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Bridgeway Church

Proverbs #4

Sermon Summary #4

Infidelity: America's New National Pastime

Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:20-35

There was a time in our country when *baseball* was considered the national pastime. The die-hard fan, of course, would insist that it still is. But statistics reveal that in recent years *football* has won for itself that cherished position, and I suppose fans of both baseball and football will continue to argue which is truly our national sport.

But may I suggest this morning that there is yet another rival for the attention and energy of men and women in America? ***It is a sport that isn't played on the field or in the arena, but in the offices and hotels and bedrooms all across our country. I'm talking about adultery. Infidelity, not baseball, football, or basketball has, tragically, become our national pastime.*** But far from being an entertaining and relatively harmless release of energy, as are these other sports, this one threatens to destroy the very foundations of home, family, and even society.

I need to be cautious in describing adultery or infidelity as our national pastime, or even in comparing it to certain "sports" in American life. I don't want you to think I regard adultery as a laughing or sporting matter. I assure you I do not. There are enough people today who are trying to convince you and everyone else that adultery is "in." Far from evil or life-threatening, they want you to believe that infidelity is an exhilarating experience that will bring you more joy than can be found in any other endeavor.

If you think I'm making this up, stop right now and try to think of a successful film or TV show (excluding *Duck Dynasty*, of course), whether it be a comedy or drama, that does not promote adultery and sexual immorality. I dare say you could count them on one hand with multiple fingers left over.

Of course, they probably won't call it "adultery" or "sexual immorality," but rather will use sanitized terms such as "fooling around" or "having a fling" or an innocent "affair." But the message in our society today is the same: if you ever hope to find yourself, if you really want to be somebody in today's culture, if you want to drink the wine of life's greatest pleasure to its fullest, *cheat*. Into one bed and out of another, from this affair to that one, all without the slightest thought of the consequences not only for yourself and your spouse but your children and circle of friends; that is the key to living life to its fullest, so they say. ***If you want to be a real man or a fully liberated woman with a life overflowing with mystery and magic, cheat.***

It is high time, I hope you will agree, that the alleged glamorous, glittering, golden image of adultery is exposed for the shallow, sinful, sordid thing that is truly is. And no one does it better than does Solomon in Proverbs. All of chapter five, one half of chapter six, and all of chapter seven are devoted to the anatomy of adultery: what it is, why it happens, how to avoid it, and the horrid repercussions if one should yield to the temptation.

Today's message and next week's as well are not going to be easy. We won't talk about the alleged thrill of a secret rendezvous, but of the devastating effects of broken vows. We won't talk about the alleged excitement of tasting forbidden fruit, but of the tragic impact of a trust betrayed. We won't talk about the satisfaction of a new sexual conquest, but of the disrupted and often destroyed lives of little children who don't deserve this. We won't talk about the superficial sensation of being a real man or a fulfilled woman, but rather of the certainty of divine judgment for those who do not repent. Let me say a few more things before we dive into this passage.

First, times have changed. No one denies this. But *human nature has not changed*. The same motivation that energized and drove men and women to adultery in the ancient world is powerfully present today. The same tactics, the same tricks of the trade, the same physiological appeal that adultery presents is still with us today. So, although you will find in these chapters a lot of language and imagery that is remote from our world and largely unfamiliar to most of us, that doesn't mean that adultery itself is different. The sin remains the same.

Second, don't be misled by the way the woman is described in these chapters. You might be inclined to think of her as the typical prostitute, who walks the street in dangerous inner-city neighborhoods at night, but in Proverbs she is also married. She could easily be the administrative assistant in the office across the hall, your next door neighbor, a business associate, your best friend's wife, or even a high school girlfriend with whom you've only recently reconnected on Facebook.

Third, although the temptation in Proverbs comes only from the woman, *it could as easily be from a man*. What the immoral woman is guilty of in these chapters is equally the sin of the immoral man. *Women are hardly the only ones who initiate an affair*. Men are equally, if not more guilty. So don't conclude that Solomon has stereotyped men and women. Both genders can be the guilty party in a seduction. Both genders can be the fool for having yielded to temptation.

