March 14/15, 2015

God's Wisdom on Sex

Skillful Living

Proverbs 5

Pastor Bryan Clark

(Video)

Natalie: I was super excited to be married. And now, looking back, I think I was really wanting that to fulfill me. Since I was little, I'd wanted to be married, so it was just one of those things that I was excited and I thought it would fill me up and life would be, you know, all roses.

You know, even though it looks perfect from the outside—like this is what's going on at home—and I just said, "I think I'm leaving my husband"....

Dating went great. It was just exciting and fun and natural.

Dan: I hadn't dated a lot before, but this was completely different.

Natalie: We dated for eight months and then were engaged for four. Well, the day we got married was beautiful. It was in October and it was like the perfect day. It was everything that I'd wanted it to be.

Dan: She thought she was marrying somebody who was completely going to, you know, love her, and her only, and all this kind of stuff.

Natalie: From the first day, I remember feeling alone and kind of shocked.

Dan: Even though I was completely numb to it and thought I was fooling everybody, I mean there was this real vacuum in our relationship from her standpoint. You know, I knew in my heart that it was wrong, and it was just one of those things that you just kept vowing, "Okay, this year it'll be good," you know, and it just wasn't something that you could ever control. So you ended up being kinda stuck. I had started to get on the internet a lot. I'd started to look at pornography more, and so you get not only the fact that you're looking at pornography, which is leading to chatting on line, which is leading…you know, all these things are like these little steps type of a deal. But there's all the lying that goes with that, all the trying to cover it up, all this energy to try to do this. I think in my own heart I could just rationalize it a little bit all the time. It was not really that bad, or, you know, this isn't real so it's not, you know, really like cheating.

Natalie: I think, for me, it was the lies, you know. I mean a relationship is supposed to be built on trust; and when someone's lying to you, there's just this emptiness and this hole. And I remember feeling awful. I mean I felt like, "What is wrong with me?" I think I was hopeful that things would change once we had Gabriel, but it was obvious, you know, right away that having a daughter—someone else in the mix—was sweet, you know, but at the same time it was even a little bit harder.

Dan: There came this point where I got tired of trying to lie to myself that I was going to be able to change. So I came home in the middle of the afternoon because I was going to, you know, be honest with Natalie.

Natalie: It had been so long of living a certain way that I had to go through those stages of relief and then shock and then anger.

Dan: Things were definitely rough, and I expected them to be rough but I expected them to kind of get better over time. And I think it was a week later in the morning, I asked her, "Well, how are you doing?" and trying to kind of feel her out and, you know, what the deal was. And she finally processed through it enough to know that she just couldn't live with me like this and that she was going to leave, and by the time she got back, I needed to be gone. All of a sudden I was out of the house and Natalie was gone with Gabriel, and I was thinking, "Wow, what is this going to be like?"

Natalie: I hated him, totally hated him for treating me like that, but I didn't stop loving him...ever.

It's pretty hard to imagine a subject in our culture where we are more confused than the subject of God's purpose and intent for our sexuality. The enemy has flooded our culture with lies and deception, and the devastation to people's lives has been tremendous.

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 5. This is a big part of the discussion in Proverbs 5 and 6 and 7. We pick it up this morning in chapter 5, verse 1:

My son, give attention to my wisdom,
Incline your ear to my understanding;
That you may observe discretion,
And your lips may reserve knowledge. (*NASB, Proverbs 5:1-2)

That's kind of a typical introduction to the next discussion. He's imploring his son to listen to what he has to say. Verse 3 then gets into the topic at hand:

For the lips of an adulteress drip honey,
And smoother than oil is her speech.

I want to spend a little bit of time around that word **adulteress**. I don't really care for that translation. The original Hebrew word carries much more the idea of an *alien*; some translations have *a strange woman*. So what does that mean? The text basically is referring to any sexual behavior outside of God's intent—in other words, one man, one woman in a lifelong one-flesh relationship God defines as marriage.

