



THE CITY GATES CHURCH

Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32 When Sex Is God Part Four

Summary: Change is possible with dependence and diligence.

I hope you take away one thing from this morning: the knowledge that you can change. By God's grace and with His strength, you can be set free. The script for the rest of your life can be re-written. You are not stuck.

Everyone in this room, and everyone you know, needs to know: change is possible. No matter who you are, or what you struggle with. Change is possible with Jesus. He has been helping people, comforting, counseling, and strengthening people, all around the world, for thousands of years – you're not the one problem He can't solve.

We're in the middle of a series on sex and sexuality, so we're going to focus on how to change in those areas, but the principles we discuss today can be applied to other areas of life as well. The gospel is like a multi-tool – it's one answer to all your problems. It's both simple and sophisticated.

Before we go any farther though, I need to remind us why we're here. We were working our way through Romans One and noticed that God reveals Himself. But people suppress, or ignore spiritual truth because, frankly, it's inconvenient. It gets in the way of what we want to do.

But when people persistently suppress what God reveals, at some point He gives them over to their own desires which results in a whole slew of sins epitomized by sexual sin. Scripture says:

Romans 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

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And so, we've taken four weeks now, and we'll take one more next week, to talk about sex and sexuality. Our goal is: sexuality submitted to Jesus. The question is not who or what are you attracted to? The question is: what does God say? Sex and sexuality are not driven by our attractions, they're shaped by God's authority.

Goal: Sexuality Submitted to Jesus

Authority

Attraction

This approach is difficult for almost everyone, because deep down at the foundation of our souls, people are inherently selfish – we want what we want. But the question is: when there is a difference between what God has said and what you feel or want, whose side will you take?

Of course, that's really the root question of all of life. And it's why I spent the first two weeks making the case that God is the creator of sex and sexuality, He designed it, and He designed it well. God doesn't want you to miss out on something good by following His ways. He actually wants you to thrive by experiencing things according to their original purpose and design. God wants you to enjoy a fire...in the fireplace.

So, how do we get there, and how do we avoid the temptations and snares that surround us along the way?

Well, last week we spoke about the dangers of pornography, in all its forms – hard and soft, pictures, movies, websites, and novels, song lyrics, and more. Today we want to talk about how to separate from these things that poison our expectations and ideas.

The first step is to understand there's a path to destruction for sexual sin and to determine where you are on it.



You start by just being **curious**. What is this? What's it all about?

And then you get to the point where you're **compelled** by it – you like it, you want it. It seems fun.

And then at some point you realize you can't shake it. You don't want to do it, there are times when you know - this is wrong, this isn't good, I don't want to get caught - but you find yourself doing it anyway. You've been caught and **caged** by your desires.

The way you respond depends on where you are on the path. If you fell into something because you were bored or **curious** and it just got the best of you – you need to repent and get back to following Jesus.

If you're **compelled** by this – you've seen it or experienced it and you like it, you need to do some hard work to break old habits and start new ones.

If you're **caged** – clinically addicted, this is going to take some serious intervention with someone trained to help you. Being caged is the spiritual equivalent of a life-

threatening illness or injury. Barring a miraculous healing – which you should pray for and seek, you're going to need more than a first aid kit – you're going to need the ICU.

This is the path to destruction. Along the way are enablers – things that accelerate and amplify the problem.

First, we have to recognize the issue of **abuse** – people don't always walk into sexual sin on their own, sometimes you're brought there by someone else. Often a friend or family member shows you something or leads or lures you into something and it becomes part of your identity.

I know a pastor whose dad would buy him pornography magazines when he was a boy and told him he could 'figure it out.' I spoke with another man this week whose first exposure was when he was five. And several weeks ago a woman who encouraged me to speak boldly about this subject because her first sexual encounter happened when she was molested at the age of 7 and it shaped her attitude about everything that has happened since.

Friend, if abuse is part of the story of how you got to where you are, you need to know: the gospel promises healing and recovery from the wrongs we have done, *and the wrongs done to us*. It doesn't matter what someone else has made you, *God created you*, and Jesus wants to redeem and renew you. There can be a clear break between who you were and who you are. There are fresh starts and new beginnings.

As my old pastor used to say, God can restore your ability to blush. He can restore your innocence. He can restore your purity. You don't have to be defiled forever. You don't have to be defined by what you've seen or what you've done or what's been to done to you.

