

1. This late-Jewish prudential-wisdom material is concerned chiefly with the health of the home and the stability of the community--two matters agonizingly at issue among us ethnic Americans [meaning, all of us severally by tribes and subcultures] today.
2. Loose genitals, male and female, are here seen as the chief cause of the breakdown of the home and of chaos in society. No messing around with euphemisms here. Everything's concrete; e.g., what fun it is to play with breasts, but let it be only your wife's (5. 19). Females are to be used for physical "enjoyment" (vs.18, AT), but only within marriage. [It's sentimental nonsense of speak of relationship as though folks can ascend to a plane where they do not "use" each other: this thing you ought to have done, and not left the other, the agapaic, undone.]
3. The sanctions here are prudential-social, not numinous-individual. The negative sanction against adultery is not that you'll get killed by society for it [the ancient *lex adulterationis*] but that the cuckold^e may injure or even kill you (6.29-35: "ignominious blows" and "disgrace," a fate worse than death!). The shame sanction, or sanction of public opinion, is foremost: what would the neighbors say? NB: Of the 27 sanctions used by early Christian leaders, this is the one least used. Because it is powerful in secular societies, in which ultimate sanctions have atrophied [like, What would God think and do?], permissivism attacks it--e.g., Fritz Perls' Gestalt Prayer: "I am not in this world to fulfil your expectations," as Fritz said to himself as he abandoned his wife in New York and took to fresh young lays at Esalen, where I saw him at play.
4. All wisdom literature, but especially ancient [Israelite, Assyro-Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese], seeks to put wisdom and folly at maximum distance from each other for rhetorical effect. Since loose genitals produce domestic and social chaos and thus shame both faster and more intensely/extensively than does any other activity, loose genitals function paradigmatically as the folly-symbol. Here, reality and rhetoric converge.
5. So powerful is the genitals' temptation to bust loose from marriage that control requires the raucous, insensitive, derisive laughter of neighbors. If the neighbors become too ignorant or indifferent or nice to gossip and deride--if one's genitals come loose and nobody laughs--social cohesiveness is destroyed from the family outward. [Mind you, I'm talking about a secular society like that of the Proverbs writers and ours. "The fear of God," in religious societies, may keep the genitals from coming loose and thus society from disintegrating. Cp. William Penn's doctrine that "the fear of God" is an essential ingredient of "liberty, freedom, and the people's self-rule." For a foolish "celebration of anonymity," see Cox's THE SECULAR CITY.] Thus the paradox: While neighbor-fear and God-fear tend to co-exist in a society, without God-fear neighbor-fear evaporates soon after having been intensified by the death of God-fear. God dies first, then the neighbor, then society--or should I say, the soul dies first? Welfare is one push toward the fatherless-family phenomenon; but loose genitals are, historically, the major factor in family disintegration. No matter whose genitals come loose, the male's or the female's or both, the females are stuck with the kids: biology is destiny.
6. Biblical thinking is not anti-sex but pro-family. Talmud enjoins sexual intercourse as the husband/wife climax of the home Shabbat service, so weekly marital genital activity --at least weekly!--is given sacred sanction and enclosure [cp. sex as "dirty"/clean]. As a good Jew, Paul objects to loose genitals partly because extramarital genital activity weakens marital-genital duty/pleasure/joy (Ro.1,24-27; the male's relatively limited orgasmic capacity being a heavy factor in the sexual neglect of wives by loose-genital husbands--on which see Paul also elsewhere).
7. Biblically, sex as dangerous precedes sex as dirty. The sex tabus of the Holiness Code root in the fear of numinous collective punishment for violation of the sacred sexual traditions whose roots are, for us, remote both historically and psychologically. The "abiding values" [Fosdick's phrase] here come from our meditating on our own con-

