

## **The Folly of Lust, the Wisdom of God, And The Heart of Man**

Proverbs 6:20-7:27

Summit Christian Fellowship

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### Introduction: The Dream

I want to tell you a story about a man named Tim. Tim was dreaming. He was having the best dream. He was in this amazing home on the coast. In the dream it was his house. Have you ever had those dreams where the emotions you experience during the dream is just as vivid—maybe even more so—than real life. It wasn't just his house, Tim felt at home in this house. The home was beautiful and comfortable—the best kind of house. And behold, the girl of his dreams was there and apparently they were married. She was committed to him. They were sitting by the fireplace drinking wine and eating food that was delicious. He couldn't exactly remember what he was eating but he remembers being blown away with how good it was. His wife was gorgeous. They were talking, but he can't remember what she was saying to him; he only remembered the look on her face: it was one of admiration, desire for him, attraction to him, and a deep respect for him. He could feel the heat of the fire roaring from the fire place and the gentle ocean breeze coming in from the window at the same time—the perfect combination. It was bliss. He felt safe—there were no dangers present. He felt at home—totally comfortable and totally accepted and totally wanted. Tim had the overwhelming feeling that this place was the best place to live on earth. This was Tim's dream. It was one of those real dreams.

The irony of this dream is where Tim was when he was having the dream. Tim was an inmate at one of the highest security prisons in America. Tim was in a cell on death row. Tim's real home in that 9'x7' cell wasn't the paradise that he dreamt. This home was cold, it was dark, and it was lonely. The people he lived with didn't respect him. He was not honored in that place. The food wasn't good. And he was always in danger of being hurt there—no safety guaranteed. And living in that home—in that correctional facility—was without a doubt going to result in his execution by the governing powers.

I made up this story about Tim because I think it is a good illustration of what being tempted with lust is like. Sexual temptation is like dreaming you are in that kind of home when in reality you are living on death row and its only a matter of time before you wake up to the awful awareness of your true condition.

In the story I made up, Tim can't leave his home—it's a correctional facility, it's a prison, but Jesus can free you from the the prison you're living in. You can walk out! The first thing that needs to happen though, is for you to wake up from the dream of sexual temptation. When you are in it, it doesn't feel like a dream. It feels real. But when you wake up, you see it for what it is.

The title for this sermon is “The Folly of Lust, The Wisdom of God, And The Heart of Man.” I mentioned last week that the first nine chapters are an introduction or a prism or a lens through which we are called to see the rest of the Proverbs. Wisdom, I argued, is calling out to be embraced. But so is folly.

[And the kind of folly that is addressed by far more than any other in the first nine chapters is the folly of lust. In fact, the adulterous woman is warned against in particular more than folly in general. And just as wisdom is personified as Lady Wisdom, so the folly of lust is personified in chapter 9 as Dame Folly.

Why so much attention given to this kind of foolishness? Why so much air-time given to this flavor of temptation? I think it is because sexual temptation is paradigmatic of every other temptation. In the Bible, temptation to sin in any way is a kind of spiritual infidelity to God. All sin, therefore, is spiritual adultery. And all sin tempts the same way as sexual temptation. If you understand the dynamics of sexual temptation, you grasp the paradigm of every sin.

So, not only is this topic applicable to every person in this room whether you struggle with sexual sin or not, its stigma should be deflated. What if the stigma was deflated not because we are going easier on sexual sin but because we begin to take every other temptation as seriously as we do the folly of lust? What if we began to feel—not just show—compassion to our brothers and sisters who struggle with sexual sin because the temptation they face is not at all dissimilar to the temptation that we face? What if our desire to proclaim grace to the repentant lover of sexual sin was just as strong as our desire to proclaim grace to the repentant lover of food, money, power, comfort? Fill in the blank. I think a culture would emerge where confession happens. A culture in this church would emerge where sin is not only confessed, but forgiveness is experienced, sinners are set free, sufferers are known and loved by other sinner/sufferers. I think it would be as beautiful as it would be rare. Jesus would be treasured in this place.

