

Explore the Bible: Following God's Design

June 15, 2020

- *The Explore the Bible Lesson for July 5 focuses on Proverbs 5:3-11, 15-18.*

Nearly five years ago, the Ashley Madison website experienced a massive data breach. Unknown individuals managed to steal massive amounts of confidential user information from the website and then leak the info onto the internet the following month. Millions of users' personal details were put on display for the world to see. Families, careers and lives were ruined. Some users even committed suicide.

You see, Ashley Madison is a website dedicated to facilitating adulterous affairs.

What made the data breach extra gut-wrenching for followers of Christ was the number of professing Christians implicated in the leak. Numerous pastors, seminary professors and other Christian celebrities were exposed as having used Ashley Madison to pursue adulterous relationships. Christianity is a faith that is supposed to uphold high standards of sexual virtue, and the Ashley Madison scandal exposed horrific failure.

Adultery is a romantic relationship between a married person and an individual who is not that person's spouse. It is condemned numerous times throughout the Bible, but even most non-Christians in America today consider adultery and "cheating" an egregious offense. This lesson's Scripture passage, Proverbs 5:3-11 and 5:15-18, is all about adultery.

The temptation and risk of adultery

Proverbs 5:3-6, the first section of our text, describes an adulterous woman. There is no specific real-life woman in view; this character is a personification, an archetype. The writer presents this adulterous woman as a near-irresistible temptress. Her “lips … drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil” (5:3).

Despite these pleasant first impressions, however, the path she treads leads only to pain and destruction (5:4-6). The writer encourages readers to keep far, far away. “Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house” (5:8). Just as the adulterous woman herself walks a path to pain and destruction, those who join her will also face the same fate (5:7-11). Though the sensual pleasures of adultery may offer temporary joy, they ultimately are unsatisfying and deadly.

Joy, life and fulfillment are not to be found with the adulterous woman. Instead, the author exhorts readers to “rejoice in the wife of your youth” (5:18). The temporary pleasures of adultery cannot compare to the joys of a long, faithful and loving marriage (5:15-18).

Modern readers may find this text somewhat troubling, however. It clearly is written from a distinctively male perspective, and the “adulterous woman” character seems like it could be misused to underwrite misogynistic stereotypes about women. This passage also could be misused to uphold the sexist double standard in which women are blamed for men’s adulterous behavior.

We must remember what the whole Bible says about adultery, however. Jesus, for example, will have nothing to do with sexist double standards. Jesus teaches that if a man so much as *looks* at a woman with lust, he is guilty of adultery—no blame is laid at the woman’s feet for the man’s wandering eyes (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus also shows mercy to a woman

caught in adultery, taking the opportunity to expose the hypocrisy of the woman's accusers (John 8:3-11).

Adultery is a grave sin, one of the deepest and most painful forms of betrayal. Christians ought to hold both men and women to equal standards of romantic fidelity. Our Lord Jesus Christ will allow no less.

The faithful bridegroom

While the Bible has plenty to say about literal adultery and marital faithfulness, the marriage relationship also provides rich fodder for metaphors for God's relationship to his people. The prophets Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel each use the imagery of adultery to describe the nation of Israel's persistent idolatry and other sins against God.

The New Testament frequently describes the church—all those who believe in the Lord Jesus—as the bride of Christ (e.g., 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-9, 21:1-2). The metaphor of marital faithfulness applies to the church's allegiance to Jesus, and the metaphor of adultery applies to idolatry, sin and apostasy.

There are some key differences, however, between human marriages and the Christ/church “marriage.” One of the most important is that unlike in human marriages, there isn't even the slightest chance of Christ committing adultery and being unfaithful to his bride. The God of Israel, who became incarnate as Jesus Christ, is fundamentally defined by his faithfulness. Even in the face of our persistent “adultery,” God remains steadfast and faithful.

This faithful love found its apex in the unlikeliest of places—the cross. The most unfaithful and spiritually “adulterous” act humanity ever committed, the murder of Christ, is the very same event God chose to bring about reconciliation between Himself and humanity.

Christians are [permitted](#) to leave a marriage and marry someone else in cases of adultery—as well as in cases of abuse, abandonment, etc. God himself also has this right. God has every right to abandon sinful humanity and leave us on our adulterous path to destruction. But God instead has chosen to come and die for us, to reconcile us to himself.

Our passage from Proverbs promises blessings and joy from a faithful, loving marriage (5:15-18). But these blessings, wonderful though they are, cannot compare to the blessings that come from Christ's unfailingly faithful love for his people.

Joshua Sharp is a writer and Bible teacher living in Waco. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Truett Theological Seminary.