

## WISDOM: LIVING SUCCESSFULLY IN A TREACHEROUS WORLD Preserving Purity, Pt 1

**“The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it.”  
~ Proverbs 6:32**

### The Importance of Sexual Purity

Few issues in life have as great an impact on the long-term success of a man as does sexual purity. Even though God’s grace through Christ Jesus is sufficient to forgive all sin, the nature of sexual sin is such that its consequences are uniquely far-reaching and long-lasting. What God created to be enjoyed in the exclusive, one-flesh intimacy of a husband-wife relationship can be corrupted as an expression of some of the greatest evil of mankind.

Because this issue is so influential in life, the book of Proverbs devotes a significant amount of attention to it. As Newheiser states, “There is no topic in Proverbs to which more emphasis is given than that of sexual purity” (*Opening up Proverbs*, 71). A survey of the book yields **eight fundamental principles** essential in the battle for sexual purity. The first four include:

#### 1. We fight for purity by keeping our ears attentive to instruction.

Sexual sin takes root and flourishes when a man listens to and believes *lies*: “this is just normal behavior”; “this isn’t that bad”; “I need sensual pleasure to help me cope with my mind off my troubles”; “I can’t stop even if I tried”; etc. To counter these lies, a man must listen to and believe *truth*. Thus, it is not coincidental that Solomon consistently begins his proverbs on sexual purity with solemn invitations *to incline one’s ear to instruction*. This is where the battle begins—with the regular intake of *truth*.

- **2:1, 5, 10-11, 16** – “My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you . . . then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God . . . for wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul, discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you . . . to deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words.”
- **5:1-3** – “My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress . . .”
- **5:7-8** – “Now then, *my sons*, listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her . . .”
- See also **6:20-24; 7:1-5, 24-25; 23:26-27**.

The battle for purity begins far away from the battle line itself. It begins even before sexual temptation is a threat. It begins in the realm of *truth*, for truth always has practical consequences. The daily fight against temptation in any form—and sexual temptation in particular—will not be advanced in ignorance of or isolation from your intake of God’s Word.

Victory in the battle against temptation is not won if vigilance is planned only for the moment when temptation strikes. Victory is won by a myriad of choices made before temptation ever arises. Make the right, small choices early to immerse yourself in God’s word. Determine to start, continue, and end your day with a consistent diet of doctrinal nourishment (reading, listening to sermons, memorizing Scripture, etc.). Sexual purity is the harvest of these small, wise decisions.

**“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word.” – Psalm 119:9**

## 2. We fight for purity by acknowledging the power of temptation.

In his treatise on the Christian's battle against sin and temptation, Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) asserted that the Christian must study "the enemy" enough to be able to state: "This is our enemy; this is his way and progress, these are his advantages, thus has he prevailed, and thus he will do, if not prevented" (*Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 76). A successful battle against temptation requires an intricate knowledge of how temptation works.

This is certainly true in the battle against sexual temptation. The Christian man must take time to assess how such temptation launches its assault, and learn the necessary lessons for future defenses. He must know where it most often arises, when it is strongest, how it makes its entrance, etc. This is how Solomon instructed his own son; he points his son to the specific manners by which temptation makes its approach, and alerts him to where he must be ready to make his stand—in the arena of the *senses*:

The Devices of Sexual Temptation	
Charming Speech (Sound)	2:16; 5:3; 6:24; 7:5, 14-21
Flaunted Beauty (Sight)	6:25; 7:10; 31:30
Physical Contact (Touch)	7:13
Enticing Aroma (Smell)	7:16-17
Powerful Flavors (Taste)	5:3; 7:18; 9:17

Many men neglect to consider these factors. They think they live in a perpetual state of strength—impervious to whatever assaults temptation may launch and always sufficient to meet the challenge. Or, the great remorse they feel over past failure never translates into strengthened defenses for the future. But wisdom can change this. By acknowledging temptation's strength and one's own vulnerability (1 Cor 10:12), and by recognizing how sexual temptation operates and how it approaches, the Christian man will be able to fortify the defenses, increase vigilance, and take appropriate steps before being overwhelmed.

As Lundgaard states, "If you want to overthrow a fortress, start by knocking out the watchman—if he can't warn the others, you will easily breach the wall and carry the day. The flesh plies deceit to knock out the watchman of your soul: your mind" (*The Enemy Within*, 55). But the opposite is also true. If the watchman—your mind—is well informed and alert to recognize the smallest of movements in the distance, it will be ready to take appropriate action when temptation is easiest to resist—when it is still relatively far away.

## 3. We fight for purity by contemplating the hideousness of sin.

Sin truly is deceitful (Heb 3:13). It never proposes itself in its genuine, foul state, but always masquerades as a thing of beauty. As Lundgaard writes, "This is the art of deception: to make someone believe that things are other than they are, so that he will do something he would never otherwise do. This is the way your flesh makes you into the willing servant of sin" (*The Enemy Within*, 54-55).

When Solomon addressed the issue of sexual sin with his son, he did not speak of it in politically-correct or culturally-approved language. He pulled the mask off sin and revealed its ugliness with vivid terms. For example, he describes the "adulteress" in these terms:

- **2:16-17** – "To deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God."
- **7:11-12** – "She is boisterous and rebellious, her feet do not remain at home; *she is* now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner."

- See also **22:14; 23:27-28; 30:20.**

He also describes the one who commits sin with her in similarly unflattering language:

- **7:22-23** – “Suddenly he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool, 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.”

