

Part 10: Calibrating our Sexuality

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We are back in the book of Proverbs today after our Advent series and if you haven't yet opened your Bible's I'd invite you to turn to Proverbs 6.

By way of reminder, I want to recap what the Proverbs are. They are not neat observations, cute moral tales, or daily tips for a blessed life. The book of Proverbs gives us wisdom before we need it by constantly reminding us of the wisdom of walking with God and the foolishness of rejecting God.

As Ray Ortlund put it: the world says live and learn, but the Proverbs say learn and live. It's meant to equip us with what we need to avoid the pitfalls and dangers of life in a broken world.

We have been working through Solomon's prologue in this book which stretches the first nine chapters. In this extended prologue there are three distinct passages where Solomon wants to equip us with knowledge beforehand about the dangers of sexual sin and temptation.

We saw one of these texts in chapter five, we will see another next week, and we are going to look at another one today.

These texts are often difficult for us to hear because they can make us feel a bit uncomfortable. Especially in our culture today. Our modern thoughts about sex and sexuality have shifted from sex being something that we do to sex being something that we are. Meaning that how we understand sex as a function in our life is actually the defining facet of your very identity.

Therefore when someone, let alone the God of the Bible, starts poking around in our thoughts on sex and sexuality, we get a little anxious. But there's two things we need to be aware of here. The first is that you are far more than your sexuality.

God created you with gender and a capacity for sex, but that doesn't mean that your life is reduced to it. You were made in the image of God which means you were made for a satisfaction far greater than intimacy with another person, you were made for intimacy with God himself.

But this means, secondly, that because God created us and our sexuality, he actually has the authority over it. He just as he created us for a purpose, so too is sex created with a purpose. The wise person recognizes that if something is repeatedly used for something it wasn't created for, it can cause severe harm to itself and to others.

You've already heard our passage read today and you perhaps heard the clear warnings against things like: lust, prostitution and adultery. I probably don't have to do much work to convince you that God views these things as significant dangers. But I wonder if there might be a disconnect with what we think is obvious and how we actually feel about these issues.

For instance, one website that was created to help married couples have affairs revealed that of all their users who included religious affiliation in their biography, nearly 50% identified as Evangelical Christians or Protestants.

Moreover a study in 2017 surveyed confessing Christians and it was discovered that 77% affirm that a one night stand with someone other than your partner is considered cheating. 82% affirmed that frequent sexual encounters with someone other than their partner to be cheating.

Statistics are a dangerous thing though. Because on the surface these sound like good statistics: the majority of Christians consider adultery to be wrong. But what is hidden beneath these numbers of 77 and 82 is that for every group of ten people in this room, two to three of them could be sleeping with someone other than their spouse and feel no remorse, repentance or wrong over their actions.

What our culture shows is that we need the clarity of Proverbs even today because our hearts are still in need of God's wisdom even today.

What we see in Proverbs 6 are two simple truths that help us reorient our hearts and avoid the dangers of sin. First in verses 20-24 we are going to see **The Promise of Life in Wisdom** and then in verses 25-35 we are going to see **The Threat of Death in Sexual Sin**.

Let's read together **Proverbs 6:20-24**.

So here we see our first point today: **The Promise of Life in Wisdom**.

What we see initially here is that everything which follows comes as from a parent to a child. Why is Solomon having these frequent birds and bees' talks with his son?

It's not because he wants us to abide by a certain code of ethics. He's not writing to us because of the Victorian glory days past. He's writing to us because he loves us and wants what is best for us.

The role of parenting in the gospel centered home is to teach God's word to your kids not out of obligation but out of affection. Here out of the affection God has for us he is calling us to keep dad's commandments and to not forsake mom's teachings.

The commandments and the teachings that he is referencing here is simply the summary for the Old Testament Law. In fact the word for mom's teaching is actually mom's "torah."

This teaching included all sorts of practical commands which shape every aspect of your life. There wasn't an ordinary part of daily Israelite life which didn't have some interaction with God's law.

But far more than being an arbitrary book of practical advice that anyone can pick up, God's law, God's teaching, required you to start with God's salvation, it begins with a relationship. There's an entry point to all of this.

