



Proverbs - Chapter Seven

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

Summary of Chapter Seven

The subject from Chapter Six is continued, by a delineation of the arts of strange women, as a caution to the unwary. Wisdom will keep a man from the adulteress. The seduced young man followed her like an ox going to the slaughter.

II.k Proverbs 7:1-27 - The False Attractions of Adultery

The appeal begins with the plea for the son to take the father's wise instruction to heart in order to keep himself away from the adulteress (vv.1-5). The main section is a narrative about a man who willingly allows himself to be entrapped by the adulteress (vv.6-23). The final verses appeal to the sons plural (v.24) to learn the point of the narrative: wisdom includes keeping off paths that one knows will lead to temptation, paths on which many have walked naively to their own ruin (vv.24-26). This is the third paternal warning about adultery; refer to Proverbs 5:1-23 and 6:20-35.

- 1 My child, keep my words
and store up my commandments with you;
- 2 keep my commandments and live,
keep my teachings as the apple of your eye;
- 3 bind them on your fingers,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- 4 Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister',

and call insight your intimate friend,
5 that they may keep you from the loose woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words.

Proverbs 7:1-5

My child, keep my words. As in the previous two sections warning against sexual immorality (Proverbs 5:1-2 and 6:20-24), Chapter 7 begins with an emphasis on keeping and understanding God's word and a father's wisdom.

Keep my commandments and live. The implication is not that Bible reading provides a magical protection against sexual immorality. Yet if a person does keep God's written commands, they will not carry out this sin, and the keeping of the commands begins with knowing them, treasuring them, and meditating on them.

Keep my teachings as the apple of your eye. The familiar phrase the apple of your eye refers to the pupil of the eye which the ancients thought was a sphere like an apple. People tend to protect their eyes because they are valuable to them, and so should they honour and protect God's word by obeying it.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. Solomon counselled his son to have a living, breathing relationship with the word of God. They should not be only on his mind but also in his heart. He should love the word as his sister and nearest kin. God would later promise a time when his word would be written on the hearts of believers: <<***But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people***>> (Jeremiah 31:33).

Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'. Sister in ancient texts sometimes refers to one's wife as a dear companion, as in: <<***I come to my garden, my sister, my bride; I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love***>> (Song 5:1). Thus, the idea may be that one should bind himself to wisdom and not the adulteress.

That they may keep you from the loose woman. The wisdom and power of God's word helps to keep Christians from the immoral woman or man. From God's word they learn the deception and strategy of sin and temptation. They learn the end result of sin and wonderful benefits of obedience. God's word imparts the spiritual light and strength they need to obey God in this difficult area of worldly life.

The task of keeping men and women from sexual immorality sometimes seems impossible. This is due to many factors, including:

- **A secular, sexually saturated and permissive culture.**

- The widespread availability of pornography.
- The disconnection of sex from pregnancy and reproduction.
- Laws making divorce easy and impossible to contest.
- Social media technology making anonymous meetings easier.
- Widespread prosperity that lessens the financial impact of family breakups.
- The large and growing gap between the time of puberty and the average time people get married.

These factors are not all unique to the present day; Christianity was founded in a very sexually permissive culture. Yet they highlight the great need for Christian men and women to rely on the power and wisdom of God's word to remain pure. It also means that such purity, even in the sense of rededication to purity, is a great sacrifice and gift to the honour and glory of God.

From the adulteress with her smooth words. Immorality speaks and has words to draw people into sin. There is always a price to pay for such sin: <<*If my heart has been enticed by a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door; then let my wife grind for another, and let other men kneel over her*>> (Job 31:9-10). Christians need the corresponding and greater power of God's words to keep them from the immoral woman or man.

6 For at the window of my house
I looked out through my lattice,
7 and I saw among the simple ones,
I observed among the youths,
a young man without 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.

Proverbs 7:6-9

For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice. The father begins an account, based on something he has observed from within his own house. As a skilled storyteller, Solomon explained how one day he looked out his window and saw a man passing along the street. The man was simple, young, and devoid of understanding.

