

CHAPTER 5

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of Proverbs
2. To write the same things, in other words, ought not to be grievous, for it is safe, ~~SOBE~~ Philippians 3:1. Here is,

- I.** An exhortation to get acquaintance with and submit to the laws of wisdom in general (v. 2).
- II.** A particular caution against the sin of whoredom (v. 3-14).
- III.** Remedies prescribed against that sin.
 - 1.** Conjugal love (v. 15-20).
 - 2.** A regard to God's omniscience (v. 21).
 - 3.** A dread of the miserable end of wicked people (v. 22, 23).
And all little enough to arm young people against those fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

~~SOBE~~ PROVERBS 5:1-14

CAUTIONS AGAINST SENSUALITY

Here we have,

- I.** A solemn preface, to introduce the caution which follows, v. 1, 2. Solomon here addresses himself to his son, that is, to all young men, as unto his children, whom he has an affection for and some influence upon. In God's name, he demands attention; for he writes by divine inspiration, and is a prophet, though he begins not with, *Thus saith the Lord*. “Attend, and bow thy ear; not only hear what is said, and read what is written, but apply thy mind to it and consider it diligently.” To gain attention he urges,
 - 1.** The excellency of his discourse: “It is *my wisdom, my understanding*; if I undertake to teach thee wisdom I cannot prescribe any thing to be more properly called so; moral philosophy is my philosophy, and that which is to be learned in my school.”
 - 2.** The usefulness of it: “Attend to what I say,”

(1.) “That thou mayest act wisely — *that thou mayest regard discretion.*” Solomon's lectures are not designed to fill our heads with notions, with matters of nice speculation, or doubtful disputation, but to guide us in the government of ourselves, that we may act prudently, so as becomes us and so as will be for our true interest.

(2.) “That thou mayest speak wisely — *that thy lips may keep knowledge,* and thou mayest have it ready at thy tongue's end” (as we say), “for the benefit of those with whom thou dost converse.” The priest's lips are said to *keep knowledge* (³⁸⁸Malachi 2:7); but those that are ready and mighty in the scriptures may not only in their devotions, but in their discourses, be spiritual priests.

II. The caution itself, and that is to abstain from fleshly lusts, from adultery, fornication, and all uncleanness. Some apply this figuratively, and by the adulterous woman here understand idolatry, or false doctrine, which tends to debauch men's minds and manners, or the sensual appetite, to which it may as fitly as any thing be applied; but the primary scope of it is plainly to warn us against seventh-commandment sins, which youth is so prone to, the temptations to which are so violent, the examples of which are so many, and which, where admitted, are so destructive to all the seeds of virtue in the soul that it is not strange that Solomon's cautions against it are so very pressing and so often repeated. Solomon here, as a faithful watchman, gives fair warning to all, as they regard their lives and comforts, to dread this sin, for it will certainly be their ruin. Two things we are here warned to take heed of: —

1. That we do not listen to the charms of this sin. It is true *the lips of a strange woman drop as a honey-comb* (v. 3); the pleasures of fleshly lust are very tempting (like the wine that *gives its colour in the cup and moves itself aright*); its mouth, the kisses of its mouth, the words of its mouth, are *smoother than oil*, that the poisonous pill may go down glibly and there may be no suspicion of harm in it. But consider,

(1.) How fatal the consequences will be. What fruit will the sinner have of his honey and oil when the end will be,

[1.] The terrors of conscience: *It is bitter as wormwood*, v. 4. What was luscious in the mouth rises in the stomach and turns sour there; it cuts, in the reflection, like *a two-edged sword*; take it which way you will, it wounds. Solomon could speak by experience, ³⁸⁹Ecclesiastes 7:26.

[2.] The torments of hell. If some that have been guilty of this sin have repented and been saved, yet the direct tendency of the sin is to destruction of body and soul; the *feet* of it *go down to death*, nay, they *take hold on hell*, to pull it to the sinner, as if the damnations slumbered too long, v. 5. Those that are entangled in this sin should be reminded that there is but a step between them and hell, and that they are ready to drop into it.

