

How expensive is immorality? (6:23-35)

For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light and reproofs for discipline are the way of life to keep you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids. 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. ³⁰Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry; ³¹But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; he must give all the substance of his house. ³²The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it. ³³Wounds and disgrace he will find and his reproach will not be blotted out. ³⁴For jealousy enrages a man and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. ³⁵He will not accept any ransom, nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts.

THE TEXT (NASB)

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For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light and reproofs for discipline are the way of life to keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall no be innocent. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; but if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. KJV - Proverbs 6:26

INTRODUCTION



How expensive is immorality? (6:23-35)

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Immorality is more expensive than you think.

Most financial literature fails to warn us of the true cost of immorality, but the Bible is different. Immorality makes a beautiful thing—human sexuality—turn ugly.



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COMMENTARY

First we need to look at the translation of the text carefully. I've found three different translations for the 26th verse, and each communicates a different financial message:

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1. The price of a prostitute is a loaf of bread (ESV, The Message).
 2. Hiring a prostitute leads to financial ruin, even to begging for bread (KJV).
 3. Hiring a prostitute reduces a person to mere chattel, like a loaf of bread (NASB).

Sex at a Discount—Quality Prostitutes Ain't Cheap



The ESV translation says, “The price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life.” And *The Message* says, “You can buy an hour with a whore for a loaf of bread, but a wanton woman may well eat you alive.” So both may give the impression that the only financial cost in hiring a prostitute is the loaf of bread, with no further consequences. Not likely.

First, the start of the verse makes no sense, unless conditions are very desperate—as during a famine. A loaf costs less than an hour's wage, but a prostitute's services typically far more. In the days of the Jewish patriarch Judah, the going rate was a young goat (Genesis 38:22-23). A kid is worth more than a loaf of bread. So it's noteworthy that the Hebrew word for bread referred to a small circular loaf. Even where prostitution is government-regulated (like Denmark) the cost far exceeds a loaf of bread.

The Message and ESV insert ideas not found in the Hebrew. These new twists seem to trivialize immorality with a prostitute. The Message adds the expression “an hour” and the ESV adds “only.”

A Caution with Translation One

The ESV does provide this footnote: ‘Or (cf. Septuagint...) “for a prostitute leaves a man with nothing but a loaf of bread.” Yet, if read literally, both the ESV and *The Message* seem to suggest that prostitution is cheap, but adultery with a married woman expensive. So in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (V.5), Allen P. Ross concludes: “A harlot brings a man to poverty but the married woman seeks death.” The one is cheap and the other expensive? Pick the



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Translations Two and Three



The second translation by the KJV—"For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life"—is illustrated biblically by the story of the prodigal son. He spent his money on prostitutes and ended up begging for bread (Luke 15:13-17).

The third rendering of this verse by the NASB—"For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life"—is like the second, revealing the immediate squalor of prostitution. In hiring a woman, we become sordid objects ourselves, as common as a loaf of bread. The passage then adds that adultery with a married woman invokes the wrath of her jealous husband (and the whole community?), leading to financial disaster.

Why spend so much time with this verse? Simply: Sexual vice in any form leads to financial ruin, whether quickly or slowly.

Cost of Prostitution

But what about immorality with a prostitute, a divorcee, or a single woman—are those acts financially safer? I think not. The true cost of prostitution includes:

- A natural and unavoidable sense of guilt;
- A fear of public shame;
- A stained reputation;
- A crippled career or job loss;
- Sexually transmitted diseases.

Classic Comments



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Classic commentator Adam Clarke suggests we ignore the distinction in the Hebrew between the prostitute and the adulteress.

In following lewd women, a man is soon reduced to poverty and disease. While the man hires the whore for a single loaf of bread, the woman thus hired taketh his precious life. She extracts his energy and poisons his constitution. In the first clause (ishshah zonah) is plainly a prostitute; but should we render (esheth) in the second clause, an adulteress? I think not. The versions in general join (esheth ish), together, which, thus connected, signify no more than the wife of a man; and out of this we have made adulteress.

In the *Eerdmaans Bible Commentary* (3rd Edition 1987), A. F. Walls writes: "It is not clear whether the teacher distinguishes two types of immoral women. Probably the same woman is referred to in both parts of the verse."

ANALYSIS PART TWO

The text then becomes a little confusing: "[30] Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry, [31] but when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; he must give all the substance of his house." Is the "he" in [31] the "thief" in [30], or the adulterer in [26-27]?