The idea of *strange* or *alien*—some people think it's a reference to like a foreigner. But if you track this term through the book of Proverbs, that's clearly not the intent. It does carry the intent that this is *strange*; this is alien to God's intent. It's outside the boundary of what God intended. This is really important to understand that just as there are natural laws within the world that God has made, it is equally true that there are moral laws. Neither can be broken without consequence. God's moral laws are just as binding as natural laws.

So let's take the law of gravity. You can believe whatever you want about gravity. But if you go up on the top of the building and you jump off, at the end of the day, reality wins. Regardless of what you believe to be true, reality wins because that's the law that God has put in place. It is equally true that God has put in place moral laws, and you break them with great consequence. They're not just rules that you can arbitrarily change and somehow get away with it. They're just as true; they're just as binding as the natural laws. At the end of the day, you bump into reality. That's the idea of *strange* or *alien*—that which is outside of God's purpose and intent.

I want to read you a couple of things to just kind of process a little bit this idea of God's moral laws and how they're binding; and when we operate outside of those, there will be consequences. Neither of these resources is written from a Christian perspective, but rather they are coming from research and psychologists who are simply analyzing the effect on our culture as a result of strange behavior—sex outside of God's boundaries.

This first book is called *The End of Sex*. The subtitle is: *How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfilled, and Confused about Intimacy*. This is how the book begins:

> *"It was while teaching an undergraduate course at a small college that I first heard students talk extensively about "hooking up". Hookup culture was clearly dominant on campus, and my students were more than willing to discuss the sexual encounters occurring at parties and in the residence halls on the weekends. At first, no one complained about this culture. They accepted it as the norm and seemed perfectly happy living within it. Then about halfway through the term, something changed. It took only one student to admit that hookup culture wasn't all she'd been told it was; and what was more, that it had made her miserable. Suddenly the students who had been speaking about hooking up in the most spirited of terms reversed themselves entirely. They confessed that they had been lying to one another about their real feelings."*

That moment launched for the author a multi-year national research campaign to investigate the consequences of what she refers to as *The Hookup Culture*, and the consequences have been absolutely devastating. One paragraph that really caught my attention, the writer says:

> *"The relationships between drinking and the party scene and between alcohol and the hookup culture were impossible to miss. There was a pervasive perception among students, not only that everyone was drinking but that everyone was drinking hard, that is, drinking in order to get wasted*—now listen to this—*and that the getting wasted part had its purpose to ease a person into the mood necessary for another hookup."*

Now think about how strange this has become—that people actually have to become intoxicated in order to enter in and experience God's most precious and wonderful gift of sexuality. At the end of the book she says:

> *"The great irony of the hookup culture, whether pre, during, or post-college, is that it's ultimately a culture of repression. If the Victorian era represents the repression of sexual desire, then the era of the hookup is about the repression of romantic feeling, love and sexual desire in favor of greater access to sex—sex for the sake of sex. Women and men both learn to shove their desires deep down into a dark place to be revealed to no one. They learn to be ashamed if they long for love, and embarrassed if they fail to uphold the*

social contract of a hookup culture and do not happen to enjoy no-strings-attached sex that much."

In another pamphlet dealing specifically with the issue of pornography—again, this is not written from a Christian perspective (this pamphlet, by no means, is from a Christian perspective)—but the researcher says:

"I would argue that we live in a pornified culture, and our current social sexual climate is in fact a sexually toxic environment, one in which many harmful, sexual activities and attitudes are made to appear appealing, arousing, and culturally accepted. For the public, for parents, for questioning teens and younger children, discerning what is healthy versus harmful or pornographic is complicated when sexual harm has become normalized in American culture. Normalization happens when a problematic or harmful behavior becomes an accepted part of society. The more normalized a behavior, the more it is viewed as beneficial or preferential. As normalization becomes entrenched, it's viewed as beyond question. And when such a behavior or practice is then questioned, the questioner begins to be treated as the problem."