The second enabler is **Access**. During my lifetime, computers have gone from being the size of a room - the original computers filled an entire lab; to being in the living room - when I was in high school your family only had one computer, if you had one at all; to being in our pockets.¹

That ties into the third enabler – **Anonymity**. Pornography has gone from something in magazines and films that you had to buy in special places to being available to anyone for free on the internet via your phone. Which means: you can be devious. You can be deceptive. You can be sneaky. You can go searching for things or have the algorithms bring them to you. No one knows what you're doing on your phone, until they do. Remember though, no privacy blocker ever conceals you from God.

The fourth enabler is **Approval**. Social barriers are falling. Things that once were not allowed on the radio or on television are now commonly accepted and expected and you can find all kinds of things on Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube. Supposedly there's a

¹ For more on this idea see Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies*.

line between what people call hard and soft pornography, but that line is becoming fuzzier all the time. On top of that, some people actively encourage the use of pornography as a healthy part of your sexuality. Pride month is suddenly a regular part of the calendar. We all know what transgender means and have had to explain it to someone. There is very little our modern society does not approve of.

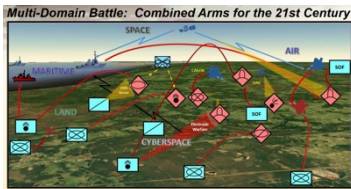
Finally, **Ambush** is an enabler. You don't have to go looking for opportunities to fall, opportunities find you. Often when you're bored or tired. Your guard is down.

You have to understand - we live in an attention-based economy. Web designers, engineers, and app developers all want to keep you looking at their things the longest. And so, you're constantly being shown new things to keep you engaged and coming back. This is how the Internet works today making it all the more likely you'll see things you're curious about. The question is: will you resist it, or will you give in? Will you click off, or click on?²

Well, we've seen **the path to destruction** and considered **enablers** along the way, so now let's get to the heart of the matter – how are you going to fight your urges and ideas? Practically, how are you going to submit your sexuality to Jesus? And the answer is, you're going to **fight on multiple fronts simultaneously**.

The nature of warfare has changed. For thousands of years armies fought on land. Eventually navies took to the seas and the best of those had Marines.

Less than 100 years ago, we began to fight in the air and today both space and cyberspace are included in what is now called multi-domain warfare.



The enemy of the future is expected to be both complicated and sophisticated. And so, we bring tools, tactics, and technology to bear on a variety of fronts.

We use space-based satellites for communication and observation, we use cyber to attack enemy communications and enable our own, we use small special operations forces as well as large conventional forces all while applying diplomatic, information, and economic pressure to achieve our goals.

Spiritual warfare is no less sophisticated in the battle against temptation. We need to fight on multiple fronts. I'll give you three A's to guide your efforts. The first is to Admit.

Three A's of Change: 1. Admit

Admit this is sin. Remember the whole flow of Romans 1 – God reveals but people suppress. Don't deny what you've done or feel. Don't try to redefine it. Often, when it comes to our sin, we take one of four approaches:

² Again, for more excellent information on this, see Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies*.

- Minimize – it's not that big of a deal, it's not that bad
- Maximize - I can't change or help myself, it's too hard to conquer, it's been too long
- Popularize - everyone does it
- Legitimize - it's OK for me under this circumstance

Instead, we need to submit to Jesus and that begins when we admit.

Admit to yourself what you've done. One pastor I know of encourages people to do this with brutal honesty, confessing in terms that are uncomfortable but absolutely true. Saying things about pornography like³:

- Today I entertained myself with sexual exploitation.
- Today I joined in the abuse of a woman.
- Today I watched her degradation for my pleasure.
- Today I took my stand with Satan, against God.

It's rough, huh? I suspect you just minimized. You tell yourself, oh, no, that's not me – what I do isn't that. OK. How about you take the time to name and define what you do or did? How would you describe it if you had to label it?

Look, the goal here isn't to make you hate yourself, but to hate the sin. To strip back the shiny surface and see what's really going on underneath. Once you see that what you have done is sin, and it defies God's best plan for your life, then you can **Admit it to God.**

One of the best tools you can use to aid your confession is found in the Psalms. Look at Psalm 51 where David confesses his sin with Bathsheba. Listen to this, and notice both the brutal honesty about sin AND the hope of mercy from God:

Psalm 51:1 Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.

Each week we've been reminded

³ Ray Ortland, The Death of Porn.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Whoever you are, whatever your issue, you need to know – the same Jesus who said hard things like *whoever looks at woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart*, and *if your eye causes you to sin, you should pluck it out* (Matt. 5:28-30), also died for those exact same sins. He wants to set you free and scrub you spotless today.