May it be so.]

**Proposition: Wake up!**

Last week we heard a call to embrace something, namely God's wisdom. This week there is a different call, and that call is to wake up! Wake up! Don't sleep through this alarm! The format will look like this: First I'll discuss what our Scripture passage calls us to wake up from; then we'll see what we are being called to wake up to. Finally, we'll ask the *how* question, kind of like we did last week. *How* do we wake up? So, God is calling us to wake up (1) from something, (2) to something, and we'll see (3) how this happens.

**First, from what?** We are being called to wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry. I'm using the analogy of a dream because in Proverbs the adulterous woman offers one thing, but ends up giving something altogether different.

With lips that “drip honey” and speech that is “smoother than oil” she entices the young man but as the father-figure states in 5:4,

“in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.”

Do you see? She is offering a dream world that is far different from the reality she gives.

She tries to make you “desire her beauty in your heart” and “capture you with her eyelashes” but the father-figure asks in 6:27,

“can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?”

The fire that we carry next to our chest when we bite of the baited hook of sexual temptation is the inevitable consequences we will face. Proverbs seems to emphasize both the consequences in this life, and the consequences we will face in the next. In other words, present consequences and eternal consequences. Bruce Waltke comments,

“Proverbs assumes her presence but threatens the son with ruin from the community (5:17), with blows and impoverishment from her husband (6:32-35) and ultimately with death from God (5:21-23; 7:23-27).”<sup>1</sup>

Your honor and reputation will be ruined in 5:8ff,

“Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and years to the merciless.”

What about the adulterous woman’s husband? You will have him to deal with. In 6:24ff the father-figure reminds his son,

“for jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts.”

There will be inevitable alienation from the covenant community, in 5:11ff:

“and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, and you say, ‘How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation.’”

Not only this-worldly consequences, but unrepentant sexual sin leads to spiritual, eternal death. As I read earlier in 5:5,

“her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol”

Then in 7:26,

“for many a victim she has laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.”

It’s a dream that in the end becomes a never-ending nightmare. But it doesn’t seem like a nightmare to begin with.

In 7:21 the father-figure says,

“with much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.”

Now, “smooth” can mean two different things: Bruce Waltke comments,

“From the viewpoint of the tempted, her speech is fluent and lubricious; from the father’s, it is slippery and treacherous.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Waltke, Bruce K. (2004-10-30). The Book Of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (Kindle Locations 2449-2450). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup>Waltke, Bruce K. (2004-10-30). The Book Of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (Kindle Locations 6747-6748). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

So her speech is seductive and smooth. And you can tell the tempted person is in a dream-like trance with the following imagery that is used in 7:22ff,

“All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life” . . . Because he is dreaming!

And the call this morning is to wake up! Wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry!

### Idolatry

I say “sexual idolatry” for several reasons. Mainly because what sexual temptation offers is simply a counterfeit version of what God offers.

In chapter 9 wisdom is personified as Lady Wisdom and the folly of sexual sin is personified as Dame Folly. Here Dame Folly seems to mimick Lady Wisdom, only what she ends up giving is very different from that given by Lady Wisdom. Consider that passage as a homework assignment.

I also call this the dream of “sexual idolatry” because as we are overtaken with desire for sexual sin we can often somehow arrive at the conclusion that this is what God wants for us. We end up fusing our sexuality and our religious life. Our moral convictions end up getting shaped by our sexual exploits, and not the other way around. In the story the father-figure tells to his son about the adulterous woman luring the young man who lacks sense, listen to what she tells him in 7:14,

“I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to see you eagerly, and I have found you.”

The adulterous woman is convincing this young man that being with her is somehow helping her fulfill her devotion to God.

