

4. Being Armed against Sexual Temptation

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- [0 : 00] Well friends, let's turn again to Proverbs chapter 5, page 530. I've known for a long time that Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, has some pretty direct things to say about sexual morality.
- But it's only in the last few weeks when I've been studying this book more carefully that I've realized just how much it has to say on this subject. If you run your eye down over chapter 5 again, you'll see that the whole of this chapter acts as a warning against adultery.
- But this isn't the only place here. If you look onto chapter 6, you'll see that the second half of the chapter, from verse 20 onwards, is again a warning against adultery. And then look onto chapter 7 and you'll see that the whole of that chapter is completely given over to the same subject, but putting things in rather different ways.
- So what we have here in three chapters is two and a half chapters of warning about sexual sin. Now you would have thought, mightn't you, that the Lord might have let us off a little bit more lightly.
- But no, he clearly decided that readers of the Bible need plenty of instruction in this subject. Why should that be? Why so much instruction?
- [1 : 18] Presumably because the Lord God knows our frailty so well. He made us as sexual beings. That was part of his perfect and wonderful design for mankind.
- But ever since the fall of man, he knows that the sexual aspect of human life has become a big problem area. It causes great problems and great difficulties for us.
- And that, I think, is why we need two and a half chapters of the book of Proverbs about it. So friends, I do hope that you'll be willing to face this subject fair and square with me tonight. It's not an easy subject, I realise that.
- Some of you, I'm sure, will be wishing that the sermon was on a different subject. Part of me wishes that we might be looking at something quite different tonight. But it's here. And God has put it here for the very good purpose of arming us and strengthening us against sexual temptation which comes to all human beings.
- All human beings. Let me very briefly remind you of the Bible's basic teaching about sex. And this might be especially helpful for some of the youngest people here tonight.
- [2 : 28] Because you may still have a rather hazy notion of what God tells us is right and proper and what is wrong in this area. According to the Bible, sex is for marriage and only for marriage.
- It's a lovely gift of God when it's used in the right place, which is in marriage. But in the wrong place, outside marriage or before marriage, it's not good.
- And when it's used outside marriage, it brings confusion and unhappiness and guilt. Sex is rather like fire. In the right place, it's lovely and good.
- But in the wrong place, it's destructive. If somebody says to you on a cold winter's afternoon, Oh, come inside, there's a fire in the sitting room. That's lovely. You go in and there's the fire in the grate.

It warms you up, makes everybody feel happy. But if somebody says to you, There's a fire in the sitting room. And you rush in and you see that the curtains are going up in smoke and the carpets and the sofa's on fire.

[3 : 35] That's fire out of control. It's in the wrong place. And it's very destructive. Now in the same way, sex within marriage is like the fire in the grate.

It's in the right place. It's good. It's cheering. Sex outside marriage or before marriage is like fire in the curtains and carpets. It's damaging, it's destructive and it always brings unhappiness with it.

Now the word adultery means sex outside marriage where one of the people involved is married already to somebody else. And Proverbs chapters 5, 6 and 7 are about the dangers of adultery.

So let's think now about the Bible's teaching on adultery. The heart of it is expressed in the seventh of the Ten Commandments, which you will know, I'm sure, by heart. You shall not commit adultery.

But these chapters in Proverbs are the Lord's own commentary, you might say, on that commandment. In fact, a great deal of the Old Testament acts as a commentary on or an unpacking of the Ten Commandments.

[4 : 46] So the Old Testament prophets, the writing prophets from Isaiah through to Malachi, take the Ten Commandments and they preach them, work out the implications of them to their own generation.

So think, for example, of the prophet Isaiah, who's preaching in Jerusalem in the 8th century BC. He takes those commandments given to Moses in the 15th century BC, 700 years earlier, and he applies those commandments to his own contemporaries.

That's what Isaiah is doing. The Psalms, at one level, are a meditation on the law of Moses. And this book of Proverbs is a detailed, colorful investigation of the implications of the Ten Commandments.

So as we study this fifth chapter of Proverbs tonight, let's think of it as God's own commentary on the Seventh Commandment. Here is the Lord, as it were, teaching us about the hinterland of the Seventh Commandment.

He's giving us some depth and perspective on what it means not to commit adultery. The Lord is very kind to us. He doesn't just, as it were, give us bare commandments without commentary and interpretation.

[5 : 57] He gives us detailed teaching on why these commandments are so important and on what they mean. Now let me say just one more thing before we get into the text itself.

