

Proverbs on Adultery

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Introduction.

I was not expecting to preach this lesson. I had originally intended for my sermon on Proverbs and drinking to be the last in this series of sermons drawn from Proverbs. In fact, the first sermon in the next series has been written for several weeks. All that changed one Sunday night a few weeks ago after services when I got a phone call from my mother. I was not at all happy to see her number pop up on the caller ID. My parents are very careful not to intrude into our privacy, and they only time they ever call us is when some horrible disaster has happened.

I know this, and so my heart was already sinking as I answered the phone. My fears were confirmed when my mother replied, “Matthew. . . I have some bad news, honey.” I’m sure you all can imagine the directions my mind was going after that. I was sure that it was going to be about some cancer-related disaster, and I wonder if my mother might have preferred that it had been. Instead, she proceeded to tell me about a married couple, Christians, very dear to us. They’d been married for 20 years, have two wonderful children, but the wife had confessed to her husband that she had had a long-running affair, and that she was filing for divorce. My mother is as tough as they come. I’ve never seen her cry, she’s faced her cancer struggle without blinking, but I could hear her voice breaking as she was telling me about this.

Tonight, then, I’m going to preach on adultery. Some naïve part of me thinks that I shouldn’t have to, that Christians just naturally ought to know better than to engage in such despicable, tragic sin. Of course, Christians don’t actually know better. The devil’s lies are no less persuasive within the church than outside it, and we are all vulnerable. God warns us plainly about it in Proverbs 23:26-28. When the consequences are so devastating, we must constantly strengthen our resolve that we will not betray our spouses. With this in mind, let’s consider Proverbs’ take on adultery.

Enticements to Adultery.

I am certain that there are few, if any married people who get married while anticipating that they are someday going to commit adultery. Nonetheless, adultery is tragically common. With such evidence before us, we need to consider the **ENTICEMENTS** that Satan uses to entrap others, and that he may well use to entrap us. We see the first of these enticements presented in Proverbs 7:15-18. Sad to say, there are all sorts of people out there, both men and women, who have no respect for their marriage vows or for the marriage vows of others. Like the evil woman in this proverb, they set out to lure a foolish man or foolish woman into adultery. They may not be quite as brazen about it as this archetypal adulteress is, but they still do whatever they can to make sin as appealing as possible.

This means that at work, in social settings, and even at church, we need to be wary of those who are just a little bit too nice to us. Men, watch out for the woman whose eyes sparkle every time she sees you. Ladies, beware of that understanding man who is always ready to listen to your problems with a sympathetic ear. These people may not even be aware themselves of what they’re doing, but rest assured that continued contact with them can easily be the first step on the road to infidelity. In situations like these, we need to trust our instincts, and we need to trust our spouse’s instincts. There have been times in our marriage, though not here, when Lauren and I were leaving services or somebody’s house and she said to me, “I don’t like the way she was looking at you.” Brethren, that’s not a comment to laugh off or to attribute to some kind of spousal jealousy. That’s a warning sign, and we need to watch out for those who set off alarms.

Of course, other people’s evil hearts and actions are only half the problem. We see the other half defined in Proverbs 6:25. I guarantee you, friends—nobody commits adultery without lusting first, and that means that if we succeed in eliminating lust from our lives, we also preclude the possibility of adultery. It’s not lust merely to notice the attractiveness of some member of the opposite sex. We’re programmed to do that. Lust begins when we notice that attractiveness and don’t look away, or when we allow our minds to dwell pleasantly on our desire for that person. I can remember a co-worker of mine long ago who used to say about her husband, “I don’t care if he looks in the restaurant window, as long as he eats at home,” but that attitude is foolish and ungodly. There is nothing harmless or innocent about lust. Jesus places it on the same level of wickedness as adultery during the Sermon on the Mount, and if we continue to indulge ourselves in adultery in our hearts, we will easily be led astray to adultery in the flesh. Lust is poison to a marriage, and if we are godly and wise, we will do whatever we must to eradicate lust from our hearts.

Results of Adultery.

However, if we are foolish and wicked, and choose to sin anyway, Proverbs warns us of several evil **RESULTS** we will see. First, we can be certain that adultery will cause generalized destruction in our lives. Consider the many disastrous consequences of adultery listed in Proverbs 5:9-11. Just as Solomon says, adultery destroys our finances, it wastes our lives, and most of all, it destroys our reputations and our honor. This last one is particularly important for us

as Christians. Everywhere we go, we are ambassadors for Christ, and our Lord and our church depend on us to hold His name in honor in our lives. There is no surer way to drag Jesus' name through the mud and to attract the scorn of unbelievers than to commit adultery. I fear very much that this is going to happen with the situation I referred to earlier. Without going into details, let me say that there are people my mother has been trying to convert for years who have already found out about this Christian's sin, and I know exactly how they're going to respond the next time she brings the subject up. They're going to say, "So if I become a Christian, are you going to teach me to cheat on my spouse like So-and-So did?" When we commit adultery, we give rise to the same thing. We cause the name of God to be blasphemed.

