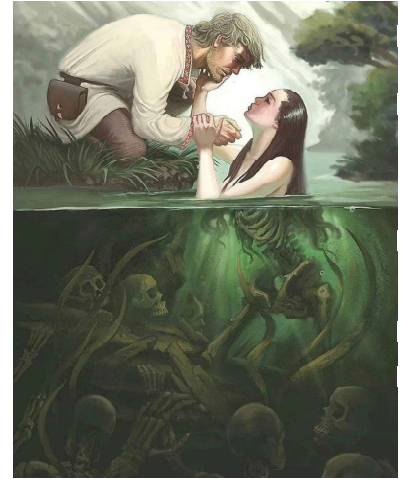


Lesson 9: Sexual Ethics

In Lesson 1 we learned that Proverbs is covenant wisdom for a people already redeemed, training them to live in the fear of the LORD under Yahweh's rule and ultimately in Christ, Wisdom incarnate. Sexual ethics belong in that same frame: fidelity is worship, infidelity is covenant treachery that deforms the heart and wounds the community. Proverbs does not peddle techniques; it forms a person.

In Lesson 2, we discussed how the opening nine chapters are “My son” discourses that dramatize two voices and two paths: Lady Wisdom versus Dame Folly. Sexual temptation is not a side topic here. Rather, it is frequently *the* crucible where covenant fidelity is tested in secret yet yields public fruit. Reading these texts as wisdom poetry (Lesson 3), we seek patterns not mechanical promises; we refuse both moralism and antinomianism; and we keep the fear of the LORD (Lesson 4) as posture and power for chastity.



Lexical & Literary Frame: Who is the “Forbidden Woman”?

Proverbs often names the seductress as the strange/outside/foreign/alien woman. In context, these labels are not *ethnic*, but *moral-covenantal*: she represents dislocated desire, sex unmoored from covenant vows. In Proverbs' pedagogy, she functions like Dame Folly's emissary (**Proverbs 9:13-18**), offering “*stolen water*” and “*secret bread*” (**Proverbs 9:17**) that taste sweet but conceal Sheol. This is personification in wisdom poetry (Lesson 2), not biography. “*The forbidden woman*” is *both* a real kind of neighbor *and* also a trope that warns every hearer about disordered loves.

Counterposed to her is the wise wife: not yet the full portrait of **Proverbs 31** (reserved for a future lesson), but a series of cameo lines:

- “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband*” (**Proverbs 12:4**)
- “*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD*” (**Proverbs 18:22**)
- “*A prudent wife is from the LORD*” (**Proverbs 19:14**)

Proverbs thus commends conjugal fidelity as covenant gift and wisdom's delight.

Theology in Proverbs: Fidelity as the Fear of the LORD

Lesson 4 taught us that the fear of the LORD is both the beginning and goal of wisdom: the heart's humble awe that hates evil and turns from it. Sexual fidelity is the fear of the LORD in a domain of powerful appetites. Lust is not merely miscalculation, rather, it is false worship, a rival liturgy of the body. Fidelity, by contrast, is doxological: it honors the God who orders desire toward promise, patience, exclusivity, and joy.

Proverbs' sexual counsel is not *Victorian restraint* or *modern “self-care”*; it is covenant holiness.

- *Victorian restraint* reduces holiness to propriety and silence, managing appearances instead of forming hearts. In this system, sin goes underground, hypocrisy thrives, victims are hushed, and marriages grow cold.
- *Modern “self-care”* enthrones the self and baptizes appetite as therapy. Consent becomes the only canon. Bodies become commodities. Practices become compulsions. Covenants become fragile. “If it feels good, do it” becomes the only mantra that matters.

Both errors mis-order desire, either by repressing it without renewing it or indulging it without disciplining it. Both fail to address sin and end in cynicism and harm.

Covenant holiness orders desires according to God and promise: *in* Christ, *by* the Spirit, *to* the glory of the Father, *for* the joy of exclusive fidelity enjoyed by God's children.

Applied to the home, this formation is taught, modeled, corrected, and celebrated.

- **Taught:** catechizing hearts with Proverbs' warnings and the gospel's hope
- **Modeled:** honest affection and rejoicing in lawful love
- **Corrected:** early confession, wise counsel, restorative consequences
- **Celebrated:** habitual gratitude and praise

It guards affections, trains eyes and steps, and orders calendars.

- **Guards affections:** naming temptations and praying quickly
- **Trains eyes and steps:** clear boundaries, transparent habits, and lawful attentiveness to one's own spouse
- **Orders calendars:** Sabbath worship, purposeful time together, and shared rhythms of hospitality that keep life in the light

This is neither prudish repression nor therapeutic indulgence, but worshipful fidelity that builds households and through them, a healthier church and society.