**“If the mind fails to identify a sin as evil, wicked, vile, and bitter, the affections will not be safe from clinging to it, nor the will from giving consent. This is one side of the castle wall, the first line of defense: to keep in mind that every sin is a forsaking of God (Jeremiah 2:19), to never forget the polluting, corrupting, defiling power of sin—to be shaken to the core by how much God loathes sin.” —Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, 63**

It is crucial for men to look past sexual sin’s beautiful façade to see the hideousness face behind it. This requires defining sexual sin not through the distorted lens of culture or tradition but through the “the fear of the LORD” (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Only God’s word has the ability to describe sin as it really is. As Newheiser states,

Wouldn’t it be nice if a man could put on a pair of glasses that would make immoral and immodest women look hideously ugly? Proverbs offers you such spiritual spectacles. Wisdom enables you to look beyond the Strange Woman’s outward beauty and seductiveness to see the ugliness of her character. (*Opening up Proverbs*).

Thus, what our culture describes as “common law marriage” or “living together” must be defined as *fornication*; what it describes as an “affair” or a “tryst” must be called *adultery*; what it designates as a “gay lifestyle” must be called the *abomination of homosexuality*; what is called “mature entertainment” must be called *pornography*; what it describes as “fantasies” must be called *lust*. Euphemisms—a mild word or expression substituted for what is blunt—never help a man battling against sexual sin. They only cloak sin’s true nature. Instead, these sins must be confessed in their stark ugliness—in biblical terms, as God defines them. This is precisely what Jesus pointed out when He confronted the Pharisees over their minimalistic definition of adultery: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-28).

#### **4. We fight for purity by remembering the consequences of failure.**

One of the great dangers of sexual temptation is its power to dull the mind to consequences. Those who entertain it begin to shut out thoughts of the future entirely, focusing solely on the potential for gratification in the present. Even if one acknowledges that the proposed sinful act will come at a cost, temptation always argues that its pleasure will always outweigh its price. “It’s worth it!”

Recognizing this deception, Solomon frequently emphasized the law of *cause-and-effect* in his instruction regarding sexual purity.

- **2:18-19** – “For her [the adulteress] house sinks down to death and her tracks *lead* to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life.”
- **6:26-29** – “For on account of a harlot *one is reduced* to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished.”
- See also **5:3-6; 20-23; 6:32-35; 7:22-23, 26-27; 9:18.**

A summary of Solomon’s teaching reveals that the consequences of sexual sin reach incredibly *far*—farther than any other sin described in Proverbs. These consequences include *spiritual discipline* from the Lord and from others; *physical ailment* as a result of promiscuity; *personal regrets and fears* as a man begins to contemplate the impending consequences; *financial ruin* as family breakup takes its toll; and a *disgraced reputation* as man is disqualified from influence in the community and shunned for the community’s protection.

Common Consequences of Sexual Sin According to Solomon	
Spiritual Discipline	2:18-19; 5:4-6, 21-23; 7:22-23, 26-27
Physical Ailment	5:9, 11; 9:18
Regrets and Fears	5:12-13; 6:34-35
Financial Ruin	5:10, 6:26; 29:3
Disgraced Reputation	5:14; 6:33

As Stuart Scott explains, “One of the most destructive sins for the husband and the family is that of sexual lust. This sin opens the door to all kinds of degradation. . . . This sin *can* and *will* destroy a man’s life and his marriage relationship as no other” (*Exemplary Husband*, 283).

Therefore, it is crucial—as Solomon communicated to his own son—that men keep the potential consequences for sexual sin in the forefront of their memories. The cost of failure in this important arena of battle must always be vivid. The descriptions found in Scripture, including of Solomon’s own failures, must be regularly reviewed. Contemporary illustrations of men who have fallen must be employed as personal warnings. These serve as powerful reminders that a man cannot expect to reap anything other than what he sows, so if he sows the seeds of sexual immorality, he will reap its consequences—and they are *severe*.

All this all must be kept within a God-centered perspective. The Stoic, too, fears the consequences of “immoral” actions, but he does so for his own long-term well-being while denying the existence of God. A true believer does not fear the consequences of sexual sin solely because of the social, emotional, financial, physical, and spiritual pain it brings. A believer fears these consequences because he fears His God. His greatest ambition is “to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor 5:9). Thus, the greatest consequence of sexual sin is to know he has spurned the grace and favor of the One who sent His Son to redeem him from sin’s dominion.

### For Further Reflection

- Continue to read one chapter of Proverbs each day.
- Describe what you do on a regular basis to “keep your ears attentive to truth”? If you are struggling in the battle for purity, what new steps are you taking—or will you commit to take—to increase your daily intake of God’s word? How will you show that you are serious? Memorize Psalm 119:9.
- How would you evaluate your ability to resist sexual temptation in its various forms? Do you know the areas where you are weakest? Have you taken the time to evaluate how such temptation has taken you captive in the past? How does 1 Corinthians 10:12 keep you prepared for battle?
- What are the ways in which the culture influences you to see sexual sin in a better light than how God describes it? Read 1 John 1:9. What does the verb “confess” mean in this text?
- Read through each of these texts—Prov 2:16-22; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; 9:13-18; 23:26-28; 29:3; 30:20—and compile a list of the *consequences* of sexual sin.

**This Week’s Audio:** [gracechurch.org/motw](http://gracechurch.org/motw)

**Next Meeting:** Nov 4 – Preserving Purity, Pt 2