A young man without sense. The man is simple and young. As in Proverbs 1:4 and 1:22, simple and without sense are not stupidity, but inexperience and gullibility. They are uneducated in the ways of wisdom and need instruction. The simple man has his mind open, but in a gullible and dangerous way.

I observed among the youths, a young man. The idea is repeated twice for emphasis. This man does not have the experience of years to help guide him in the path of wisdom. He has all the passions, energy, and overconfidence of youth, and none of the wisdom the decades can bring. Of course, it is not only the young man who faces the challenge of purity; older men and women of every age have their own challenges to pure living. Yet these are often more severely felt in the life of the young man.

Even when a young man has the desire for moral purity, there are many things that may make it difficult for him to receive and live God's wisdom. These include:

- Youthful energy and sense of carelessness.
- The lack of life wisdom.
- The desire for and gaining of independence.
- Physical and sexual maturity that may run ahead of spiritual and moral maturity.
- Money and the freedom that it brings.
- Young women who may, knowingly or unknowingly, encourage moral impurity.
- The spirit of the age that both expects and promotes moral uncleanness for young men.
- The desire to be accepted by peers who face the same challenges.

The world would say, "Have your good time when you are young; get it all out of your system. When you are older you can settle down and be religious and proper." Yet God's wisdom can make (or should make) a huge difference in the life of a young man.

God wants to spare the young man and, indeed, the older man the bondage of sin. This reflects upon the power of experience to shape habits. Surrender to any temptation; transfer it from the realm of mental contemplation to life experience, and that temptation instantly becomes much more difficult to resist in the future. Each successive experience of surrender to temptation builds a habit, reinforced not only spiritually, but also by brain chemistry. Such ingrained habits are more and more difficult to break the more they are experienced; and it is almost impossible to break such habits without replacing them with another habit.

A young man without sense. Because he is inexperienced through his youth, his reservoir of wisdom and understanding is empty. He is the one who must, at all costs, get wisdom: **<<Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away**

from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight>> (Proverbs 4:5-7). The psalmist provides remarkable wisdom for the young: <<How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word>> (Psalm 119:9). Derek Kidner commented, “Young, inexperienced, featherbrained, he is the very sort to need arming with borrowed wisdom.”

As Proverbs 6:20-35 expands on the consequences of adultery described in Proverbs 5:9-14, this appeal plays out the way in which the reckless stumble into adultery by putting themselves in the wrong place, i.e. by passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house at the wrong time, in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness: <<*The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, “No eye will see me”; and he disguises his face*>> (Job 24:15), which is in contrast to the clear instruction of: <<*Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house*>> (Proverbs 5:8).

It always seems that people wish to carry out the worst of sins under the cover of darkness, a time when they believe they will not be discovered: <<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God>> (John 3:19-21).

- ¹⁰ Then a woman comes towards him,
decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.
- ¹¹ She is loud and wayward;
her feet do not stay at home;
- ¹² now in the street, now in the squares,
and at every corner she lies in wait.

Proverbs 7:10-12

Then a woman comes towards him. Before he could actually reach her house, the immoral woman met him. She was not a prostitute but she dressed like one, i.e. she was decked out like a prostitute, and had the heart of one for she was wily of heart. For her, sex was a transaction and not an experience of intimacy within her marriage.

She is loud and wayward. If the simple man cared to notice, this was not a woman of good and dignified character. Her heart or her body would not stay at home, but looked for affection and love through sexual satisfaction outside the home.

The woman is described in terms somewhat like Wisdom, who cried aloud in the streets and markets (refer to Proverbs 1:20-21), but the implication is that her actions, i.e. being loud and wayward, in the street, in the squares, and at every corner, embody a deceptive heart and are those of the foolish woman; refer to Proverbs 9:13-18.

At every corner she lies in wait. Her availability and willingness for sex excited the young man. She was not hard to find or arrange a meeting with. His wisdom and ability to resist temptation would be tested by the presence of a willing and available woman. Adam Clarke commented, “She is continually exposing herself, and showing by her gait and gestures what she is, and what she wants.”

When it comes to sexual purity, some people are outwardly pure because they have lacked, in their perception, low risk opportunities. If a person quickly fails when they do encounter a willing and available partner for sexual immorality, it shows they were ready to fall and something was wrong even when they were, for a time outwardly pure.

