

Matthew
The Deadly Sin of Lust (Part 3)

Matthew 5:27-30

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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Years ago, I came across the remarkable story of Aaron Ralston, as told in his book, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Now, I haven't read the book, so I don't recommend it to you; it may be good, it may not; but I do want to share with you a summary of the words from that book about what happened to him. It started out as a simple hike in the Utah Canyonlands on a warm Saturday afternoon. Eight miles from his truck, in a deep and narrow slot canyon, Aaron was climbing down off a wedged boulder when the rock suddenly came loose and pinned his right hand and wrist against the canyon wall. With scant water and little food, no jacket for the painfully cold nights, and the terrible knowledge that he had told no one where he was headed, he found himself facing a lingering death. As he eliminated his escape options, one by one through the days, some six days that he was pinned there, Aaron faced the full horror of his predicament. By the time any possible search and rescue effort would even begin, he would probably already have died of dehydration.

But then, a kind of divine inspiration, an epiphany, solved the riddle of the boulder. To save himself, from what was certain imminent death, he first applied a tourniquet to his right arm. And then, using the torque of his own weight and physical strength against that trapped arm, Aaron broke the radius and ulna bones of his lower right arm. And then, over the next hour, he took a cheap multi-tool that he had brought with him, and he used the dull two-inch blade and the pliers on the tougher tendons, and he slowly amputated his right hand. That's a desperate measure, but it's one that makes perfect sense to save your life.

Jesus tells us that that's exactly what each of us must be willing to do, not physically, but spiritually, to get rid of the sin of lust in our lives. Let's read it together, Matthew, chapter 5, and I'll begin reading in verse 27. Jesus says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; 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. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand 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 for your whole body to go into hell.”

Here, Jesus tells us that in God's eyes, sexual lust violates the Seventh Commandment against adultery. And as Jesus' disciples, we must take whatever steps are necessary to cut lust, along with all sexual sin, out of our lives.

Now, we've been studying this passage for a couple of weeks. Let me remind you of what we've considered so far. First of all, we looked at “The Law against Adultery Recalled.” In verse 27, Jesus quotes the Seventh Commandment, and we looked at what it means and what it forbids. Then we considered, secondly, “The Law against Adultery Misinterpreted.” While we're not told exactly how they misinterpreted it, by the very fact that He applies it to lust, we understand that they did not. So clearly, they made it merely an external reality. Last time, we looked at verse 28, and “The Law against Adultery Explained,” and specifically, we just looked at the first half of verse 28, where we discovered “The Sin that Jesus Condemns.”

Now, if you weren't here, there's a lot that you need to catch up on; you can do that online. But let me just summarize what we learned last week like this. The sin that Jesus confronts here is looking at someone who is not your spouse, whether you look at them in person or in an image

or in your mind, looking at someone who is not your spouse in order to, for the purpose of, promoting sexual desire for them. That's the sin that Jesus condemns.

Now today, as He continues this explanation of the law against adultery, we come to the second half of verse 28. Let's call it "The Guilt that Jesus Pronounces," the guilt that Jesus pronounces. He begins with "The Verdict," His verdict. Notice verse 28, "but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her (Here's the verdict.) has already committed adultery with her in his heart." You see, desiring sexual intimacy with someone other than your spouse, whether you're a man or a woman, it doesn't matter, desiring that sexual intimacy makes you just as guilty of breaking the Seventh Commandment as physical adultery does. In other words, according to Jesus here, in the second half of this verse, coveting another person sexually is adultery in the heart.

Now to be clear, let's make sure we know what Jesus means and what He doesn't mean. There are two similarities between lust in the heart and physical adultery. Two similarities. First of all, they both violate the Seventh Commandment; that's His point here. And secondly, they both, whether it's lust in the heart or the act, deserve hell. Those are the two points of similarity. However, there is also a key difference between lust in the heart and physical adultery. That is, they are not exact moral equivalents. In other words, don't think, "Well, since I've been guilty of lust, I might as well just go ahead and act on it since both of them are adultery." That's not what Jesus is saying here. In the larger context of Scripture, a sinful sexual act brings a greater guilt and deserves greater punishment in hell than a lustful thought. They both deserve hell, but one merits more guilt and more punishment than the other. We know that because under Old Testament law, the act of adultery deserved the death penalty; lust did not.

In addition, and this is a different message for a different time, but Scripture clearly teaches that there are degrees of sin and, therefore, degrees of punishment for those who are not regenerate, in hell. One example, I'll just give you one verse that makes this clear. In Matthew 11, verse 24, Jesus says to the people of Capernaum, the city of His home base while He was in His ministry here on earth, He says to them, "It will be more tolerable (better) for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." He's making it clear that there were lesser and greater sins. There were different degrees of sin that merited different degrees of punishment. The same thing is true when it comes to the thought and the act. Both violate the Seventh Commandment, both deserve hell, but they are not exact moral equivalents. If you want to work that out a little more, get a good systematic theology, you can take *Biblical Doctrines*, the one The Master's Seminary put out, or you can look, if you want to do this, you can look at Question 151 in the Westminster Larger Catechism which spells out the degrees of sin and the concepts related to that.