(2.) Consider how false the charms are. The adulteress flatters and speaks fair, her words are honey and oil, but she will deceive those that hearken to her: *Her ways are movable, that thou canst not know them*; she often changes her disguise, and puts on a great variety of false colours, because, if she be rightly known, she is certainly hated. Proteus-like, she puts on many shapes, that she may keep in with those whom she has a design upon. And what does she aim at with all this art and management? Nothing but to keep them from *pondering the path of life*, for she knows that, if they once come to do that, she shall certainly lose them. Those are *ignorant of Satan's devices* who do not understand that the great thing he drives at in all his temptations is,

[1.] To keep them from choosing the path of life, to prevent them from being religious and from going to heaven, that, being himself shut out from happiness, he may keep them out from it.

[2.] In order hereunto, to keep them from pondering the path of life, from considering how reasonable it is that they should walk in that path, and how much it will be for their advantage. Be it observed, to the honour of religion, that it certainly gains its point with all those that will but allow themselves the liberty of a serious thought and will weigh things impartially in an even balance, and that the devil has no way of securing men in his interests but by diverting them with continual amusements of one kind or another from the calm and sober consideration of the *things that belong to their peace*. And uncleanness is a sin that does as much as any thing blind the understanding, sear the conscience, and keep people from pondering the path of life. Whoredom *takes away the heart*,
Hosea 4:11.

2. That we do not approach the borders of this sin, v. 7, 8.

(1.) This caution is introduced with a solemn preface: "*Hear me now therefore, O you children!* whoever you are that read or hear these lines, take notice of what I say, and mix faith with it, treasure it up, and *depart*

not from the words of my mouth, as those will do that hearken to the words of the strange woman. Do not only receive what I say, for the present merely, but cleave to it, and let it be ready to thee, and of force with thee, when thou art most violently assaulted by the temptation.”

(2.) The caution itself is very pressing: “*Remove thy way far from her; if thy way should happen to lie near her, and thou shouldst have a fair pretence of being led by business within the reach of her charms, yet change thy way, and alter the course of it, rather than expose thyself to danger; come not nigh the door of her house; go on the other side of the street, nay, go through some other street, though it be about.*” This intimates,

[1.] That we ought to have a very great dread and detestation of the sin. We must fear it as we would a place infected with the plague; we must loathe it as the odour of carrion, that we will not come near. *Then* we are likely to preserve our purity when we conceive a rooted antipathy to all fleshly lusts.

[2.] That we ought industriously to avoid every thing that may be an occasion of this sin or a step towards it. Those that would be kept from harm must keep out of harm's way. Such tinder there is in the corrupt nature that it is madness, upon any pretence whatsoever, to come near the sparks. If we thrust ourselves into temptation, we mocked God when we prayed, *Lead us not into temptation.*

[3.] That we ought to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, and not to be so confident of the strength of our own resolutions as to venture upon the brink of sin, with a promise to ourselves that *hitherto we will come and no further.*

[4.] That whatever has become a snare to us and an occasion of sin, though it be as a *right eye* and a *right hand*, we must *pluck it out, cut it off, and cast it from us*, must part with that which is dearest to us rather than hazard our own souls; this is our Saviour's command, ⁴⁰⁵Matthew 5:28-30.

(3.) The arguments which Solomon here uses to enforce this caution are taken from the same topic with those before, the many mischiefs which attend this sin.

[1.] It blasts the reputation. “Thou wilt *give thy honour unto others* (v. 9); thou wilt lose it thyself; thou wilt put into the hand of each of thy neighbours a stone to throw at thee, for they will all, with good reason, cry shame on thee, will despise thee, and trample on thee, as a foolish men.” Whoredom is a sin that makes men contemptible and base, and no man of sense or virtue will care to keep company with one that keeps company with harlots.

