

On one of our trips to Israel I encountered a powerful temptation of biblical proportions. We were staying at the Dead Sea. Everyone decided to take a dip in that saline-saturated water so I took the elevator to my room on the 12th floor to change into my bathing suit. As I was returning to the elevator I looked down and, to my surprise, I could see a woman on the roof of a smaller hotel who was sunning herself - every inch of herself! When I spotted the naked woman from my perch above I did what any man after God's own heart would do - I stopped in my tracks to get a better look. I wasn't stopping to pray for her. In that moment an amazing thing happened. It was like the Holy Spirit poked me in the ribs because I suddenly thought, "Wait a minute. I know this story. When a man in this country spots a naked woman from a roof top, bad things happen." And with that, I smiled and quickly walked to the elevator.

I still smile when I think of that day. But lust is no laughing matter. 2 Sam. 11-12 records the tragic episode when the lure of lust led King David down a painful path of tragic consequences. Consider the cost of David's refusal to put sin to death. His pursuit of Bathsheba was no harmless fling. It came, as it always does, with some unintended consequences. David's lust led to...

- the betrayal of Uriah, King David's loyal subject not to mention his death.
- the widowhood of Bathsheba.
- the death of an infant son.
- the painful disruption in David's relationship with God.
- the sin of Joab, David's general, who became complicit in his treachery.
- the loss of respect and trust from David's army who saw his willingness to sacrifice a trusted servant for the sake of his own personal pleasure.

Lust may begin as a tiny spark but when it is fanned into flame it sets fire to our lives and leaves behind a trail of smoldering relationships. Even if we are not burned by fire we cannot escape the smell of the smoke. Lust is a lingering problem. It's not just a personal problem or even a family problem. It's a national crisis. Consider the evidence:

Every second 28,258 users are watching pornography on the internet.
40 million American people regularly visit porn sites.
25% of all search engine queries are related to pornography (68 million/day).
One third of porn viewers are women.
Search engines get 116,000 queries every day related to child pornography.
Every 39 minutes a new pornography video is created in the United States.
About 200,000 Americans are "porn addicts."

America, we have a problem. Sexual appetites are out of control but in a morally challenged country smoking and 32oz. soft drinks are considered more hazardous than lust. C. S. Lewis pointed out the twisted nature of lust with an interesting analogy. "You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?"

I'm sure that if C. S. Lewis were alive today he would have to change his metaphor since we actually are being enticed by mutton chops and bacon. Food is the attraction every day on Food Channel, Man vs. Food, Bizarre Foods, Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives, Food Paradise, Top Chef and other culinary porn sites available to us today. But gluttony is a vice for another day. Wherever the appetite is involved, lust is lurking nearby inviting us to satisfy our God-given desires in selfish and idolatrous ways.

Lust, like all the other vices, is a disordered desire. We all have God-given appetites. These appetites or desires become vices when they are pursued merely for our own pleasure. Vainglory, envy, anger, greed all begin with a legitimate need. But our desires get twisted when we seek God's eternal, soul-satisfying joy through temporary pleasure. Lust is a party of one, the pursuit of pleasure that is completely self-focused. It reduces the physical pleasure that enriches a marriage to my own selfish gratification without regard for a relationship with another human being. Lust makes sexual pleasure all about me.

Let's consider four passages that provide some valuable perspective on this particular vice.

I. Mt. 5:27-30 is a warning about the dangers of lust. Jesus was not a big fan of religion. Religion consists of rules and regulations intended to control external human behavior. Jesus constantly contradicted the religious leaders pointing out that merely modifying your external behavior is futile and cannot be sustained unless there is a corresponding change in our internal attitudes. So he says...vv. 27-28.

Then He really gets their attention with vv. 29-30. He uses Hebrew hyperbole to form a shocking contrast. It is better to lose a part of your body than to end up in Gehenna. Gehenna was considered to be a place of unquenchable fire. If you don't take lust seriously you will be condemned to the unquenchable fire of unfulfilled longing. "Lust will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay and cost you more than you can afford to pay."

Pornography is a powerful addiction with a staggering escalation rate. Habitual viewers not only increase the frequency of their viewing but the level of perversity increases over time. They experience the law of diminishing returns. Lust promises more than it can ever deliver.

II. 1 Cor. 6:12-20 is a lesson on the purpose of your body. The Corinthians bought into the common lie that any consensual act, no matter how perverse, is ok as long as no one gets hurt. Paul quotes a common Corinthian slogan used to justify immorality and drunkenness and gluttony...v. 13. This childish thinking disregards the fact that human beings are hopelessly psychosomatic. In other words, the body and the soul are so intertwined that what happens to one affects the other. For example, when you are grieving the loss of a loved one you have no appetite or you cannot sleep. What you do with your body has an effect on your mind and vice versa. The Corinthians took the view that what you do with your body is morally irrelevant. It's what you do with your mind that really matters.

