

**Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.**

**Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.**

**(Proverbs 5:15–23)**

## Introduction

Proverbs 5 serves as a warning from a father to his son about sexual immorality. Solomon warns his son about the temptations of seduction. Clearly, *sexual* seduction is at the core of his admonitions, but I want to suggest that the matter of seduction, more generally speaking, is in view here as well. This is in keeping with the presence of the two contrasting figurative women in these opening chapters of Proverbs – Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly.

Lady Folly seeks to seduce those who are in covenant relationship with God. She seeks to lead them astray towards the more sensual and immediate or tangible self-gratification that she offers. As John addresses the Christian, we are always in danger of heeding the call of that which is fallen and fading (1 John 2:15–17).

So, there is much here for every Christian – married or unmarried. Nevertheless, marriage is clearly in view (vv. 15ff) and we would be remiss to ignore that. It could be said that, in the first fourteen verses, condemnation of sexual infidelity is the theme, whereas the remainder of the chapter celebrates sexual fidelity. We can go further: This latter section serves as a celebration of the marriage relationship between a natural man and a natural woman.

Without rehashing all that was said last time, let's make a few important considerations from this text – particularly the latter section.

## Men and Women

First, what is said in these verses has application for women as well as men. Clearly, the seductive woman has a skewed view of sexual behaviour. But it is equally true that men are very often guilty of seducing women. Therefore, women need to beware of foolish men as much as men need to beware of foolish women.

Sexual sin is not a problem for men alone. Statistics for 2016 tell us that, in that calendar year, on just one website – the largest pornographic website in the world – people watched 4.6 billion hours of porn. At age 11, average child has been exposed to Internet pornography. This includes 93% of boys and 62% of girls. Some 33% of women aged 25 and under admit to searching for porn at least once a month, with 56% of women admitting to having done so at least once.

Just as fathers are to train their sons for sexual purity, so a father must take responsibility for his daughter's sexual purity. This seems to be the thrust behind the rather strange-sounding instruction in Deuteronomy 22:13–21. If a woman accused of having lost her virginity before marriage was found guilty, she was to be stoned in front of her father's house – because it was assumed that he would take responsibility for her sexual purity. Genesis 34 offers a sad account of brothers taking responsibility for their sister's sexual fidelity rather than a father doing so for his daughter's.

Fathers, guard your daughters. Fathers, warn your daughters. Daughters, listen to your fathers. Fathers and daughters, turn a deaf ear to the folly of the world. The world claims that a father should have no say in whom his daughter dates or marries. The world suggest that sexual experience prepares one for marriage. Curfews are old fashioned, says the world, and virginity no longer an issue. The unbelieving world says that how we speak about the opposite sex is irrelevant. The Bible portrays a very different picture.

The #MeToo movement provides conclusive evidence that there is a problem in our world. We need to take it seriously.

## Same-Sex Attraction

Second, we could address from this passage the issue of same-sex attraction. It is not explicit in the text, but the principles may indeed be implicit. The same principles apply. That is, we must beware of the perversion of what God has provided as a gift.

If wisdom demands awareness of the dangers of sexual seduction, this must also apply to those who struggle with sexual desires for those of the same sex.

We need to face some realities. Same sex attraction has always been a reality in our fallen world. Same sex attraction is not itself a sin; it becomes sinful when acted upon, either in thought or action. For those struggling with this, pay heed to guard your heart, to guard your desires, to guard your body. The bible only recognises the legitimacy of sexual activity within the confines of a heterosexual monogamous marriage. This includes thoughts and actions.

## Objectification of Women

Third, we must emphasise that this passage in no way justifies the objectifying of women. Neither does it endorse viewing a wife as merely a means towards sexual gratification. If we are not careful, we might be guilty of misinterpreting and misapplying vv. 15–20 in such a way that a wife is viewed merely as a sex object – a receptacle for the fulfilment of a husband’s sexual appetite. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The word translated “breasts” in v. 19 could be translated “affections.” The intent of the passage is to emphasise a loving relationship between a husband and wife, not a lustful abuse of one another.

Sadly, throughout church history, passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:1–5 have been abused – particularly by men – to justify self-centred, lustful and even abusive sexual behaviour towards their wife. Again, to so interpret this is to pervert both the intent of both the passage and the gift of sex in marriage.

In a recent article, Darby Strickland addresses this very point. She rightly calls such behaviour “sexual abuse in marriage.” Note her observations. I quote at length.

Sexual desire perverted by entitlement damages a couple’s sexual relationship in many ways. Here are a few examples of what it looks like:

Unrelenting pressure. Most couples need to work out differences in sexual desire or appetite, but what I am talking about here is a husband pleading for or demanding more sex in such a way that the pressure never lets up. Sex-on-demand has become an expectation or a “right” within the marriage.

I have found this pattern to be the most destructive in relationships where the husband is also disengaged from other foundational areas in the marriage such as parenting, household management, and connecting relationally.

Callous disregard. There are many occasions where sex is neither desired nor conceivable: an illness, a new baby, a particularly difficult day, a house full of guests, or after an abusive rant. But instead of yielding and caring for the whole being of his wife, a common

characteristic of an entitled husband is to disregard his wife's circumstances and expect or demand that sex proceed as usual.

Coercion. Manipulation in the form of threats may also be used, forcing the victim to submit to unwanted sexual acts out of fear or guilt.... The threats do not have to be spoken; oftentimes wives experience punishments without explanation.

Violation. The worst sexual violation is rape, but there are many types of violation. These patterns are disturbing and have no place in a godly marriage.

Marriage does not equal consent. It does not obligate spouses to participate in any sexual act at any time. But devastatingly, many Christian women have come to believe that sex-on-demand is their "wifely duty." Thus, they have a hard time separating being violated from what they have come to believe is their responsibility. Confusion, shame, and guilt are compounded.

Those suffering from these distorted, abusive demands should not be left questioning what God says about such evils. The Apostle Paul speaks clearly here. "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming" (Col. 3:5–6). Paul is calling on us to eradicate all sexual sin that stands against our identity in Christ—*any* sexual impurity. He is not setting a low bar here and saying "just don't cheat on your spouses." He is saying: Wipe out all sexual covetousness—all your greedy taking—for all sexual impurities deserve the wrath of God.

## Celebrating Marriage

Fourth, this passage *does* celebrate marriage. This should be obvious. Marriage is God's gift to humanity. And a part of this good gift from God is the expression of oneness through physical, sexual, one-flesh unity (Genesis 2:24). Married couples should make the most of this. But again, the *relationship* of marriage is to be celebrated, not merely the *physical* aspect of marriage.

I have spoken with countless widows and widowers over the years, and as they reminisce, they invariably talk about missing the company and partnership, rather than the physical relationship, of their partner.

In the context, of course, Solomon is referencing the physical. However this is actually a small part of the marriage relationship. We do much potential damage, and we create potential dangers, when we emphasise the sexual aspect of the marriage relationship. This is not the only or the most important aspect of marriage.

## Celebrating Marriage

Proverbs 5:15–23

Doug Van Meter

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If we are overly focused on sex in marriage, we may well set each other up for disappointment and disillusionment. If sex is our obsession, we will miss the point of marriage, which is to picture the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:32).

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