Fourth, and perhaps most important of all, do not think that if you have been guilty of sexual infidelity or if you have been the innocent victim of it that you are beyond hope. Many here today have suffered the devastation of having committed adultery. I'm here to tell you that if you repent and seek God's forgiveness, there is grace to bring healing and restoration. And if you have suffered as a victim of your spouse's infidelity, there is grace to bring healing and restoration to you as well. Don't read these chapters without the assurance and the promise of hope for people swept up in this epidemic of sexual sin. Your marriage doesn't have to end.

You see, my deep concern is that by talking explicitly about this problem, *I may inadvertently dredge up memories from your past that you and your spouse have already addressed and for which forgiveness has occurred and restoration has come. The last thing in the world I want to do is to reawaken pain in your heart that you've long since overcome. I don't want to stir up mistrust between a husband and wife, especially given how difficult it is to rebuild trust once it has been shattered by infidelity. Simply put: I don't want to reopen and aggravate old wounds that by God's grace have been healed.*

I know what some of you are thinking: "Sam, why are you spending so much time on the front end making all these points? Just go to the text!" I appreciate that, but you must understand how sensitive and volatile and potentially damaging it is to preach honestly on a passage like this. I don't want to come across as angry or judgmental or in any way to give the impression that you who have suffered in some way or other because of infidelity are second-class citizens in God's kingdom and really have no hope for the future. I want to be clear about the sin of adultery and its consequences at the same time I am sensitive and caring toward those who are its victims. So let's get started.

A Father Appeals to his Son (5:1-6; 6:20-24)

Please note that the appeal comes from **both the father and mother and originates in the home!** Sex education as well as instruction in the ways of the world in general must come from the parents. You can't and should never trust someone else to educate your kids on this issue. "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (6:20). The reason for this urgent appeal in vv. 1-2 is given in Proverbs 5:3-6.

"For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.

She's tricky! She's slippery! She'll make a sexual encounter seem so reasonable, so full of fun, so innocent and carefree. Just as honey drips luciously and sweetly from the honeycomb, this kind of woman speaks enticing words with promises of endless pleasure. But, though sweet at first, the end is bitter. Her words seem so harmless, so gentle and subtle, but in the end they will shred you to ribbons. She will flatter you, try to convince you that you deserve a little pleasure on the side; her appeal will glisten with seductive charm. But don't listen to her! Her red lips conceal two rows of razor sharp teeth that will devour you.

She will butter you up, flatter you, make you feel like you are every woman's dream come true; she will caress your male ego and try to convince you that **you owe it to yourself** to try something new and different. After all, it's probably **your wife's fault** for not having met your needs. Or if it's the other way around, it's **your husband's fault** for working so hard and being utterly exhausted at the end of the day. They will make it sound as if a momentary sexual liaison is actually a matter of justice: "After all you've given up and sacrificed to make your spouse and kids happy, and this is all they do in return? Come on, you owe it to yourself to enjoy a little fun."

She may even manipulate you with a strange combination of guilt and compassion: "Come on, **I** need you. **I've** been hurt and rejected so many times and **I** just want to know what it's like to be loved and enjoyed by a man. And if you don't sleep with me, I'll hurt myself, and it will all be your fault!"

In the end she will do everything imaginable to make an affair seem plausible, sensible, simple, innocent, justified, and exciting. Her secret weapon is rationalization. She will, with soothing and persuasive speech, casually dismiss every moral objection that you might raise. But in the end she and her words are as "bitter as wormwood" (v. 4a). Wormwood was a plant that was placed between woolen garments to ward off maggots and moths (Kitchen, 121). It is so repulsively bitter that not even the lowest life forms could tolerate it.

Now, lest you think I'm stereotyping women, I want you at a later time to go back and reverse the genders so that you ladies will be just as alert to the seductive strategies of adulterous men.

