

**Deadly Dangers**  
**The Deadly Danger of Sexual Lust**  
**Selected Scriptures**  
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We stepped away from our study of Romans for a brief time this summer to consider three sins, three sins that Scripture itself says are especially deadly in the lives of believers. Two weeks ago we looked at the deadly danger of an unforgiving spirit. Jesus said, the person who will not forgive, will not be forgiven. Last week we looked at the deadly danger of a proud heart. Peter reminds us that God withholds His grace—that thing that we most need for our daily lives as believers—He withholds that grace from the proud heart, but gives it to the humble. Today, I want us to look at a third of those deadly sins, and that is the deadly danger of sexual lust.

Thomas Costain, in his work entitled *The Three Edwards*, tells the story of Raynald III. He was a 14<sup>th</sup> century duke in what is modern day Belgium. Raynald's brother, his younger brother Edward, led a coup against him, placed him into captivity. He didn't kill him, however. Instead, Edward built a room around Raynald in Newkirk Castle, and he promised him that he would regain his title and his property as soon as he was able to leave the room. Now, that wouldn't have been difficult for most people. The room had several windows, had a standard door. None of them were locked or barred. The problem was that Raynald was grossly overweight. To regain his freedom and crown, he would have to lose a significant amount of this huge amount of weight that he had gained. But Edward knew his older brother. And so he placed him in this room that he couldn't get out of initially, and then every day he sent him a variety of the finest and most delicious foods that a king in the 14<sup>th</sup> century could eat. And instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald simply grew fatter and fatter. Whenever people accused Edward of cruelty, he said, "My brother isn't a prisoner. He can leave whenever he chooses." Raynald remained in that room a captive to his own appetite for ten years. He wasn't released until Edward his younger brother died in battle, and by then his health was so terribly ruined that he died less than a year later. Raynald was a prisoner of his own appetite.

When I first read that story, I thought of all of us. Because that story is our story. That's a portrait of all of us before Christ. We were slaves of our appetites. Paul puts it this way in

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 3. He says we were enslaved, enslaved to the “lusts of our flesh, indulging {literally the Greek text says “the wills”} of the {body} and... the mind.” Enslaved to our own appetites. But as we have been learning from Romans chapter 6, we have been set free from that slavery. At the moment that we became a Christian, we were connected to Jesus Christ, and our slavery to sin was forever broken. It was shattered. And now God has given us in Christ all of the resources that we need to live in the freedom of that new reality in Jesus Christ, all of the resources we need to overcome the sin our lives, including sexual sin. But let’s be honest. As we sit here today, one of the deadliest dangers that we as believers face is a sin connected to sexual sin, and that is the deadly sin of sexual lust.

Now, this issue is addressed throughout the Scripture, **but** there are two passages that, I think, give us especially helpful insights into this deadly sin. And so I’d like for you to find in your Bible two passages, and we will go back and forth between them. The first is Matthew chapter 5, and the second is Ephesians chapter 5. Matthew 5 and Ephesians 5. And again, keep something marking both, because we will go back and forth between these two passages this morning.

Now, I want us to begin by allowing these two extremely helpful and insightful passages to define for us the basic nature of sexual lust. We need to understand what it is we’re talking about. And we can start by looking at the primary words involved. There are two primary Greek words used to identify this sin, and we find the first of them in Matthew chapter 5. Matthew 5, and look with me at verse 27. As Jesus is teaching this famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, as He’s redefining a misunderstanding of the Old Testament Law, He says this in verse 27: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” And that is true. That’s the seventh commandment. That is God’s command. What Jesus is now going to address, however, is the rabbi’s faulty explanation of that command. They restricted it to the *act* of adultery. And Jesus says no, they’re wrong, God intended more. Verse 28: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Now, I want you to notice first of all that word “lust.” Lust. That is one of the primary words used to identify this sin. Literally, by the way, the Greek text of verse 28 says this: “I say

to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust.” I’m sorry, let me say it again. “The one looking at a woman in order to lust for her.” The one looking at a woman in order to lust for her. That’s what the Greek text literally says. So the key word here is the word “lust.”