Exegetical Core: Proverbs 5-7 (with 2 & 9)

Proverbs 5 — Honeyed Lips and Bitter Ends

Proverbs 5 opens: *"My son, be attentive to my wisdom"* (**Proverbs 5:1**). The adulteress's lips drip honey, her speech smoother than oil (**Proverbs 5:3**). The sensory gain is front-loaded; the cost is deferred but inevitable: *"in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword."* (**Proverbs 5:4**) Wisdom brings the end into the present: *"Her feet go down to death... she does not ponder the path of life"* (**Proverbs 5:5-6**). The counsel is surgical: keep your way far from her; do not go near the door of her house (**Proverbs 5:8**). Boundaries are not legalism; they are prudence. (It's not legalism if it's right!)

The positive vision culminates in **Proverbs 5:15-19**: *"Drink water from your own cistern... Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth... be intoxicated always in her love."* Notice that Scripture sanctifies marital erotic love as covenant joy. Wisdom rejects both libertinism and shame. Exclusive delight is the strategy: overflow your marriage with lawful joy so stolen waters lose their allure. **Proverbs 5** ends pastorally: sin's costs are communal: honor squandered (**Proverbs 5:9**), wealth consumed (**Proverbs 5:10**), years ruined (**Proverbs 5:11-14**). And the theological bottom line: *"a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD"* (**Proverbs 5:21**). No secret browser history before omniscience.

Proverbs 6:20-35 — Can One Carry Fire?

The parental voice returns (**Proverbs 6:20-24**): *"Bind them on your heart... they will watch over you."* Wisdom walks with the son at night (**Proverbs 6:22**), the hour of secrecy. Then two sets of images:

- **The internal guard:** *"Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes"* (**Proverbs 6:25**). Adultery starts in the affections; the eye trains the heart or betrays it.
- **The external consequences:** *"Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?"* (**Proverbs 6:27**). Unlike theft, which can be repaid (**Proverbs 6:30-31**), adultery wrecks reputations and provokes jealous wrath (**Proverbs 6:32-35**). Wisdom here is public good: sexual sin ruptures households and destabilizes the city (cf. Lesson 8 on righteous order).

Proverbs 7 — A Parable of Seduction

Proverbs 7 is a mini-drama: the naïve youth, twilight, the street corner, the loud and wayward attire, the religious pretext (*"I had to offer sacrifices... now I have come out to meet you"*), the sensory pitch (myrrh, aloes, cinnamon), and the rationalization (*"my husband is not at home"*). The narrator slows the story: *"All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter... till an arrow pierces his liver"* (**Proverbs 7:22-23**). Wisdom gives us sympathetic imagination so we can feel the trajectory before we live it.

The application is familial and anatomical: *"keep my words... bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart"* (**Proverbs 7:1-3**). Guard gates (ears, eyes, steps) and strengthen vows with habits (more below). This, again, is the "My son" pedagogy we've traced in Lesson 2.

Proverbs 2 & 9 — The Two Tables

Proverbs 2 pictures Wisdom rescuing *“from the forbidden woman... who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death”* (**Proverbs 2:16-19**). In **Proverbs 9**, Folly’s house counterfeits Wisdom’s feast with illicit sweetness and secrecy (**Proverbs 9:13-18**). Two liturgies compete: secrecy vs. light, theft vs. gift, appetite vs. covenant. The wise must choose a table.

To the New Testament: Sexual Fidelity Re-Centered in Christ

The New Testament neither relaxes nor merely repeats Proverbs; rather, it intensifies and re-centers sexual holiness in union with Christ and the sanctifying Spirit.

- **Heart-level fidelity:** Jesus locates adultery in desire, not only in the bed (**Matthew 5:27-30**). The “can I carry fire?” logic of **Proverbs 6** becomes eye surgery: cut off occasions of sin.
- **Body-as-temple, union-with-Christ:** **1 Corinthians 6:12-20** grounds chastity in baptismal belonging: *“You are not your own... you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*
- **Sanctification as sexual holiness:** **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** names abstaining from sexual immorality as God’s will, enjoining self-control *“in holiness and honor”*, and warning that the LORD is an avenger in these matters.
- **Marital holiness and joy:** **Hebrews 13:4** honors the marriage bed. **1 Corinthians 7:1-5** dignifies (and demands) conjugal mutuality (*“do not deprive one another... that Satan may not tempt you”*). **Ephesians 5:3-5** calls for impurity to be *“not even named”* among saints. Later in the same chapter, **Ephesians 5:25-27** ties conjugal love to Christ’s sanctifying love for His bride.

These developments enhance Proverbs’ pedagogy: Christ the Wise Son (Lesson 1), the fear of the LORD perfected and poured out by the Spirit (Lesson 4), forming a people who desire better feasts.

Excursus: Conjugal Duties for Christians

This topic has been misused to excuse selfishness and abuse; nothing here should be taken to justify harm.