I'm aware that there are bound to be, in a group as large as this here tonight, there are bound to be some folk here tonight for whom this is a very painful exercise in Bible reading. Because you have fallen into sexual sin.

Either at some time in the past and your conscience and heart are still raw and painful because of it, or it may even be in the present. Now I want you to know now that before the end of this sermon I'm going to say something about repentance and forgiveness.

Proverbs chapter 5, just taken by itself, could bring a person to the brink of despair because it's very tough. But it's not the whole story of the Bible's teaching about adultery and sexual sin.

For those who repent, there is indeed forgiveness from God. So please do bear that in mind just for now and I'll say more about it a little bit later. Alright, well let's turn to the text now.

[7 : 10] Chapter 5, verse 1. And we'll start with verse 1. My son. My son. Now somebody might want to say, why is all this addressed to the son and not apparently to the daughter?

Another way of putting that question would be to ask whether this book of Proverbs might not fall foul of equal opportunities thinking. Is Solomon more interested in teaching his sons than he is his daughters?

Well perhaps there are two answers to this question. The first answer is to remember the historical context in which this was written. And that will tell us that Solomon is educating his sons rather than his daughters because in the 10th century BC when Solomon reigned and in most of human history across the globe, the son is the next head of the family.

Therefore, he has a level of leadership and responsibility that the daughter will not have. Now Solomon is well aware of the great influence that a mother will have in the godly home.

You've only got to look across to chapter 6, verse 20 to see that the son must keep his father's commandment and his mother's teaching as well. The mother is very important in the family.

[8 : 26] And the book of Proverbs gives the godly wife and mother high praise and great honour in the very final chapter of Proverbs in chapter 31 which I hope we might look at at some future point.

So the godly woman is a person of great significance in the book of Proverbs. But it's going to be the son who has to take responsibility for leading his household in the next generation.

And that's why Solomon speaks to him. My second answer to this question why the son and not the daughter is that in the matter of sexual temptation young men on the whole are more vulnerable and ill-disciplined than young women.

Now there are ill-disciplined young women about. Of course that's true. And in our own society in Britain that has become more of a problem in the last decade or two. But in general a young man is more likely to fall for a pretty female face than vice versa.

The young man of course will think that he's very tough and independent and brave and bold and macho. While the truth is of course that he's frail and vulnerable and easily led up the garden path.

[9 : 37] Many a young man has ended up up the garden path and wished that he never had opened the garden gate. But more of that a bit later. So let me take this chapter now under three headings.

First we're shown the corruption beneath the charm. The corruption beneath the charm. Let me read verse 3 again.

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil. Now the idea behind this forbidden woman and you'll see exactly the same word comes in verse 20 and again in chapter 7 verse 5 the forbidden woman appears there.

The idea is that she's forbidden simply because she's not this young man's wife. In fact the forbidden woman in chapter 7 as we'll see in a moment is explicitly a married woman and we can assume that the woman of chapter 5 is also somebody else's wife.

So the young man has no business to be with her having a conversation with her when nobody else is around. And clearly she is trying to seduce him because chapter 5 verse 3 her lips drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil.

[10 : 57] What verse 3 means is that what she says to the young man is very attractive. Honey after all is a delightful food. Most of us love honey. And when verse 3 says that this woman's lips drip honey the meaning is not so much that her lips seem to be very sweet to kiss but rather that the words that her lips say are hard to resist.

It's really about the words she says. And if you look across to chapter 7 you'll see exactly the kind of words that her lips say. This wayward wife as she's enticing a foolish young man.