[2.] It wastes the time, gives *the years*, the years of youth, the flower of men's time, *unto the cruel*, “that base lust of thine, which with the utmost cruelty *wars against the soul*, that base harlot which pretends an affection for thee, but really hunts for the precious life.” Those years that should be given to the honour of a gracious God are spent in the service of a cruel sin.

[3.] It ruins the estate (v. 10): “*Strangers* will be *filled with thy wealth*, which thou art but entrusted with as a steward for thy family; and the fruit of *thy labours*, which should be provision for thy own house, will be in *the house of a stranger*, that neither has right to it nor will ever thank thee for it.”

[4.] It is destructive to the health, and shortens men's days: *Thy flesh and thy body* will be *consumed* by it, v. 11. The lusts of uncleanness not only *war against the soul*, which the sinner neglects and is in no care about, but they war against the body too, which he is so indulgent of and is in such care to please and pamper, such deceitful, such foolish, such hurtful lusts are they. Those that give themselves to work uncleanness with greediness waste their strength, throw themselves into weakness, and often have their bodies filled with loathsome distempers, by which the number of their months is cut off in the midst and they fall unpitied sacrifices to a cruel lust.

[5.] It will fill the mind with horror, if ever conscience be awakened. “Though thou art merry now, *sporting thyself in thy own deceivings*, yet thou wilt certainly *mourn at the last*, v. 11. Thou art all this while making work for repentance, and laying up matter for vexation and torment in the reflection, when the sin is set before thee in its own colours.” Sooner or later it will bring sorrow, either when the soul is humbled and brought to repentance or when the *flesh and body are consumed*, either by sickness, when conscience flies in the sinner's face, or by the grave; when the body is rotting there, the soul is racking in the torments of hell, where the worm

dies not, and “*Son, remember,*” is the constant peal [plea?]. Solomon here brings in the convinced sinner reproaching himself, and aggravating his own folly. He will then most bitterly lament it. *First*, That because he hated to be reformed he therefore hated to be informed, and could not endure either to be taught his duty (*How have I hated* not only the discipline of being instructed, but the *instruction* itself, though all true and good!) or to be told of his faults — *My heart despised reproof*, v. 12. He cannot but own that those who had the charge of him, parents, ministers, had done their part; they had been his teachers; they had instructed him, had given him good counsel and fair warning (v. 13); but to his own shame and confusion does he speak it, and therein justifies God in all the miseries that were brought upon him, he had not *obeyed their voice*, for indeed he *never inclined his ear to those that instructed him*, never minded what they said nor admitted the impressions of it. Note, Those who have had a good education and do not live up to it will have a great deal to answer for another day; and those who will not now remember what they were taught, to conform themselves to it, will be made to remember it as an aggravation of their sin, and consequently of their ruin. *Secondly*, That by the frequent acts of sin the habits of it were so rooted and confirmed that his heart was fully set in him to commit it (v. 14): *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly*. When he came into the synagogue, or into the courts of the temple, to worship God with other Israelites, his unclean heart was full of wanton thoughts and desires and his eyes of adultery. Reverence of the place and company, and of the work that was doing, could not restrain him, but he was almost as wicked and vile there as any where. No sin will appear more frightful to an awakened conscience than the profanation of holy things; nor will any aggravation of sin render it more exceedingly sinful than the place we are honoured with in the congregation and assembly, and the advantages we enjoy thereby. Zimri and Cozbi avowed their villany *in the sight of Moses and all the congregation* (⁰²⁵⁶Numbers 25:6), and heart-adultery is as open to God, and must needs be most offensive to him, when we draw nigh to him in religious exercises. *I was in all evil* in defiance of the magistrates and judges, and their assemblies; so some understand it. Others refer it to the evil of punishment, not to the evil of sin: “I was made an example, a spectacle to the world. I was under almost all God's sore judgments *in the midst of the congregation of Israel*, set up for a mark. *I stood up and cried in the congregation,*” ⁰²⁵⁸Job 30:28. Let that be avoided which will be thus rued at last.