A simple way to make this point is: If you lack the discretion to understand that—whether we're referring to the book or the movie—*Fifty Shades of Gray* is deeply offensive to God and a trashing of God's most precious gift of our sexuality, you have become normalized. You now think what is so offensive to God is normal. That's what the writer is saying. We live in a sexually toxic culture.

That's exactly what the writer of Proverbs is talking about when he's referring to the *strange woman:* any sexual behavior, whether it's a sexual relationship, whether it's pornography—whatever it is—that is outside of God's design and intent for sexuality.

Verse 3 is saying that the world makes it look very appealing...**for the lips of the adulteress** (the appeal of this behavior outside of God's boundaries) **drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech. But**…verse 4:

But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
Sharp as a two-edged sword.

I would suggest to you that wisdom—skillful living—is not assessed in the moment. It is rightly assessed after the moment passes. You can get caught up in the moment and convince yourself of anything. But skillful-living wisdom is determined by how you process that moment once the moment is gone. Shame, guilt, emptiness, loneliness, dismay—those are all symptoms of a moment that wasn't skillfully lived. Verse 5:

Her feet go down to death,
Her steps take hold of Sheol.
She does not ponder the path of life;
Her ways are unstable, she does not know *it*. (Vs. 5-6)

This perfectly describes our culture. It's the idea that we no longer see the right path; we no longer see the long term; we no longer see the sense of commitment and reality and what really matters to us. But people just live in the moment, and they go from moment to moment to moment to such a

degree there is so much confusion that people can't even figure out what's right and wrong anymore in the midst of a sexually confused and pornographic culture. Verse 7:

> **Now then, *my* sons, listen to me,**
> **And 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.** (Vs. 7-8)

I mentioned this last week from chapter 4, verse 14—the idea of staying away from the entrance to the path of destruction, or the *wicked path*. This is the same idea—that you don't go hang around her house; you don't go hanging around her neighborhood. It's basically the idea that you don't flirt with these things. I mentioned the danger of trying to draw a line to see if I can get as close to the world as possible without somehow crossing over that line—just flirting with disaster. As I said last week, temptation, by and large, is relatively easy to deal with if we don't start down the path. But once we start down the path, it becomes a part of us. It gets in our system. And some people will go far enough down the path that it will be a very difficult battle for the rest of their lives.

The idea, then, of the proverb is that you just *stay away*. I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with someone who is weeping in my office and who says to me, "I don't know how this happened. It started with a little flirting. It started with a little texting that became sexting, and somehow things got out of control, and now I've made a disaster of my life." I'll tell you how it happens—one little step at a time! He goes on then in verse 9:

> **Or you will give your vigor to others,**
> **And your years to the cruel one;**
> **And strangers will be filled with your strength,**
> **And your hard-earned goods *will go* to the house of an alien;**
> **And you groan at your final end,**
> **When your flesh and your body are consumed;** (Vs. 9-11)

Eventually it takes over. It consumes your life. It's what you think about. It's just like the video was talking about: It's lies; it's deceit. It becomes all the energy you have to manage the lies and the deception and the stories, and pretty soon your life is given away to something that will ultimately destroy you. Again, the sobering reality is that you get one shot at this life, and you're going to give it away for something that, at the end of the day, will only destroy you.

At the end of verse 11 he talks about **your flesh and your body**. I mentioned last week that I think the proverb is saying that what you put into your heart actually has a more dramatic effect even on your physical health than what you put in your mouth. One of the things that I think we've understood intuitively, but in the last ten years or so has become much more scientific, is the understanding that we are actually hardwired by God for intimacy—that one man, one woman together for life in a one-flesh relationship is consistent with the way you're actually wired up—and it's very powerful for good. But when you step outside of that boundary, it begins to have a destructive effect on your body. Specifically, what we're learning more and more about is the effect on your brain. There's more and more science that is looking into the effect of pornography on your brain. Someone who is addicted to pornography—their brain makeup, the brain chemistry—is almost identical to someone who is hooked on meth. It is doing significant damage to your brain.