If you turn over the page to chapter 7 verse 15 I think you'll see what I mean. The scene is set in the foregoing verses we have darkness falling if you look at verse 9 and we have the young man who's walking along close to the woman's house where he should not be and then she boldly and brazenly comes out of the house takes his face in her hands and kisses him and then she says now here are the lips dripping honey look at what she says in verse 15 so now I've come out to meet you to seek you eagerly and I have found you I've spread my couch with coverings coloured linens from Egyptian linen I've perfumed my bed with myrrh aloes and cinnamon come let us take our fill of love till morning let us delight ourselves with love for my husband is not at home he has gone on a long journey he took a bag of money with him at full moon presumably many days hence he will come home in other words the coast is clear my silly husband is far from home come inside and he does the poor fool he does now those are the honeyed words beautiful fabrics lovely perfumes an absent husband no doubt other things too so back to chapter 5 verse 3 verse 3 in chapter 5 shows us the charm the allurements but thank God for verses 4 to 6 because it's those verses that reveal the corruption beneath the charm she appears so lovely and desirable in verse 3 but she's not the savage truth is now laid bare look at verse 4 look at those first words in verse 4 in the end and these episodes always have an end an end point in the end she's as bitter as wormwood she's as sharp as a sword there's nothing sweet about adultery and verses 5 and 6 take us still further and tell us what the true end of all this is and that is death the young man will always of course try to kid himself he'll say to himself this is just a bit of harmless fun it's sowing a few wild oats it's not serious it has no significant consequences but verses 5 and 6 just run your eye over those verses again they show us just how serious it all is these verses are telling our young man that if he steps across that woman's threshold he's putting his feet on the road to death death marriage is a source of life and strength and joy but adultery is like taking poison it's a toxin it breaks a person down it hastens their destruction and verse 6 makes a further chilling point this woman who leads the young man astray is not interested in the path to life she doesn't even ponder it her ways are far from the Lord she wanders from him but she's not even aware of it she doesn't know it and the implication is that her influence will make the young man become like her he will become hardened to the things of God his ways will wander but eventually he will become oblivious to that fact adultery will make him forget God now it would be exactly the same for any of us if any of us decided to engage in adultery the last thing we would want to do would be to come to church we wouldn't be able to face

Christian friends we couldn't bear to listen to Bible preaching we'd harden our hearts we'd cauterize our consciences we couldn't pretend that we loved the Lord or loved his people or loved the Bible we'd simply stay away from Christian meetings and eventually we wouldn't even be aware of what we had left behind we'd be on the high road to death but by that stage we would neither know nor care so there's the first thing we must notice the corruption beneath the charm now second we're shown the high price of infidelity from verses 7 to 14 now the actual price of infidelity is described in verses 9 to 14 but let's have a look first at verses 7 and 8 and now oh sons listen to me 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 there's the command that will make the young man sit up and take notice keep your way far from her says the father now look at the young man across in chapter 7 verse 8 let's go back there look where dusk happens to take him he passes along the street near her corner he takes the road to her house in the twilight what is he playing at doesn't he realise that if he puts himself in the way of temptation it's no surprise if he comes to grief so the wise father says back in chapter 5 verse 8 keep away don't go near it's tough advice isn't it but it's absolutely necessary now how might this apply to us well let me put it in very practical terms from a man's point of view as this is written to the son it may be that at your work at your place of work there's a female colleague who is becoming an unbearable temptation wouldn't it be best to leave your place of work altogether wouldn't it be far better to be unemployed for a while than to fall into adultery and spiritual ruin or perhaps the temptation is not in the form of a particular individual it may be a temptation to adultery in the mind looking at pornographic images on the internet for example or on films or television wouldn't it be far better brother to get rid of the computer or the television than to be hooked into habits of mind which corrupt and ruin it is possible to live without televisions and computers it may be difficult for practical reasons but it's possible far better to put the computer

I mean this seriously and literally into the wheelie bin far better to do that than to have it wrecking a man's life sometimes we need to take ruthless action with ourselves if we're going to walk with the Lord and not fall away from him so verse 8 keep away from her my son don't go near her door lest verse 9 you see lest and here comes the true and shocking price of marital infidelity from verse 9 to verse 14 this is painful friends isn't it but we've got to look steadily at this so that we can be armed we badly need to be armed these verses are here for our good it won't do to take the way of the world and pretend that these things simply don't matter so what are these verses here from verse 9 to verse 14 really teaching us I think two main things the first is that adultery will undermine a man's strength and integrity one of my commentaries by Derek

[19 : 27] Kidner says this this is a strong sentence but I think it's true he says adultery dissipates irrevocably the powers a man has been given to invest dissipates irrevocably the powers a man has been given to invest in other words look at verse 9 your honour is taken from you you cease to be an honourable man merciless people will begin to take advantage of you strangers will rob you of your strength as verse 10 puts it isn't this exactly what happens that a person loses his honour I'm not going to name any names but just think of a number of high profile people people very much in the public eye who are known to have been involved in sexual immorality what happens is their integrity becomes deeply tarnished and it never recovers think of those moments when a leading politician or perhaps entertainer or sportsman is shown to be an adulterer or to spend his time with prostitutes that man loses the respect of the world he becomes the butt of jokes he can no longer be taken seriously at one level he can no longer be deeply trusted ever something has gone from that man irrevocably his trustworthiness leeches out of his character and nothing can stop the leeching that's what verses 9 and 10 are all about it's a high price to pay but secondly this man is overwhelmed by guilt and self reproach look at verse 11 at the end of your life that's a telling phrase isn't it at the end of your life all of us would like to end well all of us would like to have peace of mind in the final years of our lives but not this man verse 11 at the end of your life you groan when your flesh and body are consumed that might be a reference to sexually transmitted disease but it may simply be a way of talking about the bodily weakness of old age and what does this groaning unhappy man say as he looks back over the course of his life look at verse 12 how I hated discipline what a fool