But here is the truth: the comfort, respect, admiration, pleasure, and thrill that sexual sin offers can only be experienced permanently and fully under the blessing of the all-wise God. And this blessing is bestowed, not earned by some life of chastity, by the way. King David, who knew God profoundly after repenting from sexual sin with Bathsheba could declare in Psalm 4:6,

“You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.”

Translation, walking with God, knowing God is better than that life.

This isn't to say sexual temptation doesn't offer real pleasure, it's only hollow and short-lived. The author of Hebrews calls the Christian to see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God . . . “that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal” (Hebrews 12:16). I bet that bowl of porrage was good for a moment, but it didn't last and it cost a lot.

Hebrews 11:24 reminds us that Moses chose rather to be “mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24).

Only in the presence of the all-wise God can we experience “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore.”

So whether it is pleasure, or comfort, or security, or the sense that you are wanted, whatever is working to entice you to sexual sin, these can only truly and rightly be found in God.

Wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry. That’s what we are being called to wake up *from*. But what does this passage call us to wake up *to*?

### **Second, To what?**

We are being called to wake up to the reality of God’s superior wisdom.

God’s wise design for sexual activity is reserved for a man and a woman in the context of marriage. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. This is God’s good design. And according to Proverbs, embracing this aspect of God’s wisdom is better than embracing the adulterous woman in sexual temptation.

Listen to what the father-figure says in 5:15ff,

“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?”

But what if you are not married? The uniform voice of Scripture is that following Jesus in a life of purity and abstinence outside of marriage not only honors Jesus as your greatest treasure but is actually more fulfilling than the host of unwise alternatives. Feeling otherwise is an indication that you are still dreaming. Wake up!

### **Third, How do we wake up?**

What if you are just now realizing that all you have ever done is live in this dream world? What if you are thinking, “the dream of sexual sin has been my reality. I want to wake up, but I don’t know how.”

I think the father figure gives some great advice so I’ll make three observations before I close with some final thoughts. I’ll use three words to make these observations: avoidance, wisdom, and heart. And this is answering the question, *How do I wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry to the reality of God’s superior wisdom?*

#### Avoidance

In the story the father-figure tells his son about the gullible young man lured by the wily woman, we see the folly in his failure to avoid her. Listen to 7:6ff,

“For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house . . .”

Listen to the father-figure’s urging in 5:8,

“Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house . . .”

What does this mean for you? Jesus said that if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, lop it off. Are you willing to become war-like and strategic in your commitment to “keep your way far from her”? Doing everything in your power to avoid sexual temptation is really important. But, as Heath Lambert writes in his book *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*, steps and strategies like avoidance

“will never be the long-term fix for your struggle, but doing so can create some space for you to be able to consider the gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

### Wisdom

We need to be filled with God’s wisdom. We wake up by immersed in God’s commands and instruction for our life. Listen to the connection between an attentiveness to the father-figure’s teaching and commands and victory over sexual temptation:

In 5:1ff,

“My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to understanding, that you may keep discretion and your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey . . .”

In 6:20ff,

“My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.”

Then in 7:4,

“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister.’ And call insight your intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.”

If you want to wake up from the dreamworld of sexual temptation, you have to know God’s word. Memorize God’s word. Write out long hand the Scriptures if that is what it takes for you to know them like you know nothing else. This means conversing with the Scriptures before anyone else, Waltke writes,

“looking for and listening to the teaching in the morning before the beginning of work and other social encounters.”<sup>4</sup>

We need God’s word to wake us up from the dream of sexual idolatry!