One of the big discussions right now has to do with a generation who now has been raised in a technological generation and has fed on pornography at such a young age that their brains are actually not developed. And the real question is: What is going to happen to their brains when they have caused so much damage to their brains, before their brain was fully developed? There is a lot of concern that those young brains will actually never develop normally, and nobody knows—it's a guessing game—as to what that will look like when they're 40-years-old, when they're 50-years-old, when they're 60-years-old. But almost everyone is predicting it will not be good.

This isn't just some sort of a rule, and we can go outside the rule—no harm, no foul. You're actually changing your brain chemistry that could dramatically affect your ability to function when you're 30, 40, 50, 60-years old. The consequences are very, very severe. Verse 12:

> **And you say, "How I have hated instruction!**
> **And my heart spurned reproof!**
> **I have not listened to the voice of my teachers,**
> **Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!**
> **I was almost in utter ruin**
> **In the midst of the assembly and congregation."** (Vs. 12-14)

Basically it's the idea of someone saying, "I just didn't listen. I ignored the warnings. I ignored my teachers; I ignored my counselors, and basically, what started so privately ended in public shame." That's basically what the proverb just said.

I'm going to put this as clearly and as bluntly as possible. There are some of you sitting here this morning, and you are determined, no matter what I say, you are not going to listen. You have convinced yourself you can beat the system. You can beat the moral absolute laws of God, and somehow the negative consequences will not happen to you. Ten years from now—you mark my words—you will have your face in your hands and you will be weeping. And listen to me, hear me now: You will remember this morning, and you will wish to God that you would have listened to what God has to say before you made an absolute disaster out of your life.

Starting in verse 15 the conversation turns positive to what God actually intended with this beautiful gift. Verse 15:

> **Drink water from your own cistern**
> **And fresh water from your own well.**
> **Should your springs be dispersed abroad,**
> **Streams of water in the streets?**
> **Let them be yours alone**
> **And not for strangers with you.** (Vs. 15-17)

The imagery here is actually very powerful. In the ancient Near East, most homes would have had within their home a cistern of water. It would have been theirs. It would have been private. It would have been clean, maybe even kept in a cool place to refresh their thirst—and it was theirs and theirs alone.

Out in the city streets, in the city square there were also large cisterns. They were there for the travelers. They were there for the foreigners. They were there for people in the streets that didn't have a home. The people drank out of them; the animals drank out of them; whatever critter drank

out of them. They were dirty; they were polluted; they were disgusting, but that was the public water.

The imagery then is you have your own private cistern that is clean and pure and satisfies the thirst deep within you. If you have such a precious, meaningful, clean, pure, satisfying cistern to draw from, why would you ever settle for something so inferior as the public water supply in the streets? That's basically the imagery of the proverb. Why would you take something that God has made to be so wondrous and so beautiful and so right, and settle for something so much less? Verse 18:

> **Let your fountain be blessed,**
> **And rejoice in the wife of your youth.**

The proverb reminds us that God intended that we would experience His beautiful gift of sexuality within the context of one man, one woman, in a one-flesh lifelong relationship that God calls marriage.

One of the things I figured out very early in my marriage is that this culture is determined not only to make me dissatisfied with what I have, but this culture is determined to make me dissatisfied with *who* I have. This makes me so angry! This culture is determined to throw in front of me ridiculous images of a fantasyland, with the intent of making me dissatisfied with the woman that I am married to. And I determined years ago to this culture: *YOU WILL NOT DO THAT TO ME! You will not take away from me the wife of my youth.* And I determined I would not let that happen, and for thirty-three years I have been crazy in love with the woman I am married to. That is a decision you make. There is something that is deep and satisfying about sharing a life together, raising children together, going through the ups and downs together, going through two heart surgeries together, going through the death of loved ones together that draws you deep into intimacy that is so meaningful and satisfying. I will not let this culture take that away. I will delight *in the wife of my youth*!

