**The wisdom of desiring true beauty**

Text: Proverbs 6:20-7:27

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**Scriptures:** Proverbs 6:20-7:27

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 326, 51b, 285, 209, 72

**Series**: **Proverbs.** Sermon 10.

**Theme:** Parental instruction, in accordance with God’s word, protects those who wisely listen from the hidden, deadly, dangers of adultery.

**Proposition:** Take heed of the wisdom of God’s word so that you can be protected from sin knowing that Christ is more desirable than sin**.**

**Introduction**

A primary school teacher was grading a science test at home that she had given to her class. The subject was "The Human Body," and the first question was: "Name one of the major functions of the skin."  One child wrote: "To keep people who look at you from throwing up."  Difficult to argue with that logic ☺. The shape, curve, texture and form of skin as it covers the human body can be very beautiful and does cover up blood vessels and muscle structures which can be unattractive to the untrained eye.

Eve, the first woman, must have been very attractive in Adam’s eyes. “*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” Gen 2:23 is likely to be much more than a mere anatomical description! The beauty of men and women made in God’s image is a reflection of the beauty of our majestic Creator God.

Yet, in a fallen world, beauty can mislead. The attractive can be deadly. Our text focusses on the deadly danger of the sin of adultery, wisely setting forth the allure of the adulteress and the consequences of following her down the path that leads to death.

A dictionary definition of adultery is “*voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse*”. However, in light of many Scriptures which warn against any sexual immorality (e.g. Eph 5:3-5; 1 Thess 4), we can apply our text from Prov 6 and 7 to include all sexual relationships outside of marriage, regardless of the marital status of the participants.

There is a yet wider application as Scripture uses the imagery of adultery to express unfaithfulness to God in general– e.g.:

* **Jeremiah 3:20** “*Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD*.”
* **Ezekiel 16:30** "*How lovesick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute,”*
* **James 4:4** “*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*

Physical adultery is relatively rare in the church. Sexual immorality is much more common in the forms of pre-marital sex and pornography, together with viewing and/or listening to sexually suggestive content from the media.

However, unfaithfulness to the Lord, as evidenced by ongoing sin in our lives, is the **experience of all of us**….as we strive with less-than-complete success to put to death what ‘is earthly in us’ (Col 3:5). So this text which warns us about adultery is a **message for us all**.

In the words of Prov 6.23, the Word of God is ‘a lamp and the teaching a light’. May the Lord shine that light into all of our hearts now as we listen to God’s wisdom expounded from His Word:

1. **The allure of sin**

In the 1990s the all-girl group The Spice Girls sold 7 million copies of the song ‘Wannabe”. Back then ‘Wannabe’ was rated as the most easily recognisable pop song of past last 60 years. This is how the highly repetitive lyrics go:

“*Yo, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want.*

*So, tell me what you want, what you really really want*”

As well as being needy we are also all ‘wanty’ (that’s actually not a word!). As creatures made in God’s image, we all have desires.

God made this world a very desirable place to live. Placing Adam and Eve in paradise in a garden which he planted out with ‘*every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*’. The very good creation that God made would have been an incredibly beautiful place. Even though it now groans (Rom 8.22) yet so much beauty remains: e.g.

1. The moon and the expanse of the sky at night, sunsets,
2. The mountains, oceans, rivers, trees, flowers,
3. The dolphin, hummingbird, zebra,
4. The human face, hand, eye.

Beauty is attractive and arouses in us delight. We are naturally drawn to what is pleasant to the eyes.

In v25 the wise father and mother warn their son about an attractive woman saying: “*Do not desire her beauty in your heart*”. Why? Because this ‘evil woman’ is an adulteress. Her tongue is ‘smooth’ (v24)– her speech is seductive and persuasive (7:21). Her eyelashes are enticing (6:25). She has a beauty which is desirable to those who lack sense (6:32). Hers is a dangerous beauty, alluring and charming on the outside, but unwholesome and ugly on the inside. Her heart is described as being ‘wily’ (7:10). The Hebrew word here means ‘guarded’.

Whilst she appears to be very welcoming, open, warm and lovely on the outside, inwardly, in her heart, she is cold, hard, secretive and unyielding. She wants to freely give herself physically, but to withhold herself emotionally and spiritually. Her frequent indulgence in the sin of adultery means she must protect her inner self from the pains of her sinful lifestyle.

*As an aside: this is part of the deep sadness of prostitution. It enslaves those who enter this ‘profession’ either voluntarily or forcibly. Often prostitutes will deal with the pain in their heart through drug and alcohol abuse, seeking to disassociate themselves from their own bodies. There are sex-workers who ply their trade not far from here. Jesus was compassionate towards those who were publicly known to be sinful, whilst never approving of their sin (e.g. Luke 7:36-50). Are we like Him in this? Our mission as a church is to mirror that of Christ - to ‘seek out the lost’. Would we welcome a sex-worker into our congregation in the same way that Jesus received such needy people into his presence?*

In our text, the outwardly attractive woman is dressed as a prostitute. She is out and about in public, seeking to trap foolish men. She is loud and bold, eagerly embracing and kissing a stranger. She veils the wickedness of her intentions with religious duties giving her the appearance of pious devotion and faithfulness. **7:14** "*I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows*”. She plans ahead so that she can offer the enticements of a sinful sexual liaison whilst her own husband is out of town.