What does God teach positively about sex within marriage? We all know the rules about what **NOT** to do with sex, the “thou shalt not” commands. For example, Scripture condemns:

- Sex in the mind (No lust, porn, or sexual fantasies about anyone but your spouse)
- Sex before marriage (No fornication)
- Sex with someone else’s spouse (No adultery)
- Sex with someone of the same sex (No homosexuality and therefore no homosexual marriage)
- Sex with family members (No incest)
- Sex with animals (No bestiality; yes, the Bible addresses this)

But how about some “thou shalt” commands? Paul gives some fairly shocking teaching. If someone enters into marriage, they lose exclusive control of their body. This is absolutely anathema to our culture, which seems to value bodily autonomy over just about anything. But it’s true. In **1 Corinthians 7:3-5**, Paul teaches that the *husband’s body belongs to the wife* and the *wife’s body to the husband* and explicitly says *“Do not deprive one another”* of sex. (There is a concession for a mutually-agreed-upon break *for the purpose of prayer*, but even that is *“for a limited time”*.)

So the Bible is clear: a marriage that is *intentionally* sexless is disobedient and sinful. Full stop.

And sex is not a favor to be bartered or a reward for “good behavior”. Sex is a mutual, joyful obligation within holy matrimony, not constantly subject to bad moods, “headaches”, or treated in such a way that regularly produces legitimate frustration for either partner. But it’s also not a slavish obligation. Each one should care for their spouse, never using the Scriptures as an excuse for abuse.

Therefore, a couple should honestly discuss how to engage in sexual behavior that is godly, righteous, and meets the needs of both spouses to the glory of God. And children should be aware in safe, respectful, age-appropriate, modest ways that their parents enjoy God’s sexual gifts, so they can do the same one day, if God grants them the gift of marriage. If we don’t teach them, someone will.

Formation for Fidelity: Practices, Guardrails, Repentance

Practices that Nurture Desire in the Right Direction

1. **Covenantal Enjoyment:** Prioritize time, tenderness, and playfulness in marriage. Sanctified eros is a means of resisting temptation, not a concession to it. ([Proverbs 5:15-19](#))
2. **Guard the Heart and Gates:** Curate input (screens, music, social feeds). The wise do not negotiate with grooming scripts; they flee them. ([Proverbs 4:23](#); [6:25-27](#); [7:1-5](#))
3. **Walk With the Wise:** Create a confessional culture with godly peers where sin is named early and help arrives fast. ([Proverbs 13:20](#); [27:17](#); cf. Lesson 6 on speech & counsel)
4. **Liturgies of Light:** Daily Scripture and prayer; weekly Sabbath observance; rhythms of hospitality. Counter secrecy with shared patterns of grace ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#); [Acts 2:42](#)).
5. **Vow-Maintenance:** Rehearse vows; schedule “state of the marriage” check-ins; confess/forgive quickly ([Ephesians 4:32](#)).

Guardrails That Are Wise, Not Pharisaic

1. **Proximity & Privacy:** “*Do not go near the door of her house*” ([Proverbs 5:8](#)). Translate to your travel, car rides, DMs, and late-night texting.
2. **Transparency by Default:** Mutual device openness; shared calendars; known locations. These are wisdom fences, not righteousness itself.
3. **Alcohol & Occasion:** Proverbs often pairs folly with dulled discernment (cf. [Proverbs 23:29-35](#)). Honor your limits and seasons.

Repentance Pathways

1. **Confession:** Immediately to God ([Psalm 51](#); [1 John 1:9](#)), then truth telling to those sinned against as appropriate ([James 5:16](#)), seeking church shepherding when needed ([Galatians 6:1](#)).
2. **Grace-Fueled Consequences:** Accept wise consequences that rebuild trust (boundaries, counseling, accountability software, time-bound reporting).
3. **Gospel Identity:** Shame is not sanctification. We fight as those washed ([1 Corinthians 6:11](#)), not as those trying to earn washing.

Public Goods of Private Fidelity

Sexual immorality is never “private”. Proverbs ties chastity to civic health: households stabilize inheritance ([Proverbs 22:28](#)), honest measures require honest men ([Proverbs 11:1](#)), and rulers who love justice are formed in just homes ([Proverbs 29:4,14](#)). When sexual folly multiplies, costs cascade, from fatherless homes to predatory markets to cynical courts (cf. Lesson 8). Fidelity, by contrast, is a quiet engine of social righteousness.

Conclusion: Two Houses, One Bridegroom

Proverbs places us at a fork: forbidden sweetness that ends in death ([Proverbs 7:27](#); [9:18](#)) or covenant joy that ends in life ([Proverbs 5:15-19](#); [8:35](#)). The Wise Son, the One greater than Solomon, has entered our ruin, borne our shame, and risen to make us His own. In Him, the fear of the LORD becomes delight, and fidelity becomes foretaste, a sign of the feast to come.

Therefore, “*make no provision for the flesh*” ([Romans 13:14](#)), but “*be intoxicated always*” with lawful love ([Proverbs 5:19](#)). Christ, our Wisdom, is forming a chaste people whose marriages hum a gospel note in a loud world.

Choose Wisdom’s table.