You need to know: Jesus showed kindness to people caught up in sexual sin. From a woman caught in the act of adultery, to a woman with multiple partners, to prostitutes, and the men who used these women – Jesus showed grace and offered forgiveness. Now, He commanded them to repent – to change, He would not tolerate them remaining where they were, but He didn't look down on them with anything but compassion. Sexual sin, of any kind, is not the unforgiveable sin. So, admit it to yourself, admit it to God, and finally, **admit it to others.**

You may remember Jason Portnoy, the Silicon Valley executive whose story I told last week. This is a man who does not love Jesus. His testimony is not, 'porn almost destroyed my life but then I found Jesus' – he fought his way through it with a counselor over a period of years. I only share his story so you can see, if you think this is hard to do with Jesus, *it's even harder without Him*. But some people do it. Of course, they've still got the eternal guilt of all their sin before God to deal with. So, it's better to just admit your sin to Jesus and receive His help in the fight.

But I want you to hear what Portnoy had to say about admitting what you've done. He said:

my other recommendation is that my healing, again, it's hard to generalize, my healing started when I finally started to reveal my secrets. And I feel like the sooner, the better. So, yeah, the sooner, the better.⁴

Here's why this is important from a Christian perspective – you may have sinned against other people and you may need to confess that sin to them. At the very least, you need to invite others in to help you fight, resist, and change – we'll talk more about that in a minute.

So let me take a minute and share some thoughts for those receiving confessions.

First, one of my seminary professors used to say, you don't need to take the lid off the sewer to know that it stinks. Personally, I prefer to just talk in general forms – you looked at porn. OK, I don't need to know what websites or what kind of things you saw. I know we're talking about ice cream; I don't need to know your favorite flavor and toppings. Frankly, I don't want what's in your head in my head. And the specifics aren't really going to change how I counsel you or pray for you.

⁴ <https://tim.blog/2022/06/16/jason-portnoy-transcript/>

Second, parents and spouses – when someone confesses to you, you need to be assured their sin is not your fault. You can do everything you possibly can to prevent sin, but ultimately the desire is in the human heart, and we all must be accountable for our own actions. Parents and spouses can create environments that make it more difficult to drift into sin, but anyone, at any time, can choose to smash into the guardrails.

Third, I want to remind you, no matter how disappointed, hurt, or shocked you are – God sees all your failings and still loves you – can you see this sinner's failings and still love them? I understand, you might need some time to process this. But there's a big list of sins in Romans 1 and being unmerciful is also on that list (vs 31). So, when they confess, listen to the them. Love them. Pray for them. Pray with them, and then take it all to Jesus and ask for His help.

Fourth – forgiveness is a decision; reconciliation is a process. The listener needs time to process what the sinner admits. The sinner has already had time to think about it and process it. The other person needs time to come up to speed – you can't just dump the clutch on them and expect the tires not to squeal. Don't be surprised if it takes them some time to forgive you and even longer to trust you.

Fifth, what if the sinner hasn't admitted anything but you already know, you found out and you want to confront. Well, consider your goal – how do you want this to end? With them feeling bad, or them repenting and seeking change? What's the long-term goal? Will you make them feel like they're on their own or will you stand with them and/or fight for them? Let your desired outcome shape your initial approach.

Let's move on to our second A. After sin is admitted Action needs to be taken.

Three A's of Change: 2. Action

Central to the message of Jesus and the apostles was the call to repent. Not just to feel bad about what you've done, but to actively and aggressively seek change as a result. So, what are you going to do differently?

It starts with developing the right mindset. Think of passages like

1 Corinthians 6:12 I will not be mastered by anything

1 Corinthians 9:27 I discipline my body and keep it under control

Galatians 5: 22-23 The fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control

2 Timothy 2:19 - Let everyone who names the name of Christ flee from iniquity.

You cannot stay in this pit forever. The first time it might be an oops. And maybe you get a little sympathy. At some point though, I have almost zero hesitation in saying this is legitimate grounds for ending a relationship. If it's a dating relationship, get out of that relationship until it's gone. You're not ready to be dating if you haven't slaughtered this

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dragon. And you don't want to be dating someone who is looking at you with the same eyes they use to look at porn. Being in a relationship will not make the problem go away – it only puts you and the other person at greater risk of falling into sexual sin – fire outside the fireplace.

If you're married, I have no problem supporting repeated use of pornography as biblical grounds for divorce at some point. Where you draw the line is not clear, but I believe you have biblical grounds for drawing it and letting it be known.

So, if you're losing the fight in temptation, you need to deal with issue of access. Where, when, and how are you getting it? How can you block it so that you can't get to it, but also it can't get to you?