Listen to how she advertises adultery in **persuasive** words to the young man she has found: “*I have spread my couch with coverings, coloured linens from Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home*" (Prov 7:16-20)

Notice the progression in her alluring strategy:

1. Appealing to the ego of the unwise young man: “I have found YOU”.
2. Appealing to his sensual passions: her couch is prepared and scented with aphrodisiac smells – the setting for a night of love-making.
3. Allaying his fears by indicating that her husband has gone away on an extended business trip so that there is no risk of him returning soon.

This is the way that Satan makes sin so enticing, as He did in Eden. Appealing to the woman in the garden, not speaking to her husband. Appealing to her passions “*your eyes will be opened, you will be like God*” (Gen 3:5). Allaying her fears “*you will not surely die*” (Gen 3:4).

Behind the ‘evil woman’ of Proverbs 6:24 is Satan (Eph 6:12). Satan who “*disguises himself as an angel of light*” (2 Cor 11:14). The Devil takes what is ugly and makes it appear beautiful. Such is the attraction, the allure of sin.

Today dating websites like Ashley Madison persuade many foolish men and some women with slogans like “Life is short. Have an affair”. These dating sites for married people and the mobile phone Tinder app. function very much like the loud wayward woman of Proverbs 7. You may be someone today who is able to resist any temptation to commit adultery, sexual immorality, or use online ‘hook-up’ software. Praise the Lord for that mercy.

However, we are very likely to be beset by what author Jerry Bridges calls “Respectable sins”. These are the commonplace sins which we tolerate in ourselves and in others, alluring sins like: ungodliness, anxiety and frustration, discontentment, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, anger, judgmentalism, envy, and worldliness.

Like the evil woman, these sins are alluring/attractive to the fallen human heart, but they have devastating effects. Like the young man who lacks sense in Prov 7, we may not recognize just how dangerous these ‘respectable sins’ really are.

Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The effects of sin**

As we’ve been moving through these early chapter in the book of Proverbs, we’ve noticed how much wisdom there is about relationships: Parents and children, Husbands and wives, friends. Trust is a foundation for any relationship. Trust is the faith you have in someone that they will always remain loyal to you and love you. To trust someone means that you can rely on them and that you are comfortable confiding in them because you feel safe with them.

Lack of trust is one of the reasons for relationships to fall apart. The sin of adultery is hugely damaging to marriages, families and churches because it **destroys trust**. The wise parents in our text do not want their son to suffer the terrible effects of adultery. The wise practical message of proverbs with regard to adultery is ‘*don’t do it because the cost is too high’.* Verse 26 of chapter 6 contrasts committing sexual sin with a prostitute and doing so with a married woman: **“***the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life*”

The point here is **not** that engaging with a prostitute is **less sinful** than adultery, but rather that the consequences are not as destructive. When a hungry thief steals food to fill his empty stomach, this is sin and if caught, the thief will need to make restitution, but people will not despise him for his (somewhat understandable) crime.

However, when a man commits adultery the consequences are far more severe. He will be hurt in the end. Eventually his sin will cost him dearly. He will be dishonoured and disgraced. He will bear great shame. The husband of the wife he has taken will be jealous and seek revenge. No amount of compensation for his crime will be sufficient. Like a man who tries to carry fire against his skin, so this man will inevitably get burned. Sooner or later, in this life or the next, the effects of sin will be painfully felt. **The message is clear ‘extra marital affairs are simply not worth the cost’.**

A note to women here. Beware of the charm of a married man. Beware of a man who enters too closely into your ‘personal space’, who stands too near, or who uses inappropriate and suggestive language.

Graphic images are used by the writer to convey the deadliness of sin which traps the unwise, brings them down and destroys them. “*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*” (Prov 7:22-23)

The Bible plainly teaches that adultery has its origins within the lustful heart (Matt 15:19). It is one of the ‘works of the flesh’ (Gal 5:19). Spiritual adultery creates enmity with God (Jam 4:4). Unrepentant adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9).

One of the tricks our deceitful hearts can play on us is to suggest that we will never be found out. King David committed adultery with Uriah’s wife Bathsheba. He tried to cover his tracks by having Uriah come back to Jerusalem from the battle front so that he would go into his wife. Faithful Uriah stayed on duty with David’s servants and did not visit Bathsheba. Then David made Uriah drunk, but still he did not go to his own house to see his wife. So David sent him back to the war with a letter to commander Joab saying: **“***Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die*” (2 Sam 11:15).

We read in 2 Sam 11:27 that “*the thing that David had done displeased the LORD*”. 9 months later Bathsheba gave birth to David’s son, having become his wife. For all those months David must have thought that he would never be caught and that he had escaped the consequences of his adultery. He was wrong. God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David and finally he saw and repented of his sin.