I was for thinking that ill discipline could bring me happiness how foolish I was to despise reproof my friends my parents they strongly advised me not to get mixed up in sexual sin but I despised their warnings I thought I knew better if only I had known then what I know now verse 13 I didn't listen I had good teachers godly instructors but I turned a death ear to them and where did this man end up look at verse 14 I'm at the brink of utter ruin here I am late on in my life I should be enjoying a happy peaceful old age but I've ended up a wretched specimen I'm on the brink of ruin and it's public knowledge look at the last phrase of verse 14 in the assembled congregation god's people know all about me and that magnifies my sense of shame and humiliation the fact is friends that these things always become known a man may think

I'll do all this in secret it's just a matter between me and her but it's never like that it always comes out so this section between verse 7 and 14 stands as a warning to us adultery and infidelity carry a huge price tag a man's integrity is undermined and he becomes overwhelmed by guilt and self reproach well friends we have better news to come in the latter part of the chapter so let's look third now at a wonderful alternative to all these horrors the wonderful alternative held out before us is the beauty and joy of a faithful marriage and that's what verses 15 to 19 are all about and these verses remember are part of the Lord's teaching the Lord's commentary on the seventh commandment when you look at the seventh commandment just by itself it looks so stern and fierce doesn't it you shall not commit adultery it appears so negative there's that great big knot

N-O-T in the middle of it but its negative fierceness is precisely designed to protect the joy and delight of faithful marriage you shall not commit adultery because faithful marriage is so delightful and so right that's part of the unspoken words of that seventh commandment so let's look at these verses we have a lovely H2O image in verses 15 to 18 just to run your eye over that water cistern wells springs streams and fountains no the writer has not suddenly taken leave of his senses and started talking about ecology or water shortages it's not that he's simply using a poetic picture here and in this picture of pure good water he's showing us that a faithful marriage produces streams of blessing water sustains life and fruitfulness on the earth doesn't it and in the same way a faithful marriage brings great blessing not only to the husband and wife but to lots of other people as well to their children to their friends their church their community and words like this written in a dry country like Israel where water is such a valuable commodity would be so powerful it's a bit different here in Scotland isn't it where we take water rather for granted when my family and

I moved from England the dry east midlands of England to Scotland the west of Scotland five or so years ago one of our friends looked at us and said to me but won't it be awfully wet and dark up there and I said it might be yes but it's lovely friends isn't it terrific when we get a dry day the lovely wet lovely wet west of Scotland there's nothing like it water everywhere but here in verses 15 to 18 these are verses written in a very dry country a very thirsty country and in that dry atmosphere a faithful marriage is seen as a source of life and blessing but the point of these verses the point of these water image verses is to say that marriage is exclusive this spring of water this blessing and joy is for a man and his wife alone it's not for others to share in sex is for marriage not for adultery that's what it means drink water from your own system should this delight and blessing be shared with others of course not should your springs be scattered abroad no let them be for yourself alone as verse 17 puts it that's interesting isn't it so much in the