The Admonition (vv. 7-8)

Stay as far away from her as you can! Do whatever you must do to distance yourself from her. Don't visit her home. Don't linger in her office. Don't drive down the streets where you know she can be seen. Don't go to the parties or events where you know she'll be present and where she has in the past made her advances toward you. Many will say, "But I've got things under control. I can handle the temptation. And it would be too inconvenient and even financially costly to separate entirely." Not nearly as inconvenient and costly as the effects of infidelity will be! ***Contrary to what you say, you are not as strong as you think you are.***

"But Sam, what if I'm compelled by my job or through circumstances beyond my control to remain in the presence of this woman who is tempting me?" The best advice I can give you is to be like Joseph in Egypt:

"Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house" (Genesis 39:6b-12).

This admonition also includes avoiding situations where you are ***exposed to her seductive glance: the winking of the eye, the casual flirtatious comment, the seemingly harmless tease.*** We read in 6:25 – "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes." Don't miss the emphasis on desire that arises within the "heart," that is to say, in your mind. When a Christian man sees another woman is beautiful and sexy, and it is virtually impossible in today's world that you won't see them, whether at work, across the street, on TV, on the internet, at the office, or wherever . . . when you see her, ***turn aside your eyes immediately.*** That doesn't mean you are to be rude and inconsiderate and disrespectful of others. Far less does it mean that you can't or shouldn't appreciate female beauty. It simply means ***you must not let your eyes serve as a stimulant to your heart.*** And ladies, the same counsel applies to you when it comes to men whom you find attractive.

The Consequences of Infidelity (vv. 9-14)

(1) There is the loss of the strength and vitality of youth (v. 9)

The "others" may refer to the woman's associates who take your money. The loss of "years to the merciless" likely refers to loss of youthful energy and strength. Trying to maintain a mistress over time will drain you financially and physically. Your dignity will be destroyed in the process. Listen to how King David described himself in the wake of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba:

"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4).

(2) There is the loss of wealth (v. 10)

This may be a reference to the creditors who will show up at your door after years of the financial drain that adultery will bring. Or it could be a reference to the extended family members of the adulteress woman. Your long “labors” and hard work will drain off into the bank accounts of other people.

(3) There is the loss of physical health (v. 11).

He may have in mind the sheer exhaustion you feel in trying to maintain more than one bed. For us today, the threat of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV are very real and relevant.

(4) There is also the loss of conscience (vv. 12-13)

He has particularly in view the pain of guilt and regret and the agony in one’s conscience as you reflect on the stupid choices you made and your refusal to pay heed to anyone’s advice or warning.

(5) There is the loss of reputation (v. 14)

The “assembled congregation” refers to the gathering of Israel in worship. Both then and now it applies to the shame and humiliation and public denunciation that one suffers when the affair is exposed.

Being on “the brink of utter ruin” (v. 14a) might refer to the physical, financial, and social devastation that the disclosure of an affair can bring. It could also refer to ***the psychologically devastating effects of feeding an addiction to illicit sex***. Once one falls into the pattern of infidelity there is an emotional drug on which you become dependent: the thrill of the chase, the secret rendezvous, the clandestine meetings, the rush that comes from a sexual conquest, the constant praise from your partner and the energy that comes from being told how much they need you and are dependent on you. It will, in the end, bring you to “utter ruin.”

There are additional consequences outlined in Proverbs 6:27-35.

“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house. He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts” (Proverbs 6:27-35).

These are warnings for those who stupidly think that no one will get hurt. You think you've got it all under control. Try carrying around a live fire in your coat pocket or walking on burning coals. As certain as it is that you will be burned, so certain it is that your infidelity will scorch and consume your soul.

We may on occasion feel sympathy for a thief who steals because he and his family are starving. But even he will suffer the consequences of his crime. How much more so do people despise the adulterer. There is no sympathy reserved for him. His destruction and disgrace go far beyond what a petty thief may endure.