What does it mean? Well the Greek word is a neutral word. It simply refers to a strong desire. It’s either a good or a bad desire depending on what it is that you desire. But most often this Greek word that’s translated “lust” here is used negatively. Even back in the Septuagint, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, in Exodus 20, verse 17, this word that’s translated “lust” here is used for the tenth commandment: “You shall not covet.” You shall not lust. Most often in the New Testament this word “lust” refers to all kinds of sinful desires. Any longing for anything that God has prohibited or withheld. But on several occasions (and this is one of them here in Matthew 5) this word is used very specifically of sinful sexual desires. It’s used that way here. It’s used that way in Romans chapter 1, verse 24, when it says God gives them over to sexual sin and to the lust that goes along with that. It’s also used in 1 Thessalonians 4:5 in this way, to speak specifically and only of sexual lust.

That’s the first word that will help us understand this sin, but there’s another found in our other text. Turn over to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians 5, and notice verse 3. Paul’s beginning a new paragraph, and he’s talking about sexual sin. The entire paragraph’s about that. He says (verse 3),

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Now notice in verse 3 the word ‘greed.’ That’s our key word. Now let me give you a little context. This word “greed” is usually translated, often translated *covet*. And it’s usually used for coveting things. But here in this context it’s in a paragraph about sexual sins. The verses I just read to you, verses 3 and 4, are one sentence in the original language, and there are six sins listed. Notice in verse 3 there are two sexual sins of action: immorality and impurity.

Immorality **is** any sexual intercourse forbidden by God. That's immorality. Impurity is sort of a catch-all term for any sexual activity that is forbidden by God that doesn't fall into the first word. It's basically all kinds of sexual aberrations, including things like sadomasochism, for example. Verse 4, you have three sexual sins of speech. You see those words "filthiness," "silly talk," "coarse jesting." Three Greek words, and those words describe sexual speech. They describe the kind of coarse humor that tells dirty jokes. They describe the kind of innuendo that's carefully couched. And they describe just more obscene kind of filthy language. That's sexual sins of speech. Notice that all six of these sins in verses 3 and 4 have the same verb. And that verb is a negative command. Look at verse 3: they "must not... be named among you." These six sins "must not even be named among you." That doesn't mean **we** don't talk about them. We're doing that this morning. It means **they** shouldn't be talked about favorably. **They shouldn't** be present with any favor at all.

Now it's clear that this command from the apostle is about sexual purity. Four of these six words are sins of **sexual** nature. One of the six is used sometimes of sexual sin. But I want you to see a word that's unexpected. Buried in these other five words for sexual sin (notice in verse 3) is the word "greed." A different form of that same Greek word is down in verse 5, where it's translated "covetous" man. What I want you to see is that in this paragraph, in this context, both the word "greed" and it's related word "covetous" both refer to sexual lust. In addition, by the way, in Ephesians **this** word group, this particular word occurs only one other time. Go back to chapter 4, verse 19. He's talking about pagans, and he says they have "become callus, {having} given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with {here's our word} greediness." Clearly, the word is used there solely and only of sexual sin. And so that's what Paul means. Back in chapter 5, verse 3, Paul is not talking, when he says "greed" he's not talking about coveting things. He's talking about coveting another person. He's talking about all sexual desire to have someone other than your spouse. It's used in the way we use the English word *lust*.

So what I want you to get is this. Paul is here forbidding not merely sinful sexual acts, but the lustful thoughts that give birth to those acts. That's why this word, the word Jesus uses **in** Matthew, the first word, the word "lust," is used in the Septuagint to translate the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." You shall not lust after your neighbor's wife. So those are the two words: lust and greed, or **as** it's otherwise translated, covetous.

Now let's, as we fill out our understanding of the basic nature of what this is, let's look also at the major expressions—not only the words, but the major expressions of this sin. What does it mean to lust or to covet after someone else sexually? Now as I often do, I think it's very important to understand what lust is not. People with tender consciences can misunderstand this, so **ah** let me give this to you. This is actually a list that comes from a very helpful book. [Number one: it is not lust to find someone physically beautiful or attractive. Secondly, it is not lust to have a strong desire to have sexual intimacy. God made us with that desire. He created us with that desire, and to enjoy it within the boundary of His law is part of what it means to be human in this life. Number three: it is not lust to anticipate and to be excited about enjoying sexual intimacy with your spouse. Number four: it is not lust when the body becomes sexually excited without sinful thinking or **an** conscious decision to do so. And number five: it is not lust to experience an external, sexual temptation.]\* As Martin Luther (commenting **on** this issue, quoted one of the early church fathers) said, "You can't prevent a bird from flying over your head, but you can certainly prevent it from building a nest in your hair." So those things are not lust. Let's be clear about that.

