March 28/29, 2015

The Story of Sexual Destruction

Skillful Living

Proverbs 7

Pastor Bryan Clark

He's handsome. He's successful. She's beautiful. She's sexy. She's got the world figured out. They meet somewhere—in a club, in a bar, at work. There's clearly chemistry between them and within a few hours they leave together. They will spend a beautiful night together, experiencing sexual pleasure that's deeply satisfying, deeply fulfilling. Maybe over the next few days—maybe the next few weeks—they will experience this deep, soul-satisfying experience together again and again. And then they will go their separate ways—no hurt feelings, both deeply thankful for how this experience has deeply enriched their lives. That is the story of sexual pleasure put out by Hollywood. I would suggest to you there's more truth in an episode of *SpongeBob* (*laughter*) than Hollywood's version of sexual pleasure. What is the true story, the true narrative of sexual immorality? That's what we want to talk about.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 7. If you're visiting with us this morning, this is not the traditional Palm Sunday message (*laughter*). It might actually be somewhat shocking. But we're working our way through the book of Proverbs, and we find ourselves in chapter 7 this morning. Next week is Easter, and then on to some other things. Chapter 7, verse 1:

> **My son, keep my words**
> **And treasure my commandments within you.**
> **Keep my commandments and live,**
> **And my teaching as the apple of your eye.** (*NASB, Proverbs 7:1-2)

Again, it sounds very Proverbs 4-ish. This is the theme that occurs again and again in Proverbs but the value of God's truth is to *treasure God's commandments*. This idea of...**Keep my commandments and live** is the reminder that God isn't just some control freak that wants to put out a bunch of laws to control your life. It's that He wants you to experience more. The concern is that you will settle for *less* when He wants you to have *more*. How do you have more? Well, you live His way—follow His commandments and live. The idea of the **apple of your eye**...the literal Hebrew there is the pupil of your eye. It kind of became a saying. It's the idea that if you look at somebody's eyeball, right at the center is the pupil and it kind of looks like an apple. The idea of the phrase then came to mean the center of your life, just like the pupil is the center of the eye. So it's the idea that God's truth, God's commandments, God's treasures would be the center of your life.

> **Bind them on your fingers;**
> **Write them on the tablet of your heart.**
> **Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"**
> **And call understanding *your* intimate friend;** (Vs. 3-4)

So it's to value God's truth as if it's an intimate friend, as if it's a family member. Why? In this text, verse 5:

That they may keep you from an adulteress,
From the foreigner who flatters with her words.

Now this word **adulteress** is the one that I defined two weeks ago out of Proverbs 5. It's a word that literally means *strange* or *alien*. Some translations have *the strange woman*. Basically the idea is that it's an imagery of any sex outside of God's design, God's purpose—understanding God's purpose was one man, one woman, in a lifelong one-flesh relationship called marriage. Any sexual activity outside of that is considered alien; it's considered strange. It's outside of God's intent, and there are consequences to pursuing sex in that way.

Before we move on, it's worth noting that the text just said that if you pursue God's truth, if you treasure His commandments, if you make them the center of your life, it helps you walk uprightly—to walk in moral purity in a very sexually-contaminated culture. Now I would not say to you that all you need to walk uprightly, sexually, in this culture is to read the Bible everyday. I think there's more to it than that but I would also say there's not *less* to it than that. In other words, that has to be an essential part of the strategy. You have to take the text at face value. God just said, "If you understand and believe My truth, it will keep you from involvement in sexual immorality." Our friends at the Center for Bible Engagement, their research shows that if you engage the Word in a meaningful way at least four times a week, it demonstrates significant life change. So we kind of use that as a bit of a target—that at least four times a week we're actually in *The Book*. Now if you struggle in this area of sexual purity, then let me give you something super practical. Make it a goal, let's say between now and the end of summer, just to put a framework on it, that you are in God's truth four times a week and in passages specifically related to this struggle. So the four passages I'm suggesting are Proverbs 5, Proverbs 6, Proverbs 7, and then I'm going to add 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 12. If you reread those every week—so that's four times a week between now and the end of summer—I'll suggest one of two things will happen. Either you will find yourself growing in your desire for sexual purity, or you'll stop reading the passages. But the text basically says, "If you pursue God's truth and treasure it, it will help you in this area." Starting in verse 6 the writer of Proverbs begins to tell, then, the story:

> **For at the window of my house**
> **I looked out through my lattice,**

This would be like a second story house, which was typical. The lower level had animals and stuff, and typically the residence was on the second level. So just imagine sitting in the window, looking out. It's evening, and seeing this story play out in the streets:

> **And I saw among the naive,**
> ***And* discerned among the youths**
> **A young man lacking sense,**

So a couple of things real quick: One is, "Don't get too lost in the imagery." It's not saying the boy is innocent and the woman is the seductress. Basically the idea is: we're all *the boy.* It's this idea of imagery that we're all vulnerable to temptation and the idea of the woman or the seductress is basically all of the temptation to experience sex outside of God's plan and purpose. It would be the strange woman, the alien behavior. So, at the end of the day, that's the point. He calls the boy **naïve**. The word means just what we think it would. It means to be *simple-minded*; it's to *lack discretion*. What we would say in our language today is *relatively clueless*. So he's out in the streets but he's naïve; he's simple-minded; he's rather clueless.

I think it is worth noting that in our contemporary culture, around this conversation, Christians are perceived to be simple-minded. We're perceived to be kind of puritanical, kind of close-minded and narrow and unenlightened and kind of gullible, whereas the rest of the culture is sophisticated, and

they're enlightened and they're open-minded and they're much more worldly-wise. But according to God, in this text it's the polar opposite. It's those who experience sex outside of God's intent that are actually very naïve; they're gullible; they're simple-minded; they're rather clueless as to what the cost of that is. Whereas it is the people of God who see it from God's point of view. They're actually quite skillful at discerning and to better understand the issues.

The idea at the end of verse seven of **lacking sense**—literally the Hebrew is *lacking heart*. It's the idea that the young man actually lacks the internal motivation to do the right thing. So the father's been counseling him, trying to share God's way, trying to do the right thing, but the son isn't buying it. The son is determined to experiment a little bit, have his own way, doesn't really buy into everything his dad is saying and lacks the internal motivation to do the right thing. This is actually a really important part of this whole discussion because it's very easy to get wrapped up into what I refer to as *sin management*. You can unplug the computer; you can put filters on your computer; you can get certain software; you can have accountability partners; you can have all these things in place which may be well and good, but if, at the end of the day, there isn't a passionate desire in your heart to do the right thing, none of those management techniques will ultimately win out. The only way you ultimately win out and walk uprightly is if, deep in your heart, you really, truly, passionately do want to do the right thing. For parents raising young people, raising teenagers, it's not enough just to take away a phone or put a filter on it or put software on the computer, or any of that stuff. If you don't somehow teach them, deep inside their hearts, to genuinely, passionately want righteousness, none of that stuff will ultimately prevail. And that's what the text is saying. This young man lacks heart; he lacks the internal motivation to do the right thing and that becomes obvious here.

> **Passing through the street near her corner;**
> **And he takes the way to her house,** (Vs. 8)

So he's not just out for a stroll in the park, walking the dog, and bumps into this woman. He knows exactly what he's doing. He's hanging out in her neighborhood. He's walking down her street; he's hanging around her corner. I talked two weeks ago about this danger of trying to define kind of this *line* between the ways of the world and the ways of God, in order to get as close to the line as possible without going over it. Eventually you will go over it—that's the way it always works. That's exactly what's happening here. He's not buying into what his dad has explained to him. He's cruising her neighborhood; he's walking down her street; he's hanging around her street corner. It's clear what he wants. Verse 9:

> **In the twilight, in the evening,**
> **In the middle of the night and *in* the darkness.**

Notice verse 9, it progressively gets darker—from twilight to sundown to darkness, to the dark of night. There's just this imagery that he's moving from the light into the darkness and there will be a consequence to that. Verse 10:

> **And behold a woman *comes* to meet him,**
> [It's as if we see the woman, with the father looking out the window.]
> **Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.**

The phrase **cunning of heart** carries the idea that she's not just out for a stroll—finds a young man and falls in love. She is a predator out hunting down a simple-minded, naïve fool. Again, don't get

too lost in the gender stuff of this. It's simply saying that there is a force that's coming after you with the intent of luring you in and destroying you. It's any sexual behavior outside of God's intent. It is interesting in verse ten that the text mentions that she's **dressed as a harlot**, and what's implied in that is, that will be very attractive to him.