Vv. 34-35 likely describe the reaction of the woman's husband when he discovers what you've done. An outraged husband will probably want his pound of flesh. In the ancient world he would also demand financial reparations. You will never be able to pay him off or satisfy his desire for revenge.

The Sexual Solution (vv. 15-19)

Let me warn you in advance. In case you didn't figure this out when we read the passage earlier, these verses are ***unashamedly erotic***. So blame God for what happens next, not me!

The solution to the temptation of adultery is simple: ***keep your hands off another woman and keep them on your wife!*** The author is talking about your sexual desires and passions and it is clear that we are to embrace them, celebrate them, enjoy them, and satisfy them with one's own spouse. Sexual desire is here portrayed as thirst for water and the message is: "Satisfy your thirst for sexual satisfaction with your wife (or your husband)." Sexual intimacy with your spouse is the only water that truly refreshes. ***Quench your sexual thirst at home!***

Notice what is **not** said. He does not say: "Well, there's a lot of sexual temptation in our world and the only way for you to survive is to grit your teeth and clench your fists and close your eyes and hope you slip by unaffected by everything around you." No! Mere self-control and resolute determination not to yield will not alone preserve your purity. ***"God's remedy for your thirst for sex is sex, overflowing sexual joy with your wife"*** (Ortlund, 93). Look again at v. 15 and the reference to "your own cistern" and "your own well." His point is that "your wife [or husband] is your own personal and private, divinely approved wellspring of endless sexual satisfaction" (Ortlund, 94).

If you think I'm making this up, look again at v. 19 – "Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." The word "intoxicated" is often used in the OT to describe a drunk who swerves and reels and staggers under the influence of alcohol. It is the author's way of saying that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to go overboard and to excess when it comes to marital love! Get drunk on love in the arms of your spouse!

Note also the emphasis on both ***the quality and quantity*** of married sexual intimacy. Let her breasts "fill" you . . . and "be intoxicated"! That's the quality of your sexual relationship in marriage. As for the quantity, he says: "at all times" . . . and "always"! In other words, "make it fun and [make it] frequent" (Ortlund, 95).

When you get married, set aside your inhibitions and go for it sexually! This isn't Sam's advice, it is God's command!

A Final Reminder and Warning (vv. 20-24)

Of all the consequences of infidelity, the most serious of all is the realization that “a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord” (v. 21). You may actually be able to get away with adultery. Not everyone who is unfaithful to his/her spouse gets caught. You may in fact be one of the few who avoid the other consequences outlined in chapter five. But ***sin is never secret in a universe overseen and governed by God.*** From one thing you will never, ever escape: the presence of God and his exhaustive knowledge of everything you say, think, and do.

A few concluding summary observations are in order.

First, parents, take to heart this example of your responsibility to educate your children, both sons and daughters, in the dynamics of human sexuality and especially in the ways of a very wicked and perverted world. Don’t assume that they’ll figure it out by watching TV or talking with friends or through some sex-education course at school. This is *your* responsibility!

Second, although this passage focuses on the physical act of adultery, ***do not overlook or minimize the devastating consequences of the so-called “emotional” affair.*** Some of you, I fear, because of difficulties at home and the diminishing of passion through the years of marriage are looking to someone of the opposite sex with whom you can share your life, your struggles, your secrets, your ambition, your hopes and dreams. And you have likely found someone who not only listens but empathizes and encourages and supports you. And it feels good! And it seems so harmless! And it will, I promise you, eventually land you in bed with him/her. Break it off now! Break it off forever!

Third, and finally, I want to return to something I said at the outset. Regardless of what has happened in the past, or even what is happening right now, it’s never too late: there is healing and hope for restoration and renewal if you will but repent and pursue God’s redemptive grace. Go to someone of the same gender and confess your struggles. Empower them to hold you accountable for how you use your time and where you go and what you see. Plead with them to pray for you daily.