CONJUGAL FIDELITY ENJOINED

Solomon, having shown the great evil that there is in adultery and fornication, and all such lewd and filthy courses, here prescribes remedies against them.

I. Enjoy with satisfaction the comforts of lawful marriage, which was ordained for the prevention of uncleanness, and therefore ought to be made use of in time, lest it should not prove effectual for the cure of that which it might have prevented. Let none complain that God has dealt unkindly with them in forbidding them those pleasures which they have a natural desire of, for he has graciously provided for the regular gratification of them. “Thou mayest not indeed eat of every tree of the garden, but choose thee out one, which thou pleasest, and of that thou mayest freely eat; nature will be content with that, but lust with nothing.” God, in thus confining men to one, has been so far from putting any hardship upon them that he has really consulted their true interest; for, as Mr. Herbert observes, “*If God had laid all common, certainly man would have been the encloser.*” — Church-porch. Solomon here enlarges much upon this, not only prescribing it as an antidote, but urging it as an argument against fornication, that the allowed pleasures of marriage (however wicked wits may ridicule them, who are factors for the unclean spirit) far transcend all the false forbidden pleasures of whoredom.

1. Let young men marry, marry and not burn. Have *a cistern, a well of thy own* (v. 15), even the *wife of thy youth*, v. 18. *Wholly abstain, or wed.* — Herbert. “The world is wide, and there are varieties of accomplishments, among which thou mayest please thyself.”

2. Let him that is married take delight in his wife, and let him be very fond of her, not only because she is the wife that he himself has chosen and he ought to be pleased with his own choice, but because she is the wife that God in his providence appointed for him and he ought much more to be pleased with the divine appointment, pleased with her because she is his own. *Let thy fountain be blessed* (v. 18); think thyself very happy in her, look upon her as a blessed wife, let her have thy blessing, pray daily for her, and then *rejoice with her*. Those comforts we are likely to have joy of

that are sanctified to us by prayer and the blessing of God. It is not only allowed us, but commanded us, to be pleasant with our relations; and it particularly becomes yoke-fellows to rejoice together and in each other. Mutual delight is the bond of mutual fidelity. It is not only taken for granted that the *bridegroom rejoices over his bride* (^{<261B>}Isaiah 62:5), but given for law. ^{<269B>}Ecclesiastes 9:9, *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life*. Those take not their comforts where God has appointed who are jovial and merry with their companions abroad, but sour and morose with their families at home.

3. Let him be fond of his wife and love her dearly (v. 19): *Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe*, such as great men sometimes kept tame in their houses and played with. Desire no better diversion from severe study and business than the innocent and pleasant conversation of thy own wife; let her lie in thy bosom, as the poor man's ewe-lamb did in his (^{<103B>}2 Samuel 12:3), and do thou repose thy head in hers, and let that *satisfy thee at all times*; and seek not for pleasure in any other. “*Err thou always in her love*. If thou wilt suffer thy love to run into an excess, and wilt be dotingly fond of any body, let it be only of thy own wife, where there is least danger of exceeding.” This is *drinking waters*, to quench the thirst of thy appetite, *out of thy own cistern*, and *running waters*, which are clear, and sweet, and wholesome, *out of thy own well*, v. 15. ^{<417D>}1 Corinthians 7:2, 3.

4. Let him take delight in his children and look upon them with pleasure (v. 16, 17): “Look upon them as streams from thy own pure fountains” (the Jews are said to *come forth out of the waters of Judah*, ^{<281E>}Isaiah 48:1), “so that they are parts of thyself, as the streams are of the fountain. Keep to thy own wife, and thou shalt have,”

(1.) “A numerous offspring, like *rivers of water*, which run in abundance, and they shall be dispersed abroad, matched into other families, whereas those that *commit whoredom shall not increase*,” ^{<390D>}Hosea 4:10.

(2.) “A peculiar offspring, which shall be *only thy own*, whereas the children of whoredom, that are fathered upon thee, are, probably, not so, but, for aught thou knowest, are the offspring of strangers, and yet thou must keep them.”