I also notice the phrase, **Let your fountain be blessed,** which is basically the celebration of God's beautiful gift of sexuality. I think it is very easy for an older generation to look at the young people today and what has happened to our culture, and be very judgmental—to be very condemning and to be very disgusted by their behavior. But part of the problem is there were generations of old that had the idea that sex is something good people don't talk about; it's something that was implied as kind of dirty. It's just something that's, you know, just for having children. Churches didn't talk about it. Good fundamental churches didn't talk about things like sex, as if sex was dirty and sex was something other than God's plan. And so generation after generation was not taught at home; they were not taught in their churches. Nobody was telling them God's plan and purpose for their sexuality. The only ones willing to teach them was the culture. These kids did not ask to be born into a sexually-pornified culture. They did not ask for the adults to somehow be so confused on this topic that they were unwilling to talk about and celebrate this wonderful gift that God has given.

The idea that sex is just for procreation is not a biblical truth. As a matter of fact, again and again and again in the Scriptures, the Bible celebrates sex as God's gift to a man and a woman in a lifelong, one-flesh relationship. If we're going to be serious Christians who are serious about this Book, it is something we must talk about in the church and in the home. These kids need support. They need encouragement; they need people that are for them. They want help. They don't need people who are condemning them. They live in a very difficult and confused culture, and we need

to help them understand God's perspective on a very difficult topic. The verses that follow are simply a celebration of God's wondrous gift.

> ***As* a loving hind** *(that's a kind of a goat)* **and a graceful doe…** (vs. 19a)

We, in our culture, don't really think of animals like this as being terribly romantic, but they did in the ancient world. It was kind of their beauty and their grace that was the idea of it.

> ***As* a loving hind and a graceful doe,**
> **Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;**
> **Be exhilarated** *(literally, the Hebrew there is be intoxicated)* **always with her love.**
> **For why should you, my son, be exhilarated** *(intoxicated)* **with an adulteress** *(a strange woman, sex outside of God's plan and purpose)*
> **And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?**
> **For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD,**
> **And He watches all his paths.** (Vs. 19-21)

Again, the message is that what God has given is right and it's beautiful, and it should be celebrated. Why would anyone settle for something that is so inferior to what God intended? I think the point of verse 21 is no matter what you're doing in private, God knows! And it's a reminder you can't beat the system. You stand no better chance of breaking one of God's moral laws and getting away with it than you do going to the top of the building and jumping off and defeating the law of gravity. That verse is just a reminder that you can't do that—it won't work. These moral laws are binding. They are God's laws. It's how He has made the world. Verse 22:

> **His own iniquities will capture the wicked,** (Vs. 22a)

The word **capture** is like *in a trap*. The **wicked**—you remember last week we defined this term. The **wicked** is basically describing someone who, if necessary, will disadvantage others in order to advantage himself or herself. Sexual immorality fits that description perfectly. It is someone who, for the sake of my own advantage, is willing to disadvantage others. The idea is you're going to get caught in your trap.

> **…And he will be held with the cords of his sin** *(it's like a snare or a noose)***.**
> **He will die for lack of instruction,**
> **And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray** ***(****in other words, down the path of destruction)***.** (Vs. 22-23)

So as we wrap this up this morning, there is no point in dwelling on the past. The past is past. You can't change that. If you have sin to confess, then confess that sin, but you can't change the past. It's not worth pouring out a lot of energy on regrets about something you can't change. You need to put your energy into today, into tomorrow, into the next day. You can decide from this moment on: "I'm going to choose to live my life in a way that is sexually pure before a holy God." If you, in your heart of hearts, say, *"That's how I want to live,"* but whatever it is, you can't stop it, whether it's a sexual relationship, whether it's pornography. If you say, "*I want to stop, but I can't stop*," you need to recognize you have a problem—you need help! You can't just keep going on that way, hoping somehow it will take care of itself. You just need help. There are so many people waiting to come alongside you and say, "Hey, we love you. We want to help you with this." But you have to admit you have a problem and get help.