Now here we tip-toe into very delicate waters, but I think it's important for women to understand how God has made a man. I hear a lot of women say, "You know, men just have to get over it." Well, you'll have to talk to God about that, because God's the one that's wired up a man this way, and you can't just summarily dismiss that. Part of the struggle with so many men struggling with pornography and some level of sexual struggle is that the temptation is virtually everywhere. It's at the mall; it's at work; it's on television; it's the commercials; it's the billboards—you virtually can't go anywhere without some level of temptation. One expert described it like an alcoholic walking around with a bottle of whiskey in his hand. There's always the temptation that close, and eventually he's going to give in. That's part of the problem of this particular struggle.

So think about this: If roughly 66, 67, 68% of men are struggling at some level with pornography and those images that are getting stuck in their head, and how that then creates how they look at the women around them. It is a huge problem. You have men that genuinely want to walk in purity. They're really struggling through this thing, and they're trying to do the right thing. So it's helpful to create some place of refuge, some place—maybe the only place literally in the community—where they can come and there isn't this constant temptation, where there isn't this vulnerability, where it is just one more place where I'm distracted and struggle. But, instead, that we would mutually say, "Okay, I understand this is a big problem and people are coming here—guys are coming here—to try to find Christ, to try to get truth, to try to do better, to try to walk uprightly." It'd be really helpful if they could come into a place of refuge where, rather than being distracted, they're actually being encouraged and supported. Some of you ladies, your motive may be nothing other than just being fashionable, but you just have to be aware of what's going on with the culture. It's a huge problem, and for the sake of others around you that may be struggling—to at least be aware of that, and can't we work together to create a place of safety and a place of refuge?

How was that... fairly delicate, yes? (*laughter*; *applause*) Thank you very much. Let's *quickly* move on (*laughter*). Verse 11:

> **She is boisterous and rebellious,**

Boisterous means kind of *loud*. It means kind of *aggressive*. It's really a helpful way to view everything that's coming at you in this culture as it relates to sexuality. Whether it's TV commercials, whether it's at the mall or the internet or even a co-worker or a fellow student, there's just this sense that it's aggressive and it's coming at you with this intent to destroy you. That's a big part of the struggle.

> **Her feet do not remain at home;**
> ***She is* now in the streets, now in the squares,**
> **And lurks by every corner.** (Vs 11b-12)

Notice in verse twelve the repetition of the word **now**. It carries the idea that she gets around; we would probably use the words *she sleeps around.* Now she's on this street; now she's in this house; now she's on this street corner. In a couple of verses there's going to be this kind of presentation that she's' going to present herself as pursuing this young man because he's handsome, because

he's good looking, because he's a good athlete, because she's fallen for him. But the truth is that's absolutely ridiculous. She does this night after night after night. What she's looking for is somebody that is so gullible, so simple-minded, so clueless, that the predator can take down another victim. And so that's the idea. Now tonight she's here; then she's there; tomorrow she's there. She's devouring whoever is gullible enough to listen to her. Verse 13:

> **So she seizes him and kisses him**
> **And with a brazen face** [which means defiant face] **she says to him:**
> **"I was due to offer peace offerings;**
> **Today I have paid my vows.**
> **Therefore I have come out to meet you,**
> **To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you."** (Vs. 13-15)