But let's move on. Jesus' verdict here is that the person who lusts in God's sight "has already committed adultery in his or her heart." Then He goes on to deliver "The Sentence" in verses 29 and 30. Notice the phrases in both verses; they are essentially identical except for the right eye and the right hand. But notice how both verses end, "It is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body (Here it is.), than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." What's the implication of that? That lust deserves hell. If the divine intention behind the Seventh Commandment were enforced at the heart level, you could be found guilty in the human court of breaking the Seventh Commandment solely because you were guilty of sexual lust. But far more serious than that is what Jesus says in these verses is that lust, think about this, lust alone makes

us guilty enough to be thrown into hell forever. Jesus says that lust that is fed, tolerated, played with, unrepented of, will get you thrown into hell. That's exactly what He says.

And this isn't the only place the Scripture makes this point. Turn over to Ephesians, chapter 5; Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 3, Paul here introduces sexual sin. This whole paragraph is about sexual sin. He says, "But immorality or any impurity or greed (And here greed is lust in context.) must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." And then he talks about sexual sins of speech, "*there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." Now notice verse 5, "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Notice it's 'certain;' there are no exceptions.

Now the word 'immorality' is 'all sinful sexual intercourse.' 'Impurity' refers 'to all other misuses of the gift of physical intimacy, things like aberrations like sadomasochism' for example. But "greed" and "covetousness" in these verses, in context, is 'sexual desire for intimacy with someone other than your spouse; so it's sexual lust.' Now don't misunderstand, Paul is not saying that a Christian never sins in these ways. That's not true; we know that from the rest of Scripture. David, for example, was clearly a believer, and he was guilty of both the sin of lust and adultery. Paul meaning here is that of a person who is characterized by these sins, who habitually practices these sexual sins, including lust, without repentance. You see here's the point. If you are truly marked by, if your life is characterized by these sins, if you are marked more by your sexual lust and sin than by purity, if your life is an unbroken pattern of these sins, then you don't belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom today. And here He tells us you won't inherit His physical kingdom in the future. Why? Look again at verse 5, Ephesians 5:5, notice it says that the "covetous man," that is again in context, the man given over to lust, sexual

lust, “is an idolater.” You see, if you're engaged in an unbroken, unrepentant pattern of sexual lust, you are an idolater. O'Brien writes, “Sexual lust is an idolatrous obsession. It places self-gratification or another person at the center of one's existence and thus is worship of the creature rather than the Creator.” This is a serious call for self-examination. Again, Christians struggle with these sins, but Christians are not characterized, constantly, by an unbroken pattern of these sins in their lives. John Stott writes this, he says, “If we should fall into,” and listen to how he describes it, “If we should fall into a life of greedy immorality (a life of greedy immorality), we would be supplying clear evidence that we are after all idolaters, not worshipers of God, and so the heirs, not of heaven, but of hell.” I mean, look at Ephesians 5:6. “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things.” What is ‘these things?’ In context, it's lust and sexual sin. “Because of these things, the wrath of God comes (is coming) upon the sons of disobedience.” One day when God's wrath pours out on this world, in part it will be because of man's sexual lust and sin. It is a violation of His nature, and it is a sin against His goodness and the good gift that He has given humanity.

Turn over to Colossians, chapter 3, Paul makes the same point here. Colossians 3, verse 5:

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead (And he goes into sexual sin again.) to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (or lust), which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, (Now watch verse 7.) and in them (these sins) you also once walked, when you were living in them.

That's what marks an unbeliever; this is the reality. So that is the guilt then that Jesus pronounces, the verdict and the sentence.

But I want you to note, thirdly, let's call it "The Forgiveness that Jesus Offers," the forgiveness that Jesus offers. This is implied in our text back in Matthew, chapter 5, but it's not directly stated. It's implied because you'll notice in verses 29 and 30, there are some who are guilty of this sin, but at the same time, whose hearts have been changed, they now hate this sin; they desire to cut it out of their lives, whatever it costs, and to be pure. How does that happen? How can a dirty heart become clean? How can the sin of lust be forgiven? Well, biblically, there are two kinds of forgiveness that we need.