This auditorium this morning is filled with many who are single, and you say, "Hey, what's the deal with me? You know, take a cold shower and hang in there?" That is terrible advice, and it will not work. My advice to you would be, "Go for it." Understand that the sexual drive is the soul's longing to be intimate with God. You get a taste of it in marriage, but the fulfillment comes in a deep, intimate, meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. If you're single, you don't get the taste of it right now. But you have a cistern that is pure, and it's yours, and it's refreshing, and it will satisfy the longing of your heart. The solution is not *just stuff it and take a cold shower*. The solution is to *go for it*—this deep, meaningful, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that will deeply satisfy your soul and give you what you need to walk in holiness in a sexually-pornified culture.

The relationship between the sexual drive and romance and the relationship with God is so intertwined, at the end of the day, what people are deeply longing for is that relationship with God. One of the ways I see this is through so many of the love songs that are not written with the intent of talking about a relationship with God, but if you listen to the lyrics, they don't understand it but that is what they're longing for. They're longing for the ultimate romance, the ultimate relationship—a deep, loving, intimate relationship with Christ.

(Video resumes):

> *Natalie: Dan moved out, and while we were separated I sought godly advice on what to do because I felt kind of stuck. I felt like, on one hand, if I stayed with him, I could be in this relationship that never changed, and also just the thought of being a single parent was really hard to think about. As I sought God and tried to figure out what He wanted me to do, I felt Him calling me to give Dan another chance. And I'm really glad that I chose to obey and stick it out.*
>
> *Dan: The only reason that we're together and that we have the family that we do and that we have the relationship that we do is because God is in the business of redeeming lives. And when I thought I was stuck and could never change, God didn't give up on me. Natalie didn't give up on me. The church didn't give up on me. I remember sitting at work and so clearly hearing God say to me, "Aren't you tired? Aren't you so tired of all the lies and all of the trying to be better, and won't you just trust Me?" And I didn't have any idea what that was going to look like. I had no idea what the next ten years was going to be like. I didn't know how hard it was, but I knew that I was so tired, and I wanted to be real. And so for the first time, really in my core, I said, "No matter what, I'm going to trust You and I'm going to be completely real and honest."*
>
> *Natalie: I had prayed for five years that there would be a change, and if I was ever going to have the marriage that I desired, it was going to be God that would change that. I couldn't change it. I feel like through letting go and surrendering both of us, you know, God gave me the strength to start trusting Dan, and gave Dan the strength to start making better choices.*
>
> *Dan: And of course I know God's love because of how Natalie loved me. I believed there was no way I was ever going to be able to stop, and I think with that you feel like, "Well, I can never have freedom with this either," and that's a big lie. And I've really experienced in the last ten years a radical difference. It doesn't mean I don't struggle, but I'm not looking at pornography. I'm not being dishonest. You know, this thing that Christ did when He died on the cross, I knew about ever since I was a kid. But the real surrender*

was this moment where I said, "Okay, I'm not going to make any more deals. Just take my life and do what You want with it, and I'll trust what happens."

Natalie: You are a totally different person than when I married you—in a good way. You seek God, and you love me in a way that I wouldn't have thought possible.

Bryan: Let's pray:

Our Father, we celebrate today the beautiful gift of sexuality that You have given to a man and a wife together in a lifelong, one-flesh relationship called marriage. But, Lord, our hearts grieve at what has been done to Your precious gift. It has become so strange, so alien, so outside of Your design in our culture, and lives have been devastated. Lord, we celebrate Your forgiveness, Your grace, Your redemption, Your power. It reminds us no story is impossible. There is no story here this morning without hope. God, there are those in this auditorium right now that are struggling, some of them deep in their sexual sin. God, they probably feel like there is just no way out. God, remind them this morning of Your grace, Your power and Your forgiveness. God, give them the courage to make a change, to get help; Lord, that we together as a people would walk uprightly in a sexually-pornified culture, that that would be part of our light in a dark and desperate culture. God, we commit this to You, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2015 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.