So what is lust? What is coveting? How do we sinfully covet or lust after someone else? What are the primary ways this sin expresses itself? Let me give you several. Number one: looking at someone except your spouse either to excite or to fulfill sexual desire. This is what Jesus says. Go back to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 28: "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Now understand that Jesus isn't just saying this is a problem for men. This happens both ways. As He

often does, He mentions one and He means both, so we're talking to men and women here. He's saying if anyone looks at a member of the opposite sex with lust for that person sexually, they have committed adultery in their heart. So, to look: the one who is looking in order to sexually desire. It doesn't matter by what means you're looking. Obviously (and in Jesus' day this would've been the primary means) it includes physically looking at another person: they're there, you see them, and desiring them sexually. We live in a culture where it has become common for both men and women to let their eyes wander over the bodies of others, and then to translate that look into a desire to have them. Let's be very clear. It doesn't matter how common that is. Jesus Christ says that is sin. It's sin.

Another expression that sexual covetousness takes in our culture is sinfully looking at someone not in person but using some kind of a medium. In the ancient world it would have been a painting or a drawing. In our day the primary medium would be digital images and video. Obviously, television, movies, the internet, streaming services, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube—a lot of places you can find those digital images. Obviously, we're talking about any sort of image you use to excite or fulfill sexual lust. But **the** major and pervasive form of this in our day is pornography. It's looking at explicit sexual images or videos to satisfy your sexual desire.

Now I know this is uncomfortable, but it's a reality we have to face. This is a huge problem in our culture. Statistics tell us that around 65% of men are looking at porn at least monthly. For women it's about 34%. In a survey by Today's Christian Woman magazine (so we're talking about Christian women) 34 (or at least professed Christians) 34% of the women said they had intentionally sought out pornography on the internet. According to Nielsen's net ratings, nearly one in three visitors to adult websites is female. So this is a serious problem for both men and women in our culture. But tragically, one of the largest groups of viewers of internet porn are youth. Listen to this, the results of this survey. This is startling. Fifty-six percent of women 25 and under have sought out pornography on the internet, and 33% of women 25 and under do it monthly. Eighty-one percent of young adult men have sought it out, and 67% of them do it monthly at least. That's very troubling.

But I'll tell you something that's more troubling. I saw a statistic this week that startled me. According to recent surveys, teens and young adults view—Are you ready for this?—not recycling as a greater sin than pornography. Thirty-two percent of those teens and young adults said that it is usually or always wrong to watch pornography. Thirty-two percent. Fifty-six percent said it is usually or always wrong not to recycle. If you're in that age group, let me tell you, you have bought into a lie. It's a lie. You can feel good about yourself because you recycle, but you're doing the very thing that God Himself says He forbids. It's wrong. Jesus says it's wrong. Scripture says it's wrong.

Another expression, another major expression of this is creating or recalling sexual images in your mind or imagination. In other words, you don't have to have an actual image. This is a kind of looking that consists of mental images played on the screen of your mind. It's choosing to recall explicit images you have seen or creating your own. By the way, a common form **that** lust can take in some women is sinfully craving a relationship and often the physical intimacy that comes with it. And this is foisted upon many intentionally through fiction and through daytime television. Romance novels, even Christian ones, can leave you craving a relationship with someone other than your spouse. A woman who's dissatisfied with her husband can live out vicariously a relationship with another man through these means. **It's** wrong. Creating or recalling images in your mind or imagination is a violation of this commandment.

But not only is our Lord forbidding lust in our own hearts, He is also—thirdly, another manifestation of this sin—He's by implication forbidding doing anything that excites lust in others. If lust is a sin, and it is, then to excite it in others is also a sin. How exactly do we violate our Lord's words here by causing others to lust? Let me just give you a little list from Scripture. Number one: you excite lust in others by moving your body in a way intended to produce lust. In interesting, in Proverbs chapter 6, verse 25, we're told that an immoral woman can do this with her eyes, seduce with her eyes. Moving your body in a way **pretended** intended to produce lust is a violation of what our Lord says.

Secondly, clothing yourself or revealing your body in a way that intentionally or negligently elicits lust. You're responsible—and let me just say, this isn't just women. In our day, this is men too. You are responsible to both clothe yourself and to wear your clothes in such a way that it doesn't intentionally try to make you look more sexually appealing, or by gross negligence causes others to respond that way. Proverbs 7:10 talks about the immoral woman dressing as a harlot. She intentionally dresses in a way to make herself sexually seductive. First Timothy 2:9 says that Christian women are to dress modestly and discreetly. Again, this isn't just a problem for how women dress. This is a problem for how men, some men dress as well.