The language is, "I have come out and I have seen you and I have fallen in love with you because you're wonderful and you're so handsome," when the reality is she's a predator looking for a victim. There's a lot of discussion around verse fourteen—kind of the religious conversation in all this. Pretty much all scholars agree that a big part of this is just the idea that in order to offer her sacrifice, she had to kill an animal, took what was required, which means she had fresh meat at home, which means she's offering this very delightful meal at home. In an ancient culture they didn't eat a lot of fresh meat. It's not like they could pull a steak out of the freezer. So it was rather unusual that an animal would be killed and there would be fresh meat, so it was a big deal. That's a part of what she's saying is, "I have this wonderful meal—this very sensual meal at home—and I'm inviting you to come and join me for that." But there are also these religious overtones; I think we would call it *spiritualizing the conversation*. She's not out there saying, "I'm naughty; I'm bad." She's out there saying, "I'm religious; I'm good; I'm spiritual. I mean, I just offered my sacrifice because I'm a good, religious person, and I'm inviting you to come home and enjoy a nice meal with me."

It's interesting how good people get at spiritualizing their behavior. Somehow, someway we convince ourselves that, "I'm really serious about my relationship with God. The fact that I'm having some sort of sexual experience outside of marriage isn't a problem. Somehow God just understands that, and He's okay with that." And we just kind of spiritualize this whole thing as if, somehow, in your case God's okay with it.

One of the things I hear a lot of couples say is, "But we're in love. How can it be bad or how can it be wrong if we're in love?" Well first of all, your feelings are not the basis for God's standards. God's standards are the basis for His standards. Your feelings don't change what God has said to be morally right and wrong. But if it is true that you're in love, I think that's wonderful. Love is a wonderful thing. If you're so in love, that's great! Get married and enjoy this beautiful gift in the context in which God intended it. Celebrate this gift rightly and purely before a holy God. But if you say, "Whoa, well wait a minute. I'm not *that* in love." That's fine, but here's the deal: If you're not in love enough to get married, you're not in love enough to be having sex.

The other thing that I hear in kind of spiritualizing all this, and I'm surprised by how many Christians use this language, "But don't they have a right to be happy? I mean, shouldn't it be fair?" Since when are happiness and fairness the basis of God's moral standard? The standard is not, "Doesn't everybody have a right to be happy? Doesn't everybody have a right to experience what's fair?" God's moral standard is His moral standard and, at the end of the day, you cannot violate God's moral laws without consequence. So she obviously is spiritualizing this whole conversation.

Verse 16:

"I have spread my couch with coverings,
With colored linens of Egypt.
I have sprinkled my bed
With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.
Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;
Let us delight ourselves with caresses." (Vs. 16-18)

Basically those verses are right out of a Hollywood movie. The spices and perfumes are actually quite expensive. She was fairly well-to-do, and I'm sure that the environment is beautiful. It's inviting; it's sensual; it's delightful. It's this picture of this wonderful experience together, which of course is the deception, because the truth is coming. Verse 19:

"For my husband is not at home,
He has gone on a long journey;
He has taken a bag of money with him,
At the full moon he will come home." (Vs. 19-20)

The Hebrew language would be, "He's gone for about two weeks." It's interesting that she on one hand is spiritualizing this thing like, "It's okay," but on the other hand, deep in her heart she knows it's wrong. That's the whole point. "My husband's out of town, which means you can come over." Deep down she knows what she's doing is wrong; otherwise that statement makes no sense. It's also interesting that what she's saying is, "You know you're such a handsome young man, such a good athlete. As soon as I saw you I fell in love with you, and I just really want you. But in two weeks my husband comes home and you're out." There's clearly a sense in which this is temporary. "I'm going to use and abuse you and spit you out because I'm a predator." Now, again, don't get too caught up in the gender language. The seductress is any sexual activity outside of God's plan and purpose. It comes after you; it promises all this sensual delight but, at the end of the day it will use and abuse, and spit you out which is basically what she just said to him. Verse 21:

With her many persuasions she entices him;
With her flattering lips she seduces him.
Suddenly he follows her
As an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool, (Vs. 21-22)

The second part of verse twenty-two could be translated *as a deer goes into a trap*, which I think makes way more sense.

Until an arrow pierces through his liver;
As a bird hastens to the snare,
So he does not know that it *will cost him* his life. (Vs. 23)

So imagine the father's up in this window. He's watching this scene unfold in the streets and eventually this woman turns to head home and this young, naïve, gullible boy is going with her. He thinks he's in for this wonderful sensual delight. But the imagery is he is so clueless, he is so deceived, that he doesn't even realize this is an *ox being led to the slaughter*.