But Paul challenges this thinking. The body is not unimportant. In fact, God is for your body. The body will never lose its importance...v. 14. This present body will pass away. But God will clothe us with new bodies just as He gave Jesus a resurrection body after He rose from the dead. The resurrection is God's declaration that he is for the body. That is why C. S. Lewis said, "Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, [where] God Himself once took on a human body."

Our physical human bodies are vehicles or instruments to be used for the glory of God...vv. 19-20. Your body belongs to God. It is not your own. And if it is not your own, you do not have a right to do whatever you want with your body. Your body was given to you by God to be an instrument, a tool, for glorifying Him. The biblical view of the body is that it is a temple for the Holy Spirit. It is sacred space, the place within which God dwells.

III. 1 Thes. 4:3-8 is a reminder of will of God and the purpose of life. "What is God's will for my life?" "I just don't know what God wants me to do." "I wish God would speak to me and tell me what to do." Ok, here it is. Sanctification is a big word that simply describes God's divine process for redeeming and repurposing our lives for His glory. When you offer your body, your life, to God, He will repurpose it. Apart from Christ we can use our bodies any way we want, but once we understand God's program our bodies take on new meaning. I am a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. Gradually, slowly, imperceptibly, the Holy Spirit transforms your life.

Some of you have been sold a bill of goods. You thought that once you got saved you were good to go. That kind of reductionist thinking robs us of the beauty of an intimate partnership with Jesus. It's like getting married and living in separate homes. You are technically married but you are missing out on all the benefits of an intimate relationship with another person.

IV. 2 Tim. 2:22 provides a brief strategy for conquering lust. What do we do about lust? "Just say no?" Not doing things is never the answer. Here are three possible action steps to defeat temptation.

1. Flee. Sexual temptation is so powerful that the best course of action is to flee from it. "Flee youthful lusts." When I saw that woman on the rooftop I knew that the only way to enjoy the temptation is to move closer and closer to it.

2. Fight. There are some temptations that you can't run from. When you're cornered by temptation there is only one appropriate response...fight. "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore (putting on the armor of God)." Eph. 6:13-14

3. Follow. Pursue, strive, strain, press forward, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." 2 Tim. 2:22. The only way to kill sin is by pursuing a relationship with the Spirit of God who is the source of power in our lives. He will replace those cheap thrills that offer instant gratification with an abiding joy and satisfaction that last forever. "Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify

the deeds of the flesh." In fact, we can put to death the deeds of the flesh. Romans 8:13 says, "If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Every one of the vices, the seven deadly sins we are considering, can be countered by a corresponding virtue. What is the antidote for lust? It is...lust. The word "epithumia" which is most often translated "lust," is a neutral term. It can be positive or negative. 2 Pe. 1:4, "sinful desire." Gal. 5:16, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires (lusts) of the flesh." 2 Tim. 2:22, "So flee youthful passions (lusts)."

The word is used positively in Luke 22:15. "And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired (lusted) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'"

Paul used the word as he agonized over whether to live or die. "My desire (lust) is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." Philippians 1:23

The best way to conquer the intense desire for pleasure is to replace it with something better. The temporary pleasure of pornography is no match for the deep, abiding joy of being in a right relationship with God and being filled with His Spirit. Never forget, lust will not keep you out of Heaven. Heaven is populated by thieves and murderers and adulterers and porn addicts. It is not sin that keeps people out of Heaven. It is the refusal to accept God's provision for their sin. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin. If that wonderful truth creates in you a sense of entitlement or a license to sin, then you have squandered God's grace and trampled upon His love. I want to invite you to offer your body to God as a living sacrifice this morning.

The best way to avoid lust is by learning to love. Freedom that is beneficial to me but harms someone else is the antithesis of love. Sexual desire is meant to promote intimacy with another human being. When it is merely self-gratification it has a dehumanizing effect on us. Start loving by asking the right questions. Not, "how far can I go" but "How can I be a person who can give and receive love in healthy ways?" As Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

If this particular vice has you in a vice grip, let me suggest something you can do about it immediately. Cultivate meaningful friendships. Lust thrives in privacy and isolation. This tendency is reinforced by our shame so we withdraw even more to hide our struggles from others. You are going to begin hearing about Life Groups around here. If you are not doing life with other believers then we want to help you with that. Men, Tuesday at 6:30 we will meet to pray for each other.