Adultery also generates jealousy among all those who have been wronged. Solomon alludes to this in Proverbs 6:32-34. When we cheat, it is inevitable that both our spouse and the spouse of the other adulterer are going to respond with a massive outpouring of jealousy. Marriage is built on trust, and when we betray that trust so heinously, how can our husband or our wife ever trust us again? Even when we're behaving completely innocently, they're going to be suspicious and accusatory, and they have every justification for acting in that way. On the flip side of the coin, let's say we commit adultery with a brother or sister in Christ, as many Christians who cheat do. When the ugly truth comes out, how can we possibly look the Christian we betrayed in the face? How can we possibly work effectively with them in the church? When we are unfaithful, we shatter many of life's most important relationships and create all sorts of jealousy.

Most importantly, adultery produces death. Consider the warning of Proverbs 7:25-27. This proverb most likely refers to physical revenge killing, but it is even truer with regard to spiritual death. No matter how well we hide our infidelity from everybody else, we can't possibly hide it from God. We might tell ourselves and others all kinds of lies to justify our behavior, but there is nothing we can say that will placate the Almighty. The message of His word is plain. If we commit adultery and we do not repent, we will go to hell. Period. No exceptions. Adultery causes eternal death.

Of course, for God's people who choose to commit adultery, they know all these things, but they persuade themselves somehow that all the bad consequences won't attach to them. If we're prone to that way of thinking, we need to pay attention to Proverbs 6:27-29. We're about as likely to commit adultery and get off scot-free as we are to dump a shovelful of burning coals down our shirt and escape unburned. This is a 99 percent certainty in this life, and it's a 100 percent certainty in the next. Almost everyone who cheats gets found out and punished, even on earth. No matter how carefully we plan, no matter how cleverly we hide, all it takes is one slip-up, and everybody knows about our dirty little secret. Even if we do pull off the perfect crime, though, we still aren't fooling God, and He is certain to remember.

Protections from Adultery.

When adultery is so deadly, it is absolutely necessary that we turn our attention to the Scripturally approved **PROTECTIONS** from it. The first of these is the Scripture itself. Look at what Solomon tells us about it in Proverbs 6:23-24. As with any other matter of sin and righteousness, the Bible tells us all we need to know to please God. We can't ever get to the point where we say, "I know enough about adultery. I'm too wise for it to happen to me." When a Christian says things like that, it makes the devil smile. They're only demonstrating their own foolishness and vulnerability. Instead, every time we encounter a sermon or passage on adultery, we need to take the word of God to heart. We need to use it to reinforce the walls we have built around our purity, to renew our commitment to faithfulness. As we diligently and humbly return to the study of God's revelations about adultery, it makes the devil's job much harder.

Another way we can protect ourselves from adultery is by avoiding evil people and situations. The Holy Spirit urges us toward this in Proverbs 5:7-8. When we run into those people we discussed earlier, the ones who seem to like us just a little bit too much, that's when we need to run the other way. Most affairs begin with a perfectly innocent friendship, and once we start forming friendships like that, it leaves us open to the affair too. No matter how appealing that other man or woman might be, we need to keep our relationships with them cordial but distant. Likewise with situations that may tempt us to adultery. Many of you have heard me talk before about my Grandmother Rule. My rule is this: I will not spend time alone with any woman other than my wife, even to study the Bible with her, unless she is old enough to be my grandmother. Before I save the souls of others, I need to safeguard my own. Too many preachers have betrayed their wives with women they were studying with, and I refuse to add my name to the list. All of us, in whatever course of life we find ourselves in, need to make sure that we do nothing that will tempt us to adultery.

Finally, we prevent adultery by finding fulfillment with our spouses. Solomon touches on this in Proverbs 5:15-18. Although I left out the more explicit part of the passage, this first and foremost has to do with our intimate relationship with our husband or wife. We need to make sure that we are satisfying the other's needs, and that our own needs are being satisfied. To turn around my co-worker's saying, if we eat our fill at home, we won't be looking at the restaurant window. However, fulfillment is about more than just sex. Our spouses need to be not just our bedroom partners, but our best friends. They shouldn't be looking to that man at work for sympathy, because they should already be getting it from us. They shouldn't notice when they make some other woman's eyes sparkle, because they already make our eyes sparkle. The best defense against adultery is a marriage so good we don't even want to cheat.