First of all, "The Once-for-all Legal Forgiveness from God as our Judge," the once-for-all legal forgiveness from God as our Judge. You see, every one of us, without exception, has been guilty of lust. This whole text should produce in us a sense of the tax collector in Jesus' story in Luke 18, where we're beating our chest saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Here's how Lloyd-Jones puts it:

If we do not feel unclean at this moment, that we are vile and foul and need to be washed and cleansed, unless we feel utterly helpless with a terrible poverty of spirit, God have mercy on us. I thank God that I have a Gospel which tells me that another who is spotless and pure and utterly holy has taken my sin and my guilt upon Himself. I am washed in His precious blood, and He has given me His own nature.

That's the good news of the Gospel.

Paul applies the Gospel directly to sexual sin over in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6. Look at 1 Corinthians 6, verse 9, he says:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; (Here's this warning again about sexual sin. Do not be deceived.) neither fornicators (That's sexual sin.), nor idolaters, nor adulterers (That's a specific kind of sexual sin.), nor effeminate, nor homosexuals (That's the two partners in a homosexual

relationship.), nor thieves, nor *the* covetous (There's that idea of craving, desiring, lust, again.), nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, (none of them) will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. You see, Christ brings cleansing, washing, and forgiveness for sexual sin, including the sin of lust.

How can God forgive sins like that? He can do so because of what we sang earlier this morning; “He paid the debt in the life and death of His Son.” 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin, *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” There's a great exchange for the believer. Jesus gets my sin and all of its guilt on the cross, and I get all of His righteousness! That's the Gospel, that's the forgiveness that's ours. We have all been adulterers in our hearts, and our only hope is the forgiveness that's promised to those who repent and believe the Gospel. If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ, you're not His follower, His disciple, this is God's standard. It's not going to be okay for you at the judgment. Your only hope, like the hope of everyone else here, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God sent His own Son into the world to live a perfect life, to die in the place, to pay the debt of sin that those who would believe in Him owed, so that God could be just and forgive that sin, and then God raised Him from the dead. That's your only hope.

But here's the beauty of the Gospel. Jesus not only will provide forgiveness from the penalty of your sin, but if you will trust in Him, He will break the power of sin in your life. This is what He promised. He said, listen, John 8:34, “everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.” Do you realize that? You're a slave of your sin, just like the rest of us all were at one point. You're a slave, and if you doubt that, try to stop. But Jesus said in that same passage, He said, John 8:36,

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” He's the only one who can shatter the slavery of your sin. If you will believe and trust in Him, He'll pay the penalty and purchase your forgiveness, and He will break the power of sin in your life, and you will begin to see an increasing pattern of righteousness and a decreasing pattern of sin.

Turn over to John 13; there's a beautiful picture of this reality in John 13 in the foot washing. You remember, Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and He is really teaching two lessons. One lesson is we ought to serve one another. But there's another lesson about forgiveness. Look at verse 10, John 13. Let's start in verse 8. You remember Peter. He says, “Lord, you're not going to wash my feet,” (Paraphrase). Jesus says, “If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me.” Of course, typically, Peter, “Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but my hands and my head.” Now watch verse 10, “Jesus said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you (plural) are clean, but not all *of you*.’” And He said that because He knew about Judas. But the rest of the disciples, all who had believed in Him, the Eleven, He says, “You have been bathed and you are clean.” That's this one-time legal forgiveness. You see, the legal forgiveness we receive in salvation is like God bathing our souls, washing all of our sins away as if we had never stained our souls with them. That's what happens in the Gospel, and that bath doesn't need to be repeated—we are forever legally clean in that sense. Colossians 2:13, “having forgiven us all our transgressions.”

But we also, even as believers, need secondly, “The Ongoing Relational Forgiveness of Our Father,” the ongoing relational forgiveness of our Father. Look again at John 13:10, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet.” Here, Jesus compares the relational forgiveness that we need when we sin as believers to God washing our feet now. We don't need another bath; we had the forgiveness, the once-for-all forgiveness of justification at the moment of salvation, but

now we need that relational forgiveness as we walk through this life. It's that ongoing forgiveness that John describes in 1 John 1:9. As believers, "If we confess (are confessing) our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Listen, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, you need that once-for-all legal forgiveness that will be like a bath to your soul, and that only comes if you're willing to humble yourself, to repent of your sins, and to put your faith in Jesus Christ. But if you're already a believer, you need to deal with all of your sin, including these sins, with ongoing confession so that you can have ongoing relational forgiveness. God grants believers relational forgiveness when their repentance is like that of David in Psalm 51.

But here's an important question. Because this can be an ongoing struggle in the heart, how do you discern the difference between false repentance and genuine repentance? How can you know if your repentance, after sexual sin or sexual lust, is true repentance? Well, genuine repentance always produces fruit. John the Baptist said, "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." What is the fruit of repentance in this case? It is, first of all, an acceptance of full responsibility. True repentance means you take all the blame; you stop blaming your upbringing, you stop blaming others, you stop blaming the internet, you stop blaming your spouse because they're just not enough, and you start blaming yourself. That's where real repentance is demonstrated.