Number three: using words or images to seduce or to tempt sexually. Read Proverbs 5 and you'll see that there's an immoral woman who uses her words. Her words are like oil. They're smooth. They're seductive. Using words—or images. In Proverbs chapter 7, the immoral woman sort of creates an a set, an image for herself to make herself appealing. Two contemporary methods of exciting lust this way are sexting, sending words or pictures intending to create sexual desire in others. Let me just say, if you've excused this in yourself, you need to under see it for what it is. You need to see it through God's eyes. It is exciting lust in someone else, and it is sin. Looking at and enjoying the words or pictures that are sent to you with that intention is also sin. Posting images or texts on Facebook or sending Snapchat pictures that are overtly sexual or intended to make you sexually appealing is a violation of this command.

Number four: using speech with sexual innuendo or explicit off-color comments and jokes. In other words, talking dirty about things that are pure, sexual things. Ephesians chapter 5, verse 4 says there's to be “no filthiness... silly talk, or coarse jesting.” As I said, those three terms describe sort of crass, gross, dirty joke telling, the smooth double meaning, and just talking in a sexual way. By the way, this includes talking about the bodies of the opposite sex. This is a problem for both men and women in our culture.

And number five: you're violating this command by exciting others to lust if you are engaging in sexual contact that either intentionally or negligently arouses sexual excitement in a way that cannot be biblically fulfilled. And I don't need to be more explicit than that. You get it. And you know what Paul says about this in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4? He said you better not, Christian, go beyond and defraud your brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such.

So if you're a Christian, let it sink into your soul. It does not matter what the culture says. It does not matter what is acceptable. It doesn't matter what pagans think is OK. Your Lord forbids you to look at another person (regardless of how that looking might happen) in order to create or to fulfill sexual desire, and by implication, doing anything intentionally or negligently that excites lust in others. This is serious.

And that brings me to our second point we need to consider about sexual lust. We've looked at it's basic nature. Let's look at the danger of sexual lust, secondly. Sexual lust is not a little sin. It is dangerous, and it is deadly. Scripture's filled with this, but let's just look at our two texts that we're looking at together. Let's see what these two texts tells us about the danger. First of all, sexual lust is dangerous because it bears the moral guilt of the sinful act. Look at Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5, verse 28. Jesus says, "I say to you." As He corrects the rabbi's teaching here that it's just the act, He says oh no, that's not just what God intended. "I say to you" here's what God intended, that you guard your mind too. "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery." Notice that. "Has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus says the one looking in order to lust has already violated the seventh commandment. He has committed adultery in his heart, or if you single, immorality in your heart. In other words, there is **a** outward expression of the sin of adultery or immorality; there is also an inward expression of it, and you are guilty. The desire brings the same guilt as the deed. First John chapter 3, verse 15 says this of a different sin. It says whoever "hates his brother is a murderer." Jesus says everyone who gives in to lust is an adulterer. According to Jesus, coveting

another person sexually renders you guilty before God of adultery or of fornication, of immorality.

Secondly, sexual lust is dangerous because it excludes from Christ's kingdom. Turn over to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5, verse 5: "For this you know with certainty." Having talked about those six sexual sins (sins of action, sins of speech, sins of the heart (greed, covetous, sexual lust)), he says, "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person {he repeats the words he's already used} or covetous man {That's the same family of words as "greed" back in verse 3. He's talking about sexual lusts.}... has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ in God." Notice there're no exceptions. No person who's like this. No person. Paul says no person who practices these sexual sins, including lust, is part of the kingdom of God.

Now, let's be clear what Paul does not mean. Paul doesn't mean that true Christians can't sin in these ways. Scripture's clear about that. David, everyone is clear that he's a true believer. And yet for about nine months he lived in a pattern of unrepentant sexual lust and sin with Bathsheba. So Christians can sin sexually, and they can remain unrepentant for a time.

So who is Paul talking about here? I like the way Peter O'Brien puts it in his commentary. He says, "Here is the person who has given himself or herself up without shame or repentance to this way of life." That's who he's talking about. Let me put it to you bluntly. If your life—if it's not just that you struggle with this sin, and you're fighting, and you're battling, and you're repentant, and you seek the Lord's forgiveness, and you come back and battle again. If it's not that, but if your life is characterized by lust, if your life is an unbroken pattern of this sin, if you are seeing an increasing pattern of this sin in your life, then you have no part in the spiritual kingdom over which Christ rules, and you will not inherit His kingdom in the future, Paul says.