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11. Chap.8 is of course the OT chapter of central import for cosmic Christology in NT, where Jesus-sophia (fem.) and Jesus-logos (masc.) for the new-ancient Wise One. In Hebrew, the beginning of Prov.8 has the sounds of Gen.1; and vs.30 relates Wisdom to God by a root that means "yes," "strength," "nurture," "truth" [on which see thinksheet #757]. temporary experience/fear of the dangers of sex: intrapsychic, interpersonal, relation-social damage, the frustration of potential and hope. The stupid efforts of the likes of Masters and Johnson to exhibit sex as "natural" adds to the problem--as though "human" and "natural" were not opposites! Sex may or may not be supernaturally dangerous [I think it is], but it's self-canceling when it becomes "natural" in the sense of losing its transcendent dimension, its "mystery." One effect is that it tends to become only genital, a gate to Nihil instead of Agape. There goes the victory of the Fall, "the carnal mind" [Paul], maya [Hind.], samsara [Buddh.], the shadow-cave [Pl.], nigredo [alchemy], and the kingdom of Ulro [Blake] as well as Mordor [from whose dangers Tolkien's hobbits were delivered]---the everyday world when, because it's taken as reality rather than as reality's mirror, no longer fires the heart with transcendent vision and with "otherworldly" preaching for the benefit of this world, preaching undegenerate into cop-out "otherworldliness." Ironically, sex becomes "dirty" in the modern sense of anti-sex precisely when it becomes un-"dangerous," and the Bible gets accused of precisely what the Bible strives to prevent!

8. In the wisdom literature of the Bible, "dirty" sex is genital activity (a) in violation of the marriage covenant ["adultery"], (b) in violation of freedom ["rape"], (c) in violation, outside of marriage, of marriage intention ["fornication"], in violation of an immediate blood-tie ["incest"]. [Note that this provides a fresh context for talking about homosexuality in practice or intention of 1:1 faithfulness.] I should add also (d) in violation of God's will that genital activity be confined within the species [avoiding "bestiality"]. Wife/husband genitality is "clean" even when it's not "human" because it is of the family-honoring, society-affirming genre; whereas a creative, "human" sexual relationship outside of marriage is "dirty" because it's of a wrong genital genre: even though both parties are growing in and from the relationship, the very success of it "humanly" must be viewed as demonic threat to home and community and therefore both "dangerous" [sinful] and "dirty" [interdicted]. Tough, but that's the way it is. And there's existential evidence for it: those who flout the marriage conventions usually pay a high price in (a) romantic illusion, (b) further social alienation, and (c) legal standing....not to mention (d) distancing from the traditional Divine. The OT tradition had one more "clean" dimension of sex [not a clean dimension for Christians], viz. paramarital: socially recognized, inside-the-house male genital activity toward siring sons [e.g., Sarah's slave]. Here the lintel, and predecessor [viz., tentdoor], divided clean from unclean, a function of the later mezzuzah [which functioned primarily as reminder for two-way, house/world, blessing].

9. In the metaphor of our passage, every Jew [male] needs three women: mother, wife, and Chokmah [Wisdom]. The mother he leaves--even the Jewish mother he gets away from. The wife he's with usually, not always. Chokmah he's to be with always: anywhere, on either side of the house lintel, he's unsafe and unfulfilled without her. As everybody knew then and knows now, single men--meaning any female-unattended adult male--are more apt to get into genital trouble both because of their own lust and because of prowling, loose-genital women, who may strip a single man of his wealth and lead him to ruin (5.1-14) and death (vv.20-23, which adds an ultimate sanction: God is watching). With Chokmah as consort when you're out of your house [I say "you" masc., because the passage is of course written from the male standpoint: men are the problem, as everybody knows...i.e., the problematic partner in family existence], you're less apt to have your genitals come loose. Therefore, take Wisdom with you whenever you leave home (7.1-5, which because of the poetic-parallelistic demand includes another woman, Binah [Intelligence]--the two women appearing again in 8.1).

10. Yes, the man is the family's problem-member. It's with the family as it is with the church: get the man and you have the women and children; get the women and children and you have the women and children. Society's central stability-problem is the domestication of the male. "Women" are evil and dirty not because sex is evil and dirty but because the only safe women, "safe" in this social-stability sense, are "wives." [My long-established concern for the older single woman is another problem.] Sensuous experience is built into both the sacred and the family and, beyond those limits, is bad news, chaos, ruin, death.