[26 : 46] Christian life is for sharing with many other people we share our time our love our money our energy our activities our friendships so much is shared but not this thing this is exclusive to a man and his wife and when a man and his wife are faithful to each other lifelong their fidelity is a source of streams of blessing just think of those happy faithful marriages that you know that you're close to don't they build up the church don't they warm our hearts in the midst of the sorry drab sex abusing world that we live in a faithful marriage is a fountain of life and a great joy and look on to the rest of verse 18 and verse 19 as well the young man under instruction is being urged by his wise father to appreciate and rejoice in his wife what the father really is saying to his son there is my son the bedroom when you're married is not just for going to sleep in do you appreciate what you've got there Benjamin well wake up and attend to your matrimonial duties and let them put a smile on your face my boy isn't he saying that it's striking isn't it how within this one chapter within one chapter wrong sex is being strongly warned against but right sex is being greatly recommended now that's the bible's way people who haven't read their bibles will sometimes say that the bible is anti-sex it is no such thing it's anti the wrong use of sex of course anti-adultery anti-gay sex but it's strongly in favour of sex within marriage not just as a duty but as a joy are verses 18 and 19 verses of duty or verses of joy well you don't need me to answer that question do you and there's another implication to all this not only is sex within marriage good but marriage itself is good very good and on the strength of verses 15 to 19 pastors christian pastors can encourage young adults to marry unless there's a good reason not to there will be good reasons in some cases not to there's been a trend I think in the last 20 or 30 years for younger christian adults to be rather shy of marriage or at least to be very hesitant rather fearful of marrying and I think we should resist this trend there are reasons for the trend which I guess we can understand the institution of marriage in the western world has been greatly undermined for the last 50 years or so divorce has become much more common and much easier to obtain and many younger people have looked at the mistakes that their parents have made and they've said we must not repeat those mistakes in our generation we must protect ourselves against all that sadness and grief that we've seen others going through so the result has been that people who are not christians have often lived together without the commitment of marriage and people who are christians knowing that living together is not a godly option have hung back and have been anxious about taking what seems to be a very big risk but the bible encourages us to marry not all of us not all god gives some people the gift or the ability to live the christian life robustly and well and fruitfully without marrying paul explains that in 1 corinthians 7 but most of us are able to marry and would find that marriage is a blessing just look again at verses 18 and 19 i won't read them out again you can read them for yourself isn't that a blessing if that is not a picture of blessing then i am the abominable snowman

well i promised earlier that i would say something about repentance and forgiveness for those who have gone astray in this area of sex thank god sexual sin is not unforgivable think of king david in the old testament he's described as a man after god's own heart he loved the lord passionately he learned to trust the lord he accepted the high calling and the great responsibility given to him by god to be the king of israel he worked hard in his kingly responsibilities he fought the lord's battles against the lord's enemies he's one of the great men of god in the bible and jesus the son of god delighted also to be called the son of david but as you know from the second book of samuel one day he saw a beautiful woman a married woman and he wanted her and because he was the king he devised a means of having her husband killed so that he could then have her as a new wife it was an adulterous marriage and he had no right to bath sheba but he got his way because he was the king now when his friend nathan the prophet confronted him with his sin david was deeply conscience stricken and he repented deeply and sincerely and nathan told him straight away that the lord had forgiven him now one reason why that story is recorded in the bible is to teach bible readers everywhere that god is willing to forgive those who fall into sexual sin when there is real repentance it's a message of great comfort to us not least because every one of us has fallen into sexual sin in the mind in our thoughts we all need forgiveness at one level look again at proverbs 5 verses 7 to 14 the man described here is not a man like david this man in proverbs 5 is unrepentant do you remember from verse 11 he reaches the end of his life and he's filled with remorse precisely because he has not repented verses 12 and 13 there are heartbreaking i hated i hated discipline i despised reproof i didn't listen to those who are wiser than myself and now i'm on the brink of ruin but david did listen to discipline and reproof the prophet came to him spoke very directly to him and david turned to god and repented so those who have fallen into sexual sin can either be like david tender hearted and repentant or like this unhappy man of proverbs 5 verse 14 whose life ends in ruin and dishonor and without god if this is you if this is you be like david and the lord will forgive you as he forgave david there are many christians in the world who would testify to the way the lord has brought them through adultery to confession and repentance and a wonderful new start in christian life and service don't despair friends don't despair come to him ask to be forgiven you might even want to use david's own prayer of confession and repentance in psalm 51 and make that your own well there's proverbs chapter 5 it stands in scripture like a lighthouse on the rocks as a powerful warning to all of us we need to take it to heart verse 1 my son be attentive to my wisdom incline your ear to my understanding

and look at verse 21 for a man's ways are before the eyes of the lord and he ponders all his paths let's bow our heads and we'll pray you know our dear father all the ins and outs of the hearts of each of us you know what goes on inside our thoughts you know what has happened to in our lives you know dear father where repentance and forgiveness are needed you know the frailty within us that needs to be shored up and strengthened against temptation and we pray dear father that you will have mercy on each one of us because we're frail and we tell you again of our frailty please enable us to live rightly in this area of our sex life and sexuality we know it would be so easy to fall to dishonor your name and indeed to put our feet on the road to ruin so please have mercy upon us and may our lives whether we're single or married bring glory to you pleasure to your heart and honour to the name of Jesus

Christ in whose name we pray Amen Amen