Why is that? Why would lust be included with these other things and be so serious? Listen carefully. Because the root of all sexual sin is sexual lust, covetousness. And what is sexual

covetousness? Look at verse 5: the “covetous man {the lustful man}, who is {what?} an idolater.” An idolater. There’s the problem. Again, listen to O’Brien: “Sexual lust is an idolatrous obsession. It places self-gratification or another person at the center of one’s existence, and thus is the worship of the creature rather than the Creator.” Listen, if you’re engaging in an ongoing pattern of lust in your life, you might as well fall down and worship that computer or the person after whom you’re lusting. Either way, a creature, a creation, has taken the place of the Creator. This is a serious call. **What** said in both these passages is a serious call to self examination. John Stott writes, “If we should fall into a life {that’s the key} if we should fall into a life of greedy immorality {lustful immorality}, we would be supplying clear evidence that we are after all idolaters, not worshipers of God, disobedient people instead of obedient, and so the heirs **of** not of heaven but of hell.”

To crave another person sexually is idolatry. And it renders us guilty, and it guarantees God’s future judgment on the unrepentant. Notice verse 6: “For because of these things.” That is, the sexual sins that are listed in verse 3, repeated in verse 5, includes sexual lusts. “For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon {unbelievers} the sons of disobedience.” Listen, God’s wrath against the world’s lust and sexual sin is coming. What is that wrath?

Well, that brings us to the third danger of sexual lust: it condemns to eternal hell. Turn back to Matthew 5. This is what our Lord says. Matthew chapter 5. He makes it clear that lust is a deadly, damning enemy of the soul. Chapter 5 of Matthew, and notice **verse** 29 and 30. Remember now, the context is lust. That’s what He’s talking about. He says in that context,

“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to loose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your **right eye makes you** stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than... your whole body to go into hell.”

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying it is more to your advantage, He's—by the way, let me just say, He's not suggesting that you physically harm your body. He's saying you better be willing to get radical in dealing with the sin of lust in your life. And here's why. It would be better, it would be more to your advantage for one of your physical members to be destroyed and not your whole body to be thrown into hell. Let me say it as clearly as our Lord does here. Lust that is fed, that is played with, that is unrepented of, will by itself be enough to cause God to cast sinners into hell. If the only thing you ever did your entire life was to give in to lust, if that was your only sin, Jesus says you will be thrown into hell. Jesus' point here is that the person who truly belongs to His spiritual kingdom is committed not only to purity in body, but also to purity of mind. And a true believer understands how serious lust is and will take whatever steps necessary to be cutting it out of his life. He's not going to tolerate it. He's not going to live with it as some kind of comfortable companion.

But how exactly can we deal with lust? Lust is a universal temptation. There isn't one person in this room this morning who hasn't been tempted by this and given into lust at some point in life. So what do we do? How do we deal with this? This is a perpetual issue. Well, let me give you a third point. Let's talk about the battle with sexual lust. How can we deal with lust in our lives? There are several biblical strategies. The first two I'm going to give you come from our two texts. The others come from other places in Scripture. Let's look at them briefly.

Biblical strategy number one: run. Run. Scripture is full of advice to run from sexual sin and temptation to sin or lust. First Corinthians chapter 6, verse 18: "Flee {run from} immorality." Second Timothy chapter 2, verse 22: "{Run} from youthful lusts." Now what does this mean? Well, **it** it means several things. First of all, sometimes it means you should literally run. There are times when the best way to deal with temptation is to literally leave the place of temptation. Joseph, of course, is a great example of this in Genesis 39 when he is seduced by Potiphar's wife. And what does he do? He leaves his coat with her and runs out. Sometimes that is the wisest and best choice. If you're home alone when temptation to lust comes, leave. Take your work and go to the coffee shop. Do something else. If it's another person, then don't walk away,

run away. Sometimes running means not that you leave the place; sometimes it means you stay away from the people and places that tempt you to sin. Proverbs 5:8, for example, as Solomon gives advice to his son, what does he say to him about the temptation that he might face? He says, “Keep your way far from {the immoral woman} and do not go near the door of her house.” Why would you put yourself in a place where you’re going to be tempted? Makes no sense. Stay away.