These commands and instructions reveal three relational truths about God to those who hear them. First that God is faithful to save. The law affirms God as a saving God who loves us and acted to save us from our sin. When the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt God didn't say do these things and you'll save yourselves. Instead God saved Israel by grace and then he gave them the law.

Second, the teachings show that God is faithful to satisfy. God doesn't save us and leave us on our own but he gives us the guidance we need to live a life which leads to joy and not to death.

Third, and lastly, it reminds us that God is faithful to instruct. His teachings are laws and commands because God is not just a savior but he is also an authority.

These three reminders were such a source of comfort and wisdom that it lead King David to say this: **Psalm 119:97** (Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.).

As Christians we have seen the fullness of all this come to pass in Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 that he is no longer under the Old Testament law because Jesus fulfilled that law for us. God showed Israel what it would take if they wanted safety from their sins but they couldn't keep it. They kept sinning, the kept falling back into slavery, they kept themselves under God's punishment.

But Jesus came and perfectly fulfilled all the commands and teachings God gave and he did so in our place, for us! But as Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 9, he says that just because we are no longer under the Old Testament law doesn't mean we are outside of all laws, but instead we are under the law of Christ.

Just as the whole course of daily Israelite life was influenced by the Old Testament Torah, so too is the whole course of the Christian life influenced by the law of Christ. We are called to glorify God, love others and pursue holiness in every aspect of our daily lives, and we can trust that this life of obedience is good for us because we've seen God's faithfulness towards us in Jesus Christ.

Walking in obedience to God's teaching in the gospel is the most rewarding experience you will have. Look at the comprehensive blessing that comes as we trust in God's ability to save and that inside of our salvation his commands are for our joy: **Proverbs 6:22**.

If you were paying attention carefully here, you should have seen three things which all of us want, and they are ultimately three things which we can only get if we see the reward of trusting God in our salvation.

Here Solomon is promising for us guidance. When you walk, God's teaching in his word will be a light to your path. When we encounter the dimly lit spaces of moral dilemmas in life, or dubious ethical decisions at work, we bring them back to God's word and we are able to assess them in the light of the gospel.

Moreover, when you find that following God might put you at odds with following the world, you can trust in God's comfort. Trusting in God's faithfulness in all our decisions gives us the gift of sleep because we can trust that we are walking in the pleasure of God and not in our own foolishness.

And lastly, trusting in God's teaching brings us clarity. When we wake up and we are groggy, confused and disoriented, God's gospel gives us context and reorients our life around what is of primary importance.

Who doesn't want to be saved by this God? Who doesn't want guidance on life's path, comfort in the darkest night and a familiar voice in life's confusion?

This sounds like the greatest life coach you could ever have. But this is where we might need readjusted. Jesus is not a life coach. It's not neat suggestions for a thriving life. We know this because look at **Proverbs 6:23**.

To not walk this path is to receive the reproofs of discipline. To be saved by God in Jesus is to also willingly invite the corrective discipline of Jesus when we stray, why?

Because look back at verse 23, the gospel is no life coach, the gospel is life itself.

Solomon is here reminding us of how important it is to not run from the boundaries of grace when we feel that obedience is too hard. Instead he is encouraging us to trust not only the teaching but also the discipline which pulls us back when we begin to flirt with other paths.

He wants us to know the words of grace because he knows these words are not the only words you will hear. Look at the hinge of this passage here in **Proverbs 6:23-24**.

Why does God want us to walk with familiarity with his word? So that we will know the danger of the false words of foolishness.

In contrast to our first point today, here we see our second point: **The Threat of Death in Sexual Sin**.

My children go to bed while listening to an artist who puts words of scripture to song. Proverbs 6:20-22 is one of the passages they made into a song and interestingly enough, they stop their lullaby before they have to sing about the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

Verses 20-23 seem to be really broad and general, but beginning in verse 24 it gets very specific and very sexual. Why is that? Well for two reasons, one will become clear as we learn of the danger of physical sexual sin, but the other is that adultery in the book of Proverbs is not just physical, it is also spiritual.

In other words to not walk on this path, to reject God's grace which so intimately goes to bed with you and wakes up with you, is to commit spiritual adultery. It is to look at the God who has covenanted himself to you in the blood of his own son, and to run away from him into the false promise of sin.