What do you need to download or delete, or erase so the algorithms don't suggest more to you? It may take time and energy, but Jesus said something about [cutting off your hand](#) and [plucking out your eye](#) – He wants us to be serious about getting rid of sin. How are you going to implement

Romans 13:14 make no provision for the flesh to gratify its lusts

You might need to get a dumb phone or to cancel a subscription. You should also go back and listen to Pastor Trip's message on Proverbs 7 – you can find it on website, podcast, or in the app under guest speakers.

It's not just what you get rid of though, it's also what will you add in?

You want to grow in both your both knowledge of Jesus and your enjoyment of Him. You want to give your mind new things to think about and give your heart something new to desire.

Ps 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed according to Your word.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You.

Spend time in the Word. List to sermons. Build a playlist of worship songs that will lift your eyes to God and fill your heart when you're feeling empty, bored, or hungry for the things you used to enjoy.

If you're going to change you need to **Admit** the problem. You need to take **Action**. And finally, you need **Allies**.

Three A's of Change: 3. Allies

Ideally, an ally is a person of the same sex who is more spiritually mature than you are, or who has fought this fight and seen Jesus overcome. You need someone who can help you walk through whatever you need to admit and whatever action you need to take, someone who can pray for you and with you and talk openly and honestly.

Some of you are already in a good place. You've been in a small group – either a home group or Turn Aside, you've gotten to know people, hopefully people you can trust, people you can talk to, at least as a first step.

If you haven't been part of one of those ministries in the past, then now might be a great time to sign up and meet people who will help you and encourage you through all the trials and challenges life brings.

There are also men, women, and couples who will meet with you and pray for you – some of them will be available as prayer counselors after the service today. So come forward, if you need to confess anything or want prayer, we'll have people here for you.

The pastors of the church are here for you and there is a congregation praying for you – asking God to bring you both conviction and cleansing.

If you're married, your spouse should certainly be praying for you because they love you. But, because you love them, you should not ask them to bear the weight of your sin. Find a friend, a ministry leader, a counselor, a pastor – someone of the same sex who can help you become the man or woman your spouse needs you to be.

But above all, remember that if you confess your sin, you already have the best ally you can get. Go and read the gospels, you're pretty quickly see – Jesus prefers the messy cases. He came to rescue you. He prays for you (Luke 22, John 17, Romans 8). He promises to give you grace in your time of need (Heb 4:14-16). Jesus fights for you. You have the Holy Spirit upon you and within you.

We may be spending a lot of time in Romans 1, but we're heading for Romans 8 where we see:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus

If you've never done it before, then now's the time - go straight to Jesus. Tell Him you're tired of doing things your way and you want to submit your life to Him. **Admit** what you've done. Ask Him to help you take **action**. Ask Him to be your **ally** and to bring others into your life. Do that right here, right now, and then come forward and receive communion – reminders of His body and blood that were given as a sacrifice for us. He died so that we can live. And He wants that life to be a beautiful life. A good life. A life set free from sin.

Let's pray.

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Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32 **When Sex Is God** **Part Four**

Summary: Change is possible with dependence and diligence.

- **Personal Reflection:** Reflect on the idea that "change is possible" with Jesus. What specific areas of your life do you feel need transformation? How does the promise of change through Christ encourage or challenge you?
- **Identifying the Path to Destruction:** The sermon outlines a path to destruction that includes curiosity, desire, and eventual addiction. Can you identify any steps in this path that you or someone you know might be on? How can recognizing these steps help in making changes?
- **Dealing with Temptation:** What practical steps can you take to address the enablers of sin such as access, anonymity, approval, and ambush? Share strategies that have worked for you or that you think could help in resisting temptation.
- **Admitting Sin:** The sermon emphasizes the importance of admitting sin to ourselves, God, and others. How does confessing sin openly and honestly to a trusted person or group impact the process of repentance and healing?
- **Action Steps:** Discuss the three A's of Change: Admit, Action, and Allies. How can you apply each of these in your own life? What specific actions can you take to overcome a current struggle or temptation?
- **Role of Allies:** Who are the allies in your life that can support you in your journey of change? How can you cultivate these relationships to ensure you have a strong support system?
- **Scriptural Guidance:** How do passages like Psalm 51 and 1 John 1:9 provide hope and guidance when dealing with sin and seeking forgiveness? How can you incorporate these scriptures into your daily life to reinforce your commitment to change?
- **Long-Term Growth:** Beyond immediate actions, what are some long-term practices that can help you stay aligned with God's plan for your sexuality and overall life? How can you continually seek to grow in your relationship with Jesus and remain vigilant against sin?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

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