Running also means making it difficult to sin. I think that’s what Jesus is saying here in Matthew chapter 5. Look again at what He says in verse 29, verse 30: cut off your right hand; pluck out your right eye. What’s He saying? He’s saying do what you have to, be radical to make it difficult to sin. This is the same thing Paul says in Romans 13:14: “Make no provision for the flesh.” Literally, don’t set the table for your flesh in regard to its lust. Don’t feed it. Do what you have to to cut it out of your life. Make it difficult to sin in your life. So many people make it easy to sin. No, make it difficult. Listen, **if** the temptation comes to you after your spouse is in bed, then go to bed when your spouse does. If the problem is the internet, put your computer in the middle of a public room, and put a password on it that only your wife has or **your** spouse has. Get software that provides protection and accountability. And if after all of that you’re still tempted to sin, then get rid of the internet. I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how can you live without the internet? So can you live any better without your right eye and your right hand? Jesus says do what you have to, get radical to deal with sin. **Get** radical may mean getting a different job if the temptation comes through the people at your work. **It** may mean changing careers if your job provides too many opportunities for sin. Stop coddling your sin. You and I must be willing to take radical steps in our fight with lust. John Owen, the English Puritan, said, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.” Those are the only two alternatives. Either you’re putting sin to death in your life, you’re cutting it off, you’re finding ways to make it difficult to sin, or it’s killing you.

Strategy number two: develop a habit of thanksgiving. Turn to our other text, Ephesians chapter 5. This is surprising. I have to just be honest with you. It’s surprising until you understand it.

In the context here talking about sexual sin, in verses 3 and 4, Paul says OK, don't be involved in these six sexual sins (sins of action; sins of the mind, of lust; and sins of speech). Look at the end of verse 4: those things "are not fitting, but rather," here's what I want you to do. "Rather" is a strong adversative in the Greek text. He says in place of those six sexual sins, including lust, here's what I want you to do instead: be in the habit of giving thanks to God. Now I know what you're tempted to do. You're tempted to do what I did the first time I read this. It's like, really? I mean, **that's** like helpful? What is that? How can thanksgiving help with sexual sin? Well, think about it. Sexual sin begins with lust, craving what I do not have. The opposite of that is giving thanks to God for what I do have. Giving thanks, then, is the virtue that must replace lust or covetousness in the heart. This means that we develop a life of thanksgiving.

But it also means that we give thanks to God at the moment of temptation. You say, what does that look like? Well, at the moment **of your** temptation to sexual lust, thank God for Christ. Thank God that He died for every act of sin you've ever committed, including those times that you've given into lust. Thank God that there's grace in Christ for sanctification, for growth in holiness. Thank Him. If you're not married, thank Him for your future spouse. Thank Him that in His providence He will meet your sexual needs in His time. If you're married, thank God for marriage. Thank Him for married love. Develop a habit of thanksgiving. It is the opposite of coveting what you don't have.

A third means for dealing with sexual lust is not found in either of these passages. Now we're going to go a little further afield. Use the Word. Use the Word. And I mean that in two senses. I mean remember that the **scriptural** is crucial in your pursuit of sanctification in a general sense. Forget the specifics of lust at this moment, and think about **your** growth. The Scripture is crucial. Psalm 119, verse 11: "Your Word {have I} treasured in my heart, that I {might} not sin against You." What did Jesus pray in John 17:17? He said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." Can I urge you to do this? So many people who struggle **with** lust or even pornography, they fight only on that front. It's like that's the only problem in their life, and that's the only place they fight. Listen, back up and look at the whole of your Christian life, and pursue

overall holiness and likeness to Christ. And let the battle with lust be part of that. God isn't interested in rescuing you from the one thing that bothers you, so that you can go live your own independent, **selfish** life. Pursue holiness.

But I also mean use Scripture in a specific way in temptation. Jesus did this. You remember in Matthew 4, in response to Satan's temptation, three times Jesus turned to His deep understanding of Old Testament passages that He had studied and memorized from Deuteronomy's chapter 6 through 8. And He quoted them back as His response to that temptation. This is what you and I have to do. This is what Paul meant in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 17, when he says, "Take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." What did he mean? The word for "sword" he uses is **a little short** sword that the Roman soldier carried. And he's saying I want you to take a little, short passage of Scripture; a little, short section of Scripture; a verse; a phrase; a passage; and I want you to have it on your mind. I want you to understand it like Jesus did, and in a moment of temptation, I want you to respond with that sword. I want you to preach to yourself, tell yourself what's true, quote that passage to yourself. Properly used, Scripture is the sword that we wield at the moment of temptation to uncover and unmask the lies and deception of sin and Satan. By the way, Solomon does this. He urges his son in Proverbs 6: let me tell you what's really going on, let me tell you what's really happening, let me explain to you the lies and deception.