### Heart

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<sup>3</sup>Page 16

<sup>4</sup>Waltke, Bruce K. (2004-10-30). *The Book Of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (Kindle Location 6729). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

But more than strategies of avoidance and more than an a mere accumulation of Scriptural information, we need God to change our hearts if we are going to wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry. C.H. Spurgeon addresses the futility of mere behavior modification and new information,

*"It is as if, when the reservoir was filled with poisonous or polluted fluid, some sage counsellor should propose that all the piping had better be taken up, and fresh pipes laid down, so that the water might run through fresh channels; but who does not perceive that it would be all in vain, if the fountain-head were polluted, however good the channels. So in vain the rules by which men hope to fashion their lives; in vain the regimen by which we seek to constrain ourselves to the semblance of goodness, unless the heart be right, the very best scheme of life shall fall to the ground, and fail to effect its design." - Spurgeon*

The heart is so important. In 6:20 the father-figure says to the son,

“Do not desire her beauty in your heart.”

Then in 7:25 he says,

“Let not your heart turn aside to her ways.”

It’s one thing to know God’s wisdom for your life, it’s an entirely other matter to have it written on your heart. And we see this hinted at in 7:1-3,

“My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”

If you know your Bible you know that Israel knew the Scriptures, they passed God’s law down from one generation to the next, but what Israel need more than anything was for the law of God to be written on their heart. More than their bodies circumcised, they needed the circumcission of the heart. This is why they went into exile. You can only memorize Scripture so much, what we need even more than education is regeneration. And while Israel is in exile, this is exactly what is promised when the Messiah comes in new covenant mercies.

Listen to Jeremiah 31:31ff,

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . .”

And this is exactly what happens when someone despairs of all efforts at self-salvation and puts their hope in Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, he comes and dwells in our hearts by his Spirit and the very Word of God is written on our hearts.

Lady Folly entices us with the word of her empty promises but Jesus Christ can burn the word of the Living God on us.

Lady Folly offers you everything and gives nothing in return but pain, Jesus takes the pain you deserve and writes the deed of his inheritance on your heart.

There will be no waking up from the dream of sexual idolatry without this essential activity of God in your heart and mine. Then we will wake up and we will sing! We will sing lines like,

“He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me. He speaks, and  
listening to his voice,  
new life the dead receive;  
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.”<sup>5</sup>

And we will sing,

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

What we need when faced with any temptation is God in all his power to give us greater affection for Jesus, the wisdom of God, than we have for foolishness desire for sin.

[Possible close if short on time]

How do we wake up from the dream of sexual idolatry to the reality of God’s superior wisdom? Avoid, wisdom, heart.

### **A Final Appeal: Hope and Exhortation for the Dreamer**

Maybe some of you are thinking, “I want to wake up, but I just can’t. The dream of sexual enticement that I have always lived in still seems more real than Jesus.”

I’m listening to C.S. Lewis’ Space Trilogy right now and in Out of the Silent Planet, listen to the way the sorn describes the eldils to Ransom.”<sup>6</sup>

*“What we call firm things – flesh and earth – seem to the eldil thinner and harder to see, than our light, and more like clouds, and nearly nothing. To us an eldil is a thin, half real body that can go through walls and rocks; to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like clouds.” (Planet 94)*

The gospel realities may seem like phantoms to us not because they are less real than the temptation we face, but actually the reverse: because we are less real than they are. As

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<sup>5</sup>In 1739 Charles Wesley wrote these words in the hymn, *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*,

<sup>6</sup><http://www.charliewstarr.com/c-s-lewis/lewis-course/best-student-papers/dreams-sleep-and-c-s-lewis.html>



you contemplate whether the reality of God's wisdom could actually be superior to the dream you are living in, consider whether the apparent gospel phantom walks through walls because he is less real, or because you are. You will have to decide: are the promises of sexual sin a dream like the one Tim was having from his cell on death row, or are they reality.

[Possible close if short on time]

Finally, it's time to act. Even if you feel like you are still living in the dream, you can't wait to wake up to act. Some of you might be thinking, I want to repent, but I have never woken up from the dream. Sexual sin still feels truer than God's wisdom. I think we make a mistake if we wait for Christ to seem better than sin before we repent. Doing so makes the call of Jesus to deny yourself and die to self meaningless. If there is no dream to wake up from, no life to die to, no self to deny, we trivialize his urgent call to follow him.