

Proverbs 7:22-27

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The story of the seduced young man ends in the path of wickedness. The result is his destruction.

In this section, Solomon concludes his narrative of the young man caught up in adultery (Proverbs 7:6-21). In the middle (previous) section of the story, Solomon saw the woman's seduction strategy, that it had taken effect.

Suddenly, he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter (vs 22). Without argument or question, the young man goes with the seductress. She has promised a night of "caressing" until "the morning." This story is an allegory about how evil can tempt us, distracting us from the way of wisdom, and lead us into trouble. Solomon says here the young man *follows suddenly* (or *immediately/straight away*). He has lost his moral compass.

With lust in his eyes, he does not realize he is being led to destruction. He thinks he is being led to fun. To something he wants. He has allowed himself to be deceived. *Like an ox goes to the slaughter*, he is carried away oblivious to what horror awaits him. When we detach ourselves from reality, we fail to see what is truly going on and allow ourselves to be convinced by our own delusions and desires of the flesh.

The young man also goes *as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool* (vs 22). A literal translation of this phrase is "as a fool to the correction of the stocks." It reiterates that the young man is unaware of the fate awaiting him. He is a *fool*, one not aware of what is true. He goes to the correction (or *discipline*) of the *fetters* (or *stocks*—another synonym is "shackle"). He is being handed over to imprisonment, to limitation, to the imperfection of wickedness.

When the Apostle Paul defended his gospel of grace, he repudiated the false allegation that he taught that since we are justified in God's sight solely by faith then we ought to sin (Romans 3:8). One of the reasons Paul gives why we should not sin is because sin leads to slavery and death (Romans 6:15-16). This episode from Proverbs is an illustration of this principle.

Solomon gives a third example from the animal world. *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* (vs 23).

In all of these examples from the animal world, there is a moment when the quarry realizes the truth of the trap. But by then it is too late, they see it just before their destruction: *An arrow pierces the liver* and there is a pain of knowing. A *bird* rushes into a *snare* and realizes just as his life is ending that he has made a fatal mistake. So it is with this young man. *He does not know it will cost him his life* to engage with the adulteress. He is following the seductress to his own destruction.

In this story, Solomon does not tell us what sort of death/separation the young man will experience. In the previous chapter, Solomon warned of the wrath of a jealous husband, which

could be the source of physical harm (Proverbs 6:34-35). But there are many forms of separation that adultery brings, including an internal separation of our self from our moral compass.

It is not that the seductress necessarily means him physical harm. She is likely focused on exploiting the young man for her own ends. What Solomon means is that by choosing to flirt with wickedness, act in wickedness, and then trust in the seduction of wickedness, we go deeper and deeper into the path of evil. We think we can escape consequences—but sin always leads to death.

We might settle into a new way of life (or, more literally, commit ourselves to the way of death). One adultery becomes many. One act of wickedness becomes a pattern. By this, our life is snuffed out. The wisdom we were created for is ignored and the opportunity to steward others and love God is replaced by a pattern of seeking to satisfy the lusts of the flesh.

Solomon ends his narrative here. And moves into the voice of father to son:

Now, therefore, my sons, listen to me (vs 24). This is the last time Solomon uses the phrase *my sons* until late in the book of Proverbs ([see notes on Proverbs 7:1-5](#)). This admonition can be seen as the culmination of his warnings, his pleadings.

The narrative he has shared in this chapter has a dramatic feel, a tension, a desperation about it. *Therefore*, Solomon says, *listen to me*. I am about to tell you how to avoid destroying your life. *Pay attention to the words of my mouth* (vs 24). This is not just small talk. This is a teaching that could save your life.

His warning is clear and straight to the point. *Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways* (vs 25). This presumes the reader is on the right path, or that he was created for it. Or, at least, that it is reality and what is in his best interest. He has to *turn away* to find *her*. *Her ways* are the path of wickedness.

The inference here is that the *heart* is inclined to *turn aside to her ways*. This is consistent with the scripture's warnings that our unredeemed heart is drawn toward wickedness (Jeremiah 17:9). But also inferred is that we have a choice, a will, that can override our *heart*. We can *not let* our hearts *turn aside*. The emphasis here is on intentionality; a deliberate and active choosing.

Her ways are a denial and perversion of reality. The young man has a choice as to how to respond when confronted with this perversion.

Solomon warns also of being diligent not to accidentally or inadvertently wander into a path that puts us in harm's way. Solomon says: *Do not stray into her paths* (vs 25). To *stray* is to wander aimlessly. To be careless. Not only are we to actively choose NOT to follow the evil intents in our heart. We also need to be diligent and intentional to avoid inadvertently straying into her path.

The only way to avoid this inadvertent straying is to be intentional about the path we choose. Solomon advises us to stay the course for which we were created, to which we truly belong, the

path which we truly desire to walk. Again, choosing wickedness requires one to *stray*. It is also important that *ways* and *paths* are plural here. The adulteress has many strategies, many means and practical inroads (sex and adultery are just one). The key to avoiding all of them is in *your heart*. It is not just a physical warning to avoid being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is a spiritual warning to align your *heart* with what is true.

For many are the victims she has cut down and numerous are all her slain (vs 26). Solomon's narrative was a cautionary tale, but not an isolated incident. It seems as though he is trying to explain something he sees all the time, a prevalent frustration and sadness for him. He is not trying to tell one unique, isolated story. He is trying to tell what he has seen play out in many stories. Many have found their way to the path of wickedness. It is a wide and crowded road. Take care not to be among them. The word for *victim* is "halal"; it means "mortally wounded." Those who, like the young man in the story, were stumbling around trouble. She has snatched them and *cut them down*.

Of course, the irony of all this is that, in the end, Solomon did not take his own advice (1 Kings 11:4-5). He let his guard down in his older years and it brought down his dynasty. This makes the cautionary tale all the more relevant.

Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death (vs 27). The seductress, in verses 16-17, told the young man about how she decorated her bed and covered it with perfume in preparation for him. When the story ends, the two are walking back to her house, to engage in all she has promised him.

Solomon makes clear here that her *house* is nothing less than death. *Sheol* was the Old Testament word for "place of the dead." It could mean "grave," "pit," or "hell." Here it is alluding to the destruction of the naïve young man who chose the path of wickedness.

The young man is walking to his demise, *Descending to the chambers of death*. *Chambers* means "bedchambers," an allusion to the bed she promised was so ornate and full of fleshly delights. It is, in reality, a deathbed.

Solomon invites us to replace the image of a night of revelry and ecstasy with a more complete image. The full picture is a night of indulgence followed by massive consequences of death and destruction. This cautionary tale is for all of us, and relates to any sort of sin. The consequence of sin is always death (Romans 6:23).

Biblical Text

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Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,**

**²³ 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.**

**²⁴ Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.**

**²⁵ Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,
Do not stray into her paths.**

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And numerous are all her slain.**

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