By the way, back to my first point about using the Scripture in all of sanctification. I think one of the most helpful things you can do to battle lust is go back and study Romans 6 like we've been doing, because I think that if you understand who you are in Christ (that you've been set free from slavery to sin) it provides a great foundation pursuing victory in this area of your life.

Number four: pray. Pray. And I don't mean pray for miraculous deliverance from all temptation. "Lord, I don't ever want to be tempted to lust again." Listen, God's not going to do that, because that means He would have to completely take you out of your fallen human body. That's not going to happen. So instead, pray for a spirit of dependence on God, on His grace, for His help.

Pray that you don't enter into temptation. Jesus taught us this in the Lord's Prayer, didn't He? He said pray this every day: "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil," Matthew 6:13. But also pray in the middle of temptation. Hebrews chapter 4 says we have "One who has been tempted in all {points like} as we are, yet without sin." We can go to Him in the middle of temptation and find help.

So what do you pray like in the middle temptation to sexual lust? Here are some ways you can pray:

[God, thank You for making me a sexual creature with sexual desires. I don't ask that You remove my desire, but that You help me to please You with it in my thoughts and actions.

God, you made me for true and lasting pleasure. Fill me with confidence that You have good things in store for me, something much better than what lust has to offer.

God, thank You for beauty and my ability to appreciate it. That person is attractive, but let me look on that person with purity. I don't want to covet and lust. Help me to view him or her as a person made in Your image, not as an object of my lust.

God, I'm tempted to look to lust for comfort right now. Please help me to find my comfort in You.]\*

**Those are** great examples of how to pray in the midst of temptation.

A fifth strategy, number five: rehearse the tragic consequences of sexual lust. You know, temptation always leads us to think about the attractiveness, the pleasures of sin. Scripture, on the other hand, urges us to reflect on the tragic consequences of it. In 2 Samuel 11, what did David focus on as he looked over the wall of his palace? He focused on the pleasure that could be had with that woman that he was looking at, Bathsheba. But read the rest of 2 Samuel, and

you see the tragic consequences of that lust: an act of murder, a dead child, a rebellious son who copied his sexual sin, a life on the run. Yeah, God forgave David. Psalm 51 is in our Bibles and God responded to him that way, but there were tragic consequences. Think about that before the temptation comes. And again, the Proverbs again and again tell us that. Think about the fact that the gate to her house is the gate of hell. Think about that. Wayne Mack, in his book *Sweethearts for a Lifetime*, suggests writing out the consequences of sexual lust and sin. I don't know that you need to write them out, but you ought to write them **on the** your mind. Remember, for example, that sexual lust plants images on your mind that will last a lifetime. Remind yourself that it never satisfies. Remind yourself that it will affect your relationships. You know, a lot of people lie to themselves and say, "You know, this is a selfish sin; it's not going to affect anybody else." It's a lie. Tom Beswick was telling me in the elder's prayer time before the first service that he was reading a secular study talking about the fact that because of pornography, people are not getting married. They're not having relationships. They're waiting longer to marry, because they're seeking selfish satisfaction elsewhere. And I read that divorces are 200% more likely in homes where there's pornography than where it isn't. It will affect your relationships. It destroys the trust of those around you. It produces real guilt before God and a guilty conscience. Remind yourself that it robs you of assurance of your salvation. And depending on how much of a pattern it is in your life, it raises serious questions about the reality of your faith in Christ. Make a list, a written one or a mental one, and remind yourself of the consequences of sin.

Number six: enjoy the gift of married love. If you're married, actively pursue sexual satisfaction in your spouse. Remember Proverbs 5? Instead of pursuing an immoral relationship, enjoy what God has given you. First Corinthians chapter 7, verses 1 to 5, Paul says that to Christians as well. He says, I don't want you to be apart except for a short time by mutual consent, and that for prayer, because I don't want you to be tempted. Enjoy the relationship that God has given us in marriage. If you are unmarried, pursue marriage. First Corinthians chapter 7, verses 8 and 9: "I say to the unmarried {in context, probably those who'd been biblically divorced}... if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for {it's} better to marry than to burn with passion." Let's be clear. Marriage alone will not deal with all temptation to sexual lust and sin, or there

wouldn't be married people who were engaging in it. But it is one of God's means for dealing with this sin.