- 13 She seizes him and kisses him,
and with impudent face she says to him:
- 14 ‘I had to offer sacrifices,
and today I have paid my vows;
- 15 so now I have come out to meet you,
to seek you eagerly, and I have found you!
- 16 I have decked my couch with coverings,
coloured spreads of Egyptian linen;
- 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
aloes, and cinnamon.
- 18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;
let us delight ourselves with love.
- 19 For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.
- 20 He took a bag of money with him;
he will not come home until full moon.’
- 21 With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.

Proverbs 7:13-21

She seizes him and kisses him. The idea is that she trapped him and this is an accurate description of how many are ensnared in a sexually immoral relationship. They are pleased to be caught and then soon feel trapped. The sexually immoral person shows a certain defiance and impudence. They insist on their way and their gratification. It was with this sense of arrogant defiance that she spoke the following words.

The woman uses whatever she can as part of her appeal. She puts the young man off his guard: Israelite culture apparently discouraged the romantic kiss in public (refer to the comment made on Song 8:1), and this impudent face (v.13) would set the man back; she flatters him into thinking he is someone special, i.e. to meet you, to seek you eagerly (v.15); she promises sensual delights (vv.16-18) and security from discovery for her husband will not be back anytime soon (vv.19-20).

The sacrifices (v.14) are probably peace-offerings. The implication is that she has a supply of meat at home, ignoring the wisdom of: **<<Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife>>** (Proverbs 17:1). This is a stark example of a disconnection between her religious practice, since the peace-offering was intended to foster communion with God, and the path of her life – a disconnection that the prophets so often condemn. In fact Isaiah 1:10-20 highlights the hypocrisy of the people's worship. Isaiah, like other prophets who comment on sacrificial practices, recognises that God appointed the system of worship and authorised the central sanctuary. However, these ordinances were always intended to foster true piety among God's people, which would move them to humble purity of heart and energetic promotion of others' wellbeing. Isaiah denounces the way his contemporaries have divorced the ordinances from their proper purpose. It seems that they treated their worship as a way of manipulating God; they also mixed in elements from Canaanite religions. Refer also to the comment made on Amos 4:4-5.

I have decked my couch with coverings, coloured spreads of Egyptian linen. She went on to allure him with the anticipation of the sensory experience, and that directly connected with her bed. She told the simple young man that he would experience wonderful touches, smells, and pleasures.

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. These three are also mentioned among others in: **<<Your channel is an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices>>** (Song 4:13-14). These are references to aphrodisiac aromas intended to enhance the experience of sexual intercourse.

Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love. Her invitations became more and more explicit, although still clouded in the misused word love. She offered him a kind of love, but certainly not the best or lasting love. It would be a delight and even last until morning, but would eventually bring pain, misery, and death. Clarke observed, “The original itself is too gross to be literally translated; but quite in character as coming from the mouth of an abandoned woman.”

For my husband is not at home. This makes clear what was hinted at before, that this was not a prostitute but an adulterous woman. She betrayed her husband, her honour, her marriage vow, and her faithfulness to God.

He has gone on a long journey. The final piece of her plan of seduction was to persuade the young, simple man that this was safe and would have no consequence. Many people are willing to commit sexual immorality when they feel there is little or no risk of being discovered, showing that their commitment to purity is rooted in external and not internal motivations.

With much seductive speech she persuades him. At the end of it all, her seduction was successful. With her enticing speech and her flattering lips she convinced the simple young man to sin with her sexually. She used words and actions to successfully walk her victim through these steps of seduction:

- A well-chosen target: <<*a young man without sense*>> (v.7).
- Available to meet: <<*the road to her house*>> (v.8), where: <<*a woman comes towards him*>> (v.10).
- Provocatively attired: <<*decked out like a prostitute*>> (v.10).
- Of bad character: <<*she is loud and wayward*>> (v.11).
- Looking to trap and seduces: <<*She seizes him*>> (v.13).
- Free with physical affection: <<*She kissed him*>> (v.13).
- Gave some recognition to religion: <<*I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows*>> (v.14).
- Pursuit to make one feel desired: <<*I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly*>> (v.15).
- Promise to please the senses: <<*I have decked my couch with coverings, coloured spreads of Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon*>> (vv.16-17).
- Invitation to her bed: <<*I have decked my couch with coverings, coloured spreads of Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon*>> (vv.16-17).
- Promises of love, delight, and sensual pleasure: <<*Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love*>> (v.18).
- Persuasion that the risk of discovery is very low: <<*For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey*>> (v.19).