Now imagine this scene where somebody has their ox and they put a rope around its neck and they're going to walk this thing down the street, eventually to the butcher shop and have it slaughtered. That ox has virtually no clue what's coming. The ox thinks, "Oh what a nice master; we're going out for a lovely little walk this evening. You know, maybe we're walking down to *Chick-fil-A*. You know, "Eat more chicken." (*laughter*) He is just virtually clueless that this lovely little walk is down to the butcher shop where he will be slaughtered. That's the imagery.

Or a deer that's walking down this path in the woods that has virtually no idea that there is a deer hunter sitting in a stand above him, with the bow drawn and about to put an arrow right through its side. The deer is clueless—just wandering down the path, nibbling a few leaves as it goes. Or the idea of a bird caught in a snare. The idea is this gullible young man is so senseless, is so clueless, is so gullible, that he has no idea that he is about to experience deep and lasting pain. Verse 24:

> **Now therefore, *my* sons, listen to me,**
> **And pay attention to the words of my mouth.**
> **Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,**
> **Do not stray into her paths.**
> **For many are the victims she has cast down,**
> **And numerous are all her slain.**
> **Her house is the way to Sheol,**
> **Descending to the chambers of death.** (Vs. 24-27)

Again the imagery is that the seductress is all sex outside of God's purpose, outside of God's design—that it is presented as that which is so meaningful and that which is so alluring, but at the end of the day, it destroys its victims again and again and again.

So where do we go with all this? Well a couple things, like I've said before: There's just no point dwelling on the past. No matter what you have done, no matter what's been done to you, the past is past. If you have sin that you need to confess before God, by all means do that, and trust that God is a gracious, forgiving God, ready to wipe the slate clean. But the energy needs to be put on today and tomorrow and the next day because these are the choices you still have to make. It's very important that we, as a church, create a culture of redemption and restoration where it is a safe place for people to step out of the shadows of their shame and guilt and be able to be honest and say, "Hey, I'm struggling and I need some help," without condemnation and without people throwing stones at them, that there's a sense in which this is a safe place where you can step out and you can get the help that you need in order to experience freedom in this area.

I've mentioned it before but we have to understand that our young people are growing up in a culture unlike any young people ever have in the history of the world. This culture is absolutely brutal on them. What they don't need from us is condemnation and judgment. What they need from us is compassion. This is a very difficult world to grow up in. They need to know that we are with them, that we are for them, that we pray for them, that we care for them, and when they do struggle and fall—and they will—that we're there to pick them up, get them back on their feet, get them back on the path, going down the right path. We have to be in this together. We have to understand that this is a very difficult culture in which to navigate ourselves sexually.

Over the last couple of weeks there have been many of you who have had the character and the courage and the integrity to step up and say, "I need help. I'm struggling, and I'm not doing very well in this area and I need help." I want you to know how very proud of you I am—that you would

have the character, that you would have the integrity and the courage to step up and say, “I want help! I’m not doing so well,” and I’m excited for you that you have taken the first step in experiencing freedom that perhaps you have not known in years.

But there are many more of you that need to be willing to step out of the shadows of the shame and guilt and say, “Hey I’m struggling. I’m not doing so well here and I need some help.” We’re not waiting to throw stones or to judge or condemn. We’re waiting to come alongside and say, “Thanks for being honest, and let’s take this journey together,” and to experience the freedom that Christ wants for you. We have to understand that in this particular area we are at war with the culture. The culture is coming at us full speed ahead to experience sexuality outside of God’s intended plan and purpose, and at some point you have to realize, “This is war; this is a battle.” You have to have the courage and strength to stand up and say, “I am ready to fight.” You only get one shot at life. You just cannot let this poison destroy your one and only shot at life! At some point you have to say, “That’s enough...and I’m not going to live that way! I’m not going to give my life to the strange woman. I will experience better!” and better is found in this intimate relationship with Christ. You have to have the courage to fight and say, “That’s enough...that’s enough! I will not let this enemy destroy me!”

*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.