Now there's one last means for dealing with sexual sin, and it's the most important of all. Hear me. Fail to use this one, and none of the other strategies we've talked about will help you at all. Number seven is depend on Christ alone. And here's what I mean by that. First of all, I mean rely on and plead for the forgiveness that He earned for us. Ephesians 1:7: "In Him {in Christ} we have... the forgiveness of our trespasses." Listen, if you are repentant, there is no sin for which there is not forgiveness. Christ died for that sin of lust. He died for that act. He died for whatever sins you are willing to bring to Him with a truly repentant heart and to turn away from.

Number two. When I say depend on Christ alone, I also mean rely on and plead for His help in temptation. I mentioned Hebrews 4 earlier. Here's what the writer of Hebrews says:

We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore {Do you see the connection? In temptation, therefore} let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What need? Need in the moment of temptation. Rely on Christ. I love our VBS songs. Many of them I find myself singing throughout the year. But one of them speaks to this very directly. Listen to this line: "When I feel like sinning, right at the beginning, help me look to You alone." That's the idea.

When I say depend on Christ, thirdly, I mean rely on Him and plead with Him for sanctification. You know, as Christians we're prone to think that we needed Christ to get in, but now we're on our own. Nothing could be further from the truth. What does Jesus say? "{Without} Me you can do nothing." Nothing. You can't produce spiritual fruit in your life. You can't kill lust

alone. Don't get me wrong. You must do these other things we've talked about. Christ is not going to do for you what He commanded you to do. But if you will give yourself to these other things, and you think that you can do them with your own resolve, your own willpower—Yeah! I'm gonna stop!—you're in for a rude awakening. If it's our strength, our resolve, our promises, we will fail. Our faith must be in Christ alone.

What if you've already failed? What can you do? Well let me just say, if you're here this morning and you're not in Christ, Christ is your only hope. I will promise you this. If you don't turn to Christ, you will remain enslaved to sexual lust and sin. And it will get worse before it gets better. The only hope you have is Jesus Christ. He said the one I make free will be free indeed. Only He can free you from your slavery. You must come to Him and plead with Him to make His death on the cross applicable to you. He died for the sins of all who would believe in him. Come to Him repenting of your sin and say, "I want You to give me a new heart. I want You to free me from my slavery. I want to be a slave to You and not my sin." And He will hear you. And He will respond. And He'll make you new. That's your only hope. I love the way 1 Corinthians puts it in 1 Corinthians 6. He talks about all these sexual sins, and then Paul says, "Such were some of you; but you {have been} washed... you {have been} sanctified... you {have been} justified {through} the Lord Jesus Christ."

If you're here this morning and you're a believer, understand, there is full and complete pardon for every sin of sexual lust if you're repentant, if you're willing to turn from that sin, and if you're willing to pursue these strategies. Now I know what some of you may be thinking. I've tried that and it didn't work. Yeah, like, how long? That's like saying, "You know, for three weeks I've exercised regularly, and I'm not a professional athlete. It doesn't work." Listen, the call of Scripture is to run **the** race to win. Keep running mile after mile. Keep fighting inch after bloody inch. Keep on doing these things, and you will see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life and an increasing pattern of righteousness.

Now, I'm going to have one other slide they're going to put up that has some books I recommend. I'm not going to go through them. Let me just call your attention to the first one. This one is good regardless of whether you struggle in an ongoing way with lust, whatever sins you struggle with. It's John Owen's *Sin and Temptation*. It's a more readable version of it, edited by Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor. I strongly recommend it to you. There's some other books there as well. Get help. Beloved, here's my point to you this morning: beware of the deadly danger of sexual lust. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for how it speaks to our lives so practically. I pray that You would use this study this morning for good in our lives. Help us to take this sin seriously. Lord, our culture doesn't. It makes jokes about it. It downplays it, compares it to recycling. Father, help us who follow You, who follow Your Son, to have His mind and not the mindset of our culture. Help us to put this deadly sin to death by your grace, through the work of Christ, through these strategies. And Father, I pray for the person here this morning who is in slavery to lust and sexual sin. Lord, may they run to You today and find that the one whom Christ makes free is free indeed. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

\* This helpful material comes from a book that we can no longer recommend because of its author. For that reason we have deleted the specific reference to the author and book title.