(3.) “A creditable offspring, which are an honour to thee, and which thou mayest send abroad, and appear with, in the streets, whereas a spurious brood is thy disgrace, and that which thou art ashamed to own.” In this

matter, virtue has all the pleasure and honour in it; justly therefore it is called *wisdom*.

5. Let him then scorn the offer of forbidden pleasures when he is *always ravished with the love* of a faithful virtuous wife; let him consider what an absurdity it will be for him to be *ravished with a strange woman* (v. 20), to be in love with a filthy harlot, and *embrace the bosom of a stranger*, which, if he had any sense of honour or virtue, he would loathe the thoughts of. “Why wilt thou be so sottish, such an enemy to thyself, as to prefer puddle-water, and that poisoned too and stolen, before pure living waters out of thy own well?” Note, If the dictates of reason may be heard, the laws of virtue will be obeyed.

II. “See the eye of God always upon thee and let his fear rule in thy heart,” v. 21. Those that live in this sin promise themselves secrecy (*the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, ^{<3215>}Job 24:15); but to what purpose, when it cannot be hidden from God? For,

1. He sees it. *The ways of man*, all his motions, all his actions, are *before the eyes of the Lord*, all the workings of the heart and all the outgoings of the life, that which is done ever so secretly and disguised ever so artfully. God sees it in a true light, and knows it with all its causes, circumstances, and consequences. He does not cast an eye upon men's ways now and then, but they are always actually in his view and under his inspection; and darest thou sin against God in his sight, and do that wickedness under his eye which thou durst not do in the presence of a man like thyself?

2. He will call the sinner to an account for it; for he not only sees, but *ponders all his goings*, judges concerning them, as one that will shortly judge the sinner for them. Every action is *weighed*, and shall be *brought into judgment* (^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14), which is a good reason why we should *ponder the path of our feet* (^{<2106>}Proverbs 4:26), and so *judge ourselves* that we *may not be judged*.

III. “Foresee the certain ruin of those that go on still in their trespasses.” Those that live in this sin promise themselves impunity, but they deceive themselves; their sin will find them out, v. 22, 23. The apostle gives the sense of these verses in a few words. ^{<5134>}Hebrews 13:4, *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*.

1. It is a sin which men with great difficulty shake off the power of. When the sinner is old and weak his lusts are strong and active, in *calling to remembrance the days of his youth*, ^(23:19) Ezekiel 23:19. Thus *his own iniquities* having *seized the wicked himself* by his own consent, and he having voluntarily surrendered himself a captive to them, he is *held in the cords of his own sins*, and such full possession they have gained of him that he cannot extricate himself, but in the *greatness of his folly* (and what greater folly could there be than to yield himself a servant to such cruel task-masters?) he shall *go astray*, and wander endlessly. Uncleanness is a sin from which, when once men have plunged themselves into it, they very hardly and very rarely recover themselves.

2. It is a sin which, if it be not forsaken, men cannot possibly escape the punishment of; it will unavoidably be their ruin. As their own iniquities do arrest them in the reproaches of conscience and present rebukes (^(7:19) Jeremiah 7:19), so their own iniquities shall arrest them and bind them over to the judgments of God. There needs no prison, no chains; they shall be *holden in the cords of their own sins*, as the fallen angels, being incurably wicked, are thereby *reserved in chains of darkness*. The sinner, who, having been *often reprov'd*, *hardens his neck*, shall *die at length without instruction*. Having had general warnings sufficient given him already, he shall have no particular warnings, but he shall die without seeing his danger beforehand, shall die because he would not receive instruction, but *in the greatness of his folly* would *go astray*; and so shall his doom be, he shall never find the way home again. Those that are so foolish as to choose the way of sin are justly left of God to themselves to go in it till they come to that destruction which it leads to, which is a good reason why we should guard with watchfulness and resolution against the allurements of the sensual appetite.