Sevenfold is Not Seven Times

First we must ask, what does "repay sevenfold" mean? It might be saying that a hungry thief, caught stealing food, must repay it seven times, even if it costs his entire household. But how could someone desperate enough to steal food repay seven times the food stolen? Could he have anything in his house for repayment? Even if forced into slavery, it would not take him too long (a week?) to cover the cost of some food.

The Legal Limit



The maximum legal recompense for stealing consumables like bread was four loaves in return (Exodus 22:1, Luke 19:8). So the expression, "repay sevenfold," can't be taken as strict arithmetic, but figuratively to mean "full and complete repayment." The LORD



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Two Different People

So, I don't believe verses [30-31] are describing the same person. This is suggested by the word "but" beginning [31]. The conjunction "but" is contrasting instead of combining. Unfortunately, the text is made a little more confusing when the KJV inserts another "but" at the start of [32]. That might be just emphasis for the first "but," but it's not in the Hebrew.

Conclusion? The passage is proclaiming the high cost, not of a thief stealing food from hunger—after all, there's no stigma in that, no enduring vengeance!—but of our sexual vice. The cost is first financial, but then gets much more personal, eventually taking our health and even our lives.

More Classic Comments

So the K&D Commentary explains:



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Uncleanness is Pollution



Matthew Henry identifies five adverse results of “uncleanness” or sexual filthiness:

1. “It is a sin that impoverishes men. Job describes it as a fire that consumes right to hell and wastes all of a man’s profit (Job 31:12).
2. “Death. The Law of Moses (Leviticus 20:10) exacted the death penalty for the adulteress and adulterer... most cultures do not enforce this [but] God’s standard does not change.
3. “Guilt upon the conscience. This invisible pain and misery cannot be shaken without God’s pardon... as unavoidable as the consequences of hugging fire. Burning and incredible pain...
4. “It ruins one’s reputation more severely than the sin of stealing.
5. “It exposes the adulterer to the rage of a jealous husband. Even if the law does not punish adultery severely, there is the risk that a jealous husband will take matters into his own hands...”

Porn is Real Pollution

The mindless hedonism, championed by Hugh Hefner and his Playboy delusions, proclaims the opposite. It contends that restraining our lust will cost us our happiness. What a lie! Look at the empty shell Hefner became! God warns that vice destroys our very selves. The pornography industry bleeds a country’s economy and its citizens’ health—physical and mental. Pornography’s social cost is recognized by some ethical investors. A small minority refuse to



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Wealthy but Dead-ended



What about those who seem wealthy, but live sordid lives? The text says that their hold on wealth is brief. What if we're not caught? It doesn't matter. The costs may be delayed, but they are certain. Gifts do not placate angry husbands. Some sins are so personal, they're beyond reconciliation.

The text warns us never to surrender to personal lust, always to count the full cost to our soul and reputation. As the poet Sir Philip Sidney, said, "Every base occupation makes one sharp in its practice and dull in every other."

Professional Infidelity (Source: Calgary Herald 2 Feb. 2010)

In February 2010, investors got cold feet over an internet infidelity promoter, Avid Life Media Inc. Avid ran "adult" dating websites, including one promoting extramarital affairs. But it had problems getting a date. The Toronto firm planned to go public on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), seeking \$60 million from its initial public offering (IPO). However, said media reports, its efforts to woo investors met a cool response. "They're putting that plan on hold, citing market conditions," said an anonymous insider. Avid Life Media could not be reached for comment, but later reports suggested that banks and big investors were hesitant, despite Avid's solid financial record.



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How did Jesus handle adultery?

Jesus showed great compassion to those entangled in the sin of immorality. When the religious leaders confronted him with an adulteress, caught in the act, Jesus protected her from being stoned to death (John 8:3-11). However... however, Jesus also told her to "Go and sin no more!"

Repentance and a changed life are far better solution than capital punishment. Jesus came to save lives, not to destroy them.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- If married, love your spouse with gusto.
- Recognize that immoral thoughts come from the flesh (i.e. naturally through the first birth), but the Holy Spirit given by God at the new birth (John 3:3-8) can overcome them consistently.
- Buy a small unexpected gift of appreciation for your spouse.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS
adultery, bread, freedom, hunger, immorality, less assets (quantity), pornography, prostitution, sex, thief, bf spending

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: "Haste makes waste," "brains over brawn," and "don't jump to conclusions."

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. "Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late." Pauline says, "First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity."

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day



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