22 Right away he follows her,
and goes like an ox to the slaughter,
or bounds like a stag towards the trap
23 until an arrow pierces its entrails.
He is like a bird rushing into a snare,
not knowing that it will cost him his life.

Proverbs 7:22-23

Right away he follows her. The woman presented by Solomon in Chapter 7 would be very difficult to resist. This is why it is anticipated that he went after her as soon as he started on the path towards her house (v.8). Such strong temptation can be overcome by the power and presence of Jesus in the believer, but it is even better to keep one's self from the temptation. There was no delay. It can be sensed that he desired to be tempted this way, and so had no strength to withstand it when the opportunity.

And goes like an ox to the slaughter. The promise of the sexually immoral woman and the anticipation of the simple young man were for sensual pleasure and delight. What was really waiting for him was slaughter, and he was like an animal ripe for sacrifice or as a fool to the correction of the stocks. Once again the foolish path is described as a trap that ends in destruction: <<*They despair of returning from darkness, and they are destined for the sword*>> (Job 15:22).

He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life. The simple young man chose to only see and anticipate the sensual excitement and pleasure waiting for him with the sexually immoral woman. He did not reckon on the cost involved, or supposed that the only cost came from being discovered.

24 And now, my children, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
25 Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths.

Proverbs 7:24-25

And now, my children, listen to me. The father now expands his audience to include all his sons. The lesson had been presented and needed a conclusion to reinforce the principle. The father once again asked for the attention of his children to this important matter.

Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways. The narrative of the fool and the trap are meant to instil in the sons the good sense to keep far from such ways or paths. Such caution, stemming from the father's commandments being written on the heart (v.4), is the means by which wisdom will keep them from the forbidden woman or the adulteress (v.5).

Solomon understood that adultery and sexual immorality begins in the heart. It does not begin in the hormones or glands, and it does not begin in the heart in a romantic sense. In the sense that the heart describes a person's deepest love and desires, a heart that does not properly love and desire God but does love and desire pleasure will turn aside to sexual immorality.

Do not stray into her paths. If the heart is turned aside towards sexual immorality, the feet will find it easy to stray in that direction. It is far better for the line of godliness to be drawn at the heart; but if it is not, then it should be drawn at the path. Again, the earlier warning should be heeded: <<*And now, my child, 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*>> (Proverbs 5:7-8).

²⁶ For many are those she has laid low,
and numerous are her victims.

²⁷ Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death.

Proverbs 7:26-27

For many are those she has laid low. Many, many people have had their reputations, their health, their prosperity, and even their life destroyed by sexual immorality. Many of these were strong men or women. God's word and a father's wisdom teach people to learn from such disasters in the lives of others and not to repeat it in their own lives.

The image of numerous victims, a mighty throng according to the ESV, having fallen to her advances, as if she were a warrior, is given as further grounds for staying away and warns the sons against the foolish pride of presuming they would be different.

Although the woman invites the fool to her bed in her own home for immediate pleasure, the nature of the path to her house will entangle him in a way that, in the end, leads to the chambers of death.

Her house is the way to Sheol. That was not how she saw it or described it in vv.16-18, but it was true. Wisdom teaches that things are not as they are often presented or perceived. Rare is the person who willingly, knowingly takes the way

to hell and descends to the chambers of death. The power of temptation and the tempter lies in concealing this result and wisdom sees what is concealed. In mentioning Sheol, the text is indicating that the consequences go beyond this life: <<*Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol*>> (Proverbs 23:13-14). Life and death in Proverbs commonly correspond to a right relationship to God and estrangement from him, continuing beyond the grave: <<*In the path of righteousness there is life, in walking its path there is no death*>> (Proverbs 12:28).