To ignore God's word for you in the gospel is not to choose a different flavor of ice cream, it is to choose a different lover all together.

So when we read passages like this, and what we will read next week, we read it at two levels and neither level diminishes the one. We read it hyper aware that all disobedience is flirting with another lover. All disobedience chooses dissatisfaction with Christ who becomes our husband in the gospel.

But secondly, it also shows us the danger and vulgarity of sexual sin and adultery.

What I want to do right now is read the remainder of this chapter and then we will circle back and look at three points of emphasis in this passage. **Proverbs 6:25-35**.

The obvious point here is pretty clear isn't it? This lifestyle will harm you. But in supporting this theme we see three practical points in this text.

First we see, *The Ease of Access to Sexual Danger*.

Look again at verses **24-26**.

In Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Baloo the bear is warning Mowgli of the seductive danger of the monkeys. The monkeys are always trying to lead Mowgli away and Baloo says this: **"They have no speech of their own, but use stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait above in the branches."**

When we encounter the smooth words of the lady folly we encounter stolen words. This is why sexual sin is so powerful in our own lives. To put it simply sexual temptation is rooted in one word: satisfaction.

God created us to be satisfied in him, but our world has overheard this language of longing and they've stolen the language and tried to make it their own. They offer not what they can actually provide but only what you want to hear.

But the danger is that our hearts quickly desire what is being spoken and we are captured by an eyelash and we buy in for the simple fee of a loaf of bread.

This is really humbling language isn't it? Here you have this young man getting a life lesson from his father. And in our braggadocio our youth is often typified by our trust in our strength.

But did you see how easily we are conquered if we guard not our hearts? By an eyelash. The mightiest man bound by the smallest of hairs.

How many of us have had hearts enticed in desire for what is impure by the quickest commercial on TV, the ad on social media, or the individual leaving the gym.

Now Solomon knows that not all tempters in life are female, so ladies feel free to read in this the danger of seductive men. But in using the analogy of a female and her eyelash here he is creating a play on words to show how vulnerable and delicate we might be to this threat of sin.

More than that the price of a prostitute was cheap, only a loaf of bread.

In our world today sexual gratification is even cheaper with the digital world at our finger tips and the anonymity of the internet.

Not only are we quickly triggered by the eyelashes of lust and the power of its stolen words, but we can act on it at little to no cost by worldly standards.

We live in a world which understands that. Researchers have found that just about every year since 1983 sexual themes in advertising have increased and are used to sell everything from beauty products to bank loans.

Why do they do this? Because they know that sex sells.

The eyelashes and bread of lust are everywhere in our world. So what hope is there for our hearts in this culture? Well consider what the father led with: the word of God and his promise of faithfulness in the gospel.

The best way to keep the world out of your heart is to keep the promise of God in it. What you encounter in the flirty text from your co-worker or the preview on Netflix is nothing more than the stolen language of God himself. Therefore we must learn to remind ourselves that it is only God who can satisfy us.

We combat the immediacy of false promises with the eternality of God's grace for us in Jesus Christ.

But our second point picks up on the second part of verse **26**.

Prostitution might be cheap, but adultery isn't. Now Solomon isn't saying that prostitution or pornography are acceptable. Both of these ought to be loathsome and are equally destructive. But what he is showing here is the immense threat adultery is to the health of any community.

And it's here we see ***The Sanctity of Marriage***.

Prostitution is wrong. But adultery is devastating.

Adultery breaks the covenant of marriage all over the place and devastates not only the community, but the family and the individuals.

Adultery might cost you your marriage. It might cost other person their marriage. It might cost kids their families. It might cost communities their stability and peace.

Marriage in the Bible is between a man and a woman for life and it is not an insignificant covenant.

We live in a world where our identity no longer comes from a community, or from God's word, but instead it our identity comes from inside of us and the inner self that rules supreme is our sexual desire.

When it's put like that most Christians realize that this is a wrong lens through which we view our world. But I wonder how subtly we have been acclimatized to such a worldview?