Also, a hatred of the sin. Do you hate the sin in your life? Do you want to cut it out? Do you want to get rid of it entirely? You see, there's also, with the fruit of repentance, a desire to stop it entirely and to be like Jesus Christ. There's a willingness to take practical steps to stop, and the actual taking of those steps, not just the willingness, but the doing of it, that's the fruit of

repentance. And in our text, the fruit of repentance is an openness to take even radical steps if necessary. So, that's "The Law against Adultery Explained."

The final insight we see here is in verses 29 and 30, and that is "The Law against Adultery Applied." Look at these verses. Verse 29:

"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

Here, Jesus tells us, in part, how to deal with lust.

But let's first of all consider "What Jesus Does Not Mean." He does not mean that you should "physically mutilate" your body in some way. Sadly, some, in church history, thought that is what he meant. Origin of Alexandria, for example, had himself emasculated, thinking that it would help him overcome sexual temptation. Of course, it didn't work, and he later repudiated that. And Jesus doesn't mean literally "cut off your hand, tear out your eye, or maim your body in some other way." How do we know that? We know that for several reasons. First of all, we know it because "The Apostles were guilty of lust, and they didn't mutilate their bodies." In other words, they didn't interpret Jesus' words that way. Secondly, we know it because "Eyes and hands don't cause us to sin—hearts do." In Matthew, chapter 15, verse 19, Jesus says, "For out of the heart come...adulteries, fornications." Thirdly, we know it because "Tearing out your right eye won't keep you from lust." Why? Because you still have your left eye! And tear out both eyes, and you can still draw the pictures in your mind. Number four, we know it's not physical because "The nearly universal consensus of the church is that Jesus is making a spiritual point," not a physical one. In fact, shortly after Origin took those dramatic steps, the

council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D., declared mutilating your body is something that Scripture forbids. But most importantly of all, Colossians, chapter 2, verse 23, Paul says there that the harsh treatment of the body is of “no value against fleshly indulgence.” So Jesus didn't mean we should physically harm ourselves.

So let's consider then “What Jesus Does Mean.” There are actually three lessons in these verses.

Let me give you the first two, and then we'll come to number three, which is the main point.

First of all, the first lesson is “Accept Full Responsibility,” accept full responsibility. You see, the problem isn't the person you're lusting after; they are not the problem. It's not that person on the internet who had the audacity to make that video. It's not the internet; it's you! Jesus says, “It's your eyes and your hand.” So accept full responsibility. Don't be blaming other people.

Number two, “Have Zero Tolerance.” What's really clear in these verses is how serious this sin is and how hard you have to work to get rid of it. It's deadly; have zero tolerance! We cannot tolerate lust. Ephesians 5:3 says it should “not even be named among” us. That's Jesus' message here in Matthew 5, get rid of all lust.

And then thirdly, and this is really Jesus' main point in these two verses, “Do Whatever's Necessary.” Jesus used this same language on another occasion a year later. And in that case, unlike here, He wasn't referring specifically to sexual sin, but to anything that causes us to sin.

Turn over to Matthew, chapter 18; Matthew 18, verses 8-9:

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it's better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and to be cast into the fiery hell.

Now notice here that the eye, the hand, and the foot all represent things that are stumbling blocks that make you stumble. That is, they cause you to sin. That's the idea; they are the source of temptation. The eye refers to what we see, the hand to what we do, and the foot to where we go. Jesus isn't saying to actually sever these limbs from your body. He's saying, "Act as if you have. Don't let these things dominate your life. Don't let your foot go where it wants to go. Don't let your hand do what it wants to do. Don't let your eyes look where they want to look." Like Job in Job 31:1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then shall I gaze at a virgin?" understood in sexual desire. Later in that same chapter in verse 9, He says, "I won't lurk at my neighbor's doorway hoping for some fleeting glance at something sordid," (Paraphrase). What Jesus is saying then, back in our text, is that we must be willing to destroy the cause or the source of our temptation to sin.

So let me ask you, friend, "If you struggle at all with this sin of lust, if you struggle with this, if you struggle with pornography, what are you prepared to do to kill the sin of lust in your life?" Are you willing to get rid of your premium television channels, your streaming services, your cable, even your television? Are you willing to get software that monitors and reports on your internet activity? Are you willing, if nothing else works, to get rid of the internet altogether? To get rid of your smartphone and get a dumb phone? And if you don't see progress in your fight against lust, are you willing to get rid of all of your digital devices? If traveling alone for business is one of the greatest sources of your temptation, and you can't figure out another way, are you willing to give up your job and career? If, when you travel, it's the television and all of those free premium channels in the hotel room, are you willing to commit that the moment you check in, you'll ask the front desk to remove the television from your room? