangers will take their fill of your wealth,

and your labours will go to the house of an alien;
11 and at the end of your life you will groan,
when your flesh and body are consumed,
12 and you say, ‘Oh, how I hated discipline,
and my heart despised reproof!

Proverbs 5:8-12

Keep your way far from her. Solomon did not advise his son to stay in the immoral woman’s presence and test his ability to resist her seductions. The best defence was distance, to not even go near the door of her house. The apostle Paul would write much later: <<*Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*>> (2 Timothy 2:22), echoing the sentiments of Solomon. The longer one stays in the presence of such enticement to evil, the worse the danger becomes.

Christians must remove their way far from such temptations not only in presence, but also in heart and mind. They must put away the pornography and enticements common to this present day and work for a mind set on things above: <<*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*>> (Philippians 4:8), and: <<*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*>> (Colossians 3:1-2). Derek Kidner commented, “The New Testament echoes this practical, if seemingly un-heroic, advice (2 Timothy 2:22; Matthew 5:28-29), which could mean, in terms of detailed decision, e.g. ‘change your job’, ‘change your newspaper’, ‘break with that set of friends’.”

Verses 9 and 10 begin the description of consequences for failing to heed the instruction of vv.7-8. Following the lures of the forbidden woman, (refer to the comment made on Proverbs 2:16-17), results in having what is meant for enjoyment honour and years, wealth and labours, being given over to others, and also produces regret over the wasting of body and soul (vv.11-13), and shame within the corporate body (v.14). Although the terms in vv.9-10, i.e. others, merciless, strangers, and alien, could refer to the husband and family of the woman with whom adultery would be committed: <<*For jealousy arouses a husband’s fury, and he shows no restraint when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation, and refuses a bribe no matter how great*>> (Proverbs 6:34-35), they need not be understood as referring exclusively to them. Proverbs

often describes the foolish path as one that squanders the very good it deceptively offers; refer to Proverbs 1:10-19.

Or you will give your honour to others. Solomon will describe many things that are lost through sexual immorality, and he began with honour. There is a valid sense of honour that the one who stays pure can have.

And your years to the merciless. Adultery and sexual immorality ruins lives. God's command that human sexual relationships remain only in the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman was not given to take away from life and enjoyment, but to significantly enhance it.

And strangers will take their fill of your wealth. In the modern world, many men know what it is like to lose their wealth because of adultery.

On **at the end of your life you will groan** Adam Clarke commented, "The mourning here spoken of is of the most excessive kind: the word *naham* is often applied to the growling of a lion, and the hoarse incessant murmuring of the sea."

When your flesh and body are consumed. Sexual immorality leads to disease and breakdown of health. Even the stress of living a double, deceptive life is enough to take away one's health.

Oh, how I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! One great price of sexual immorality is regret. When one sees how empty the promises of sin are and how great the price for those sins is, deep sorrow and regret is a logical response. Many men and women, fallen into the snare of sexual immorality, have wondered: "How did I ever end up here? How could I have been so foolish? How could I give up so much for what amounted to so little?"

13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
or incline my ear to my instructors.

14 Now I am at the point of utter ruin
in the public assembly.'

Proverbs 5:13-14

I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. This not just an admission of failure and guilt, but an opportunity for Solomon to show the consequences for such folly.

Now I am at the point of utter ruin in the public assembly. What the adulterer thought would remain secret was exposed. He entered his sin thinking, no one will ever find out. When it was exposed **in the public assembly** his foolishness, betrayal, and lack of self-control were all made public. Jesus would later warn

that this will be the case: <<*Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops*>> (Luke 12:3).

- 15 Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.
- 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?
- 17 Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for sharing with strangers.
- 18 Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
- 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts satisfy you at all times;
may you be intoxicated always by her love.

Proverbs 5:15-19

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Solomon reminded his son that God had provided his wife for his sexual needs and pleasure. Instead of neglecting what God had given, he should renew his gratitude and focus upon what God has blessed. God's provision for sexual need is found in the marital bed, which is pure before him: <<*Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers*>> (Hebrews 13:4). It is like a pure, fresh spring, i.e. flowing water. Although some are dissatisfied with what God provides in marriage, that dissatisfaction is more a reflection on them than on their spouse.

The wife is pictured as the source of water in these images of 'cistern,' 'well,' 'springs,' 'streams,' and 'fountain,' which is clear both in the repeated phrase from your own cistern and from your own well, and the conjunction of 'your fountain' and the wife of your youth. The force of v.16 is thus to call the hearer to imagine how he would feel if his wife were to commit adultery, i.e. should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? And to follow the principle of: <<*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets*>> (Matthew 7:12), and: <<*Do to others as you would have them do to you*>> (Luke 6:31), i.e. be faithful to her as he wishes her to be faithful to him. This is often referred to as 'The Golden Rule.'

Ancient or modern, an over-sexualised culture promotes the idea that sexual satisfaction is a mainly a physical sensation. While only a fool would deny the physical enjoyments of sex, a more mature mind sees that intimacy - the open, unhindered revelation, reception, and sharing of one's self with another - is also a great reward in a sexual relationship. When sex is reserved for the Biblical boundaries of marriage over the years and decades it says:

- “I am here for you, and you are here for me.”
- “I am my beloved's and he is mine.”
- “I know you more than anyone else and yet I love you.”
- “You know me more than anyone else and yet you love me.”
- “Our children and home life are protected and safe.”
- “We are not slaves to our sexual desires; we live by principles greater than our sexual impulses.”
- “We will remain together and supportive of each other as we grow old.”