How many of us see adultery in our sit-coms or novels and think nothing of it? How many of us read of adultery between celebrities and we get excited that so and so is now with such and such? How many of us have thought in the dangerous recess of our own hearts that if such sexual freedom were to give us happiness then who could blame us? In fact it very well could be that our external culture might actually praise such ventures.

But here we are reminded of God's design for fidelity in marriage.

I generally want to be very careful for broad calls to repentance, but I wonder if we as a church need to repent over the ways in which we have allowed culture to shape our expectations of marriage and sexuality and not the world of God.

Could it be that we, like the false teachers in 1 Timothy, have seared our consciences? So seared that we have made a gradient where God has made a line?

The Old Testament law was that a couple caught in adultery stood liable to the death penalty. By God's grace, we are no longer ruled by that kind punishment. But I wonder how many of us are more offended at the Old Covenant penalty for adultery than we are of adultery itself?

Why is this passage so clear on the elevated foolishness of adultery over other sexual sin? Because adultery strikes at the very heart of the gospel itself. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that marriage was made as a placeholder and metaphor for Jesus and the church. The true husband who lays down his life for his bride so that they might faithfully love and serve together.

To be laissez-faire about fidelity is to be laissez-faire about the gospel which saves us. Christians don't care about marriage because marriage is worth dying for. Christians care about marriage because the gospel is worth dying for.

This commitment has all sorts of applications in the political and social realm, but God is far more concerned with how this commitment manifests itself in your own heart by showing chastity outside of marriage and fidelity inside of it.

Because here is the truth about sexual sin, and any sin for that nature: sex doesn't define you, but it can destroy you.

This is our third point in this ***The Inevitable End of Adultery.***

Read with me again: **Proverbs 6:27-35.**

You notice the inevitable end Solomon paints here: you can't carry fire and not be burned, you can't walk on coals and not be singed. You can't play with sexual sin and not be harmed, even destroyed.

He then uses a secondary example of that of a thief. If someone stole because they were hungry we could wrap our brains around it, but we also understand that if he's caught there's punishment for those who steal.

His point is not that people who commit sexual sin are given sympathy. In fact quite the opposite. He says the adulterer sins not because he lacks food, but in verse 32, he lacks sense.

There's nothing noble about it, but instead it affects your reputation, it affects your wealth, your lively hood, and provides a disgrace which will not be wiped away.

Not to mention now you've got at least one, if not two, angry spouses who have been sinned against.

This jealousy will make the offended husband furious, and the Old Testament law which said that the adulterers must be put to death offered a provision that the sinner could pay a ransom price to the one he sinned against and be delivered.

But Solomon is saying that for most people when they reach this level, there is no hope for them. You might multiply your gifts, but nothing you can do can remove the mess of sin that you've made.

Now, there are two things we get to do at this point.

The first is that all of us should stand in somber fear of sexual sin. Our world increasingly tries to shape our conscience in ways which normalize pornography, premarital sexual-acts, hook-up culture and adultery. But in reading this we should feel the weight of this sin on our chest and perhaps even feel the burn of the coals Solomon is speaking of.

Because even if we haven't purchased the bread, haven't we all desired in our hearts. Jesus himself says this is sufficient enough.

But this is where we remember the hope in verse 23: the reproofs of discipline.

Here while you are here, you are subject to the grace of discipline. Discipline which acknowledges the foolishness and destructive impact of your sin, but discipline which responds by grace to God's work in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We all find ourselves as sexual sinners because in our sin we have spiritually committed adultery towards our God. And you can multiply your gifts all you want but you cannot ransom yourself from the death penalty you deserve.

But this is where we get to secondly look at the beauty of the gospel. God is the offended spouse in every sin, and yet in the gospel he has paid the ransom price for us in Jesus Christ. Our gifts aren't enough to remove the death penalty we deserve, but Jesus' gift in our place is.

In this room are people who have not only been spiritually adulterous towards God but emotionally and physically adulterous towards others. But Jesus has come to pay the penalty for that in himself and in so doing ransoms us back into God's grace. To those who are broken, there is a husband who welcomes us back.

Jesus redeems us from our sexual brokenness by reminding us of his faithfulness to save, and the reminder of his faithfulness to save gives us the motivation we need to walk not in the foolishness of sexual sin, but in the freedom of holiness.