Nathan prophesies the Lord’s judgement: *‘Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun’ (2 Sam 12:11).* Read the rest of the account of David’s family in the Bible and you’ll see how much distress resulted from his adultery.

Galatians 6:7 teaches us that actions have consequences. “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap*”. King David was caught, dishonoured, wounded, and his family suffered greatly because of his sin. He repented of his sin, seeking the Lord’s mercy, understanding that he had sinned first and foremost against God (Ps 51:4)

How about you? (pause) “*be sure your sin will find you out*” (Num 32:23). Now, today, is the time to have your sin dealt with. How much you and I need Christ, for our ‘unrespectable sins’ and for our ‘respectable sins’. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

How is such forgiveness possible? Only through the glorious person and work of Christ.

Which bring us to our 3rd point

1. **The glory of Christ**

We’ve seen that sin is alluring: with the deceptive beauty of an evil adulteress. It is because sin gives pleasure and satisfaction for a time that it is so addictive. [Sex](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/sex)ual activity, drugs, alcohol, food, or anything which brings us pleasure triggers the release of **dopamine** in the nucleus accumbens (part of the so-called pleasure-centre of the brain).When we experience pleasure, we desire to have more of the same, because it feels so good.

Perhaps you are someone today who is struggling with an addiction to sin, perhaps pornography or highly suggestive racy novels. It might be ungodliness, anxiety and frustration, discontentment, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, anger, judgmentalism, envy, or worldliness.

In the twisted perversion of sin, these evils bring us pleasure, even though we would confess that they displease the Lord, as David’s adultery did some 3,000 years ago. Yet God’s word says that “*we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*” (Rom 8:37). Through Christ, how do we conquer our besetting sins?

I think the answer is by desiring Christ more than we desire the ‘evil woman’, the sin which looks so attractive on the outside, but which so ugly underneath and which lays low so many victims. He is the Heavenly Bridegroom of whom Solomon writes from the bride’s perspective: “*Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away*” (Song 2:13b)

The Scriptures use the word ‘glory’ much more than ‘beauty’ to describe the ‘weight’, the worthiness, the value, the splendour, the dignity, the shining majesty of God. The glory of God is too bright to be seen directly by human eyes. The prophet Ezekiel describes a vision of God in Ezekiel 1 saying: “*Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD*”. Here, in a literary way, the prophet places himself 3 steps away from a direct description of God who (in the words of 1 Tim 6:16) “*dwells in unapproachable light*”. Augustine wrote of God a being ‘the Beauty of all things beautiful’. God is utterly perfect, harmonious and radiantly splendid.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, three disciples (Peter, John and James), saw the glory of Christ briefly unveiled (Mark 9:2-8; Matt 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36). “*His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light*” (Matt 17:2). Christ Jesus is the most beautiful person who has ever lived. “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*” (Heb 1:3). His radiant glory, his resplendent beauty, is seen in the vision of John in the book of Revelation (1:16b). “*from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength*”

Augustine, commenting on the royal wedding psalm which we know as #45, writes this about Jesus: “*He then is beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth; beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents’ arms; beautiful in his miracles; beautiful under the scourge; beautiful when inviting to life … beautiful in laying down his life; beautiful in taking it up again; beautiful on the cross; beautiful in the sepulchre; beautiful in heaven*” (Enarrationes, 44.3). Christ is “*altogether desirable*” (Song 5:16b).

We will all be attracted to what our hearts desire most. The good news is that God has provided for us in His Son, the most attractive, beautiful person we can know. God has “*shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6).

Do you desire to kill sin in your life? To put to death **“***what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Col 3:5)?

Then desire Christ more than sin! God made His glorious Son to be the ugliest person who ever existed on the cross: “*He had no form of majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him*” (Isaiah 53:2b). Brothers and sisters in the Lord “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin*” (2 Cor 5:21a). In the ugliness of our sin, He went as an ox to the slaughter. He was caught fast on the cross, ensnared by our sin. Our unfaithfulness to God, our spiritual adultery, cost Him His life. He went all the way down to Sheol, to the grave for us.

So will you listen to Christ as He speaks to you now and be attentive to the words of His mouth **“***Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths*” (Prov 7:25). Do not be tempted by sin which looks so attractive on the outside but is so ugly underneath. Do not commit adultery because the cost is too high. Do not view pornography read highly suggestive racy novels – the cost is too high. Do not keep on indulging in ‘respectable sins’ ungodliness, anxiety and frustration, discontentment, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, anger, judgmentalism, envy, or worldliness – the cost is too high.

Perhaps you have done this evil in God’s sight, perhaps you are convicted of your sins by this message. What should you do? Repent and seek forgiveness in Christ. Jesus forgave the sin of the woman who wet his feet with her tears, saying to her “*Yours sins are forgiven*” (Luke 7.48), “*Your faith has saved you: go in peace*” (Luke 7.50). He offers the same salvation and peace to all who will come to Him in repentance and faith.

The heart of Christ is not ‘wily’, not guarded, His heart is open to all who will come and delight in His beauty, who will see his glory, ‘*glory as of the only Son from the father, full of grace and truth*’ (John 1:14)

AMEN