Individually and especially collectively these are benefits far greater than the experience of orgasm. This is sex with meaning, not only pleasure. The world, the flesh, and the devil do a masterful job in selling humanity the lie that sex focused only on pleasure is greater than what God promises in obedience to his plan: sex with meaning.

Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Here the image changes and the idea is that Solomon's son should regard his sexual activity to be like a supply of life-giving water that should be set in the right channel. It is for the satisfaction of his wife, and not for sharing with strangers. Different interpreters take different approaches to this image of both the cistern and the fountains dispersed abroad. Some take it as a picture of fathering children outside of marriage or similar ideas. The best approach seems to be a contrast between private and public. God meant for sex to be enjoyed and celebrated in the privacy of marriage, not in the public or even commercial sphere.

Proverbs calls unabashedly for seeking fulfilment in the sexual intimacy of marriage, i.e. may her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love, as the relational context where these desires are rightly fostered for the enjoyment (rejoice in the wife of your youth) and good (let your fountain be blessed) of both husband and wife. The Hebrew translated be intoxicated is literally ‘be led astray, i.e. in the sense of being ‘swept away’ with delight in one's wife.

Rejoice in the wife of your youth. Solomon alluded to God's plan for marriage, even if he did not follow it himself: <<*Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart*>> (1 Kings 11:3). God's best for humanity is for a man to marry a wife in his youth and for him to rejoice with her for the rest of his days. Life circumstances

mean there will be many different ways this is lived out, but when a man does marry a woman in his youth, God's best is for him to rejoice in her until death parts them. The exhortation to rejoice in the wife of your youth means there is an element of choice involved. There are times when a husband or wife needs to choose to rejoice in their spouse. A person's affections are much more affected by where they choose to focus them than people realise.

There is no record that Solomon committed adultery, according to the technical definition of that sin. Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines were all legal partners. Yet he obviously fell far short of God's plan for one man to be married one woman and to find satisfaction in the wife of his youth. It was probably Solomon who wrote about this ideal in the Song of Solomon, but never enjoyed it or only did so for a relatively brief period of time. Solomon's failure in this area shows that if a man is not satisfied with one woman - the wife of his youth - then he will not be satisfied with one thousand women. If a man is not satisfied with the wife of his youth, the blame almost always is upon him and not upon the wife.

May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love. The phrasing of this implies there is an element of choice involved. A person usually thinks that being enraptured with her love is something that can happen to a person from the mystical force of love. Yet, people love what they chose to put their affections on and a husband can choose to be enraptured with love toward his wife, even if they fear love has diminished or died over time.

- 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman
and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
- 21 For human ways are under the eyes of the Lord,
and he examines all their paths.
- 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare them,
and they are caught in the toils of their sin.
- 23 They die for lack of discipline,
and because of their great folly they are lost.

Proverbs 5:20-23

Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman. Solomon just described how God provided for a husband's sexual needs in marriage. That being the case, it makes no sense for a man to fall into the trap of the immoral woman. He should not fall into her trap or her embrace. This is an important reminder for any man dealing with the temptation of an immoral woman. It is human nature to

think that such a sin may be excused if it is never made public. People often think sin can be excused if it is undiscovered, and many have been exceptionally tempted by what they think is a ‘risk free’ opportunity. Solomon rightly reminds his readers that God sees all their ways, and before him no sin is hidden. God ponders all his paths.

For human ways are under the eyes of the Lord provides the grounds for the instruction of the chapter and acts as a reminder of the promises of God’s blessing if one stays on the good path, the vocabulary of Proverbs 4:26. It also provides warning if one’s path is heading toward an end consistent with its nature: <<***And on account of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: ‘The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire’, because they have perpetrated outrage in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbours’ wives, and have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them; I am the one who knows and bears witness, says the Lord***>> (Jeremiah 29:22-23).

They are lost is the same Hebrew word as ‘intoxicated’ in vv.19-20, thus there is ironic contrast of the two kinds of being ‘led astray’ – one into delight and the other into destruction – by the forbidden woman can result in being **caught in the toils of their sin** and thus in a life that lays hold of the path leading to death.

Sexual sin - especially the violation of the marriage covenant - is a sin that entraps and destroys. It brings death, not life, for **they die for lack of discipline**. It is God’s care and compassion that gives people his instruction for their sexual conduct and expression. Clarke observed, “Most people who follow unlawful pleasures, think they can give them up whenever they please; but sin repeated becomes customary; custom soon engenders habit; and habit in the end assumes the form of necessity; the man becomes bound with his own cords, and so is led captive by the devil at his will.” And Charles Spurgeon added, “The lifelong occupation of the ungodly man is to twist ropes of sin. All his sins are as so much twine and cord out of which ropes may be made. His thoughts and his imaginations are so much raw material, and while he thinks of evil, while he contrives transgression, while he lusts after filthiness, while he follows after evil devices, while with head, and hand, and heart he pursues eagerly after mischief, he is still twisting evermore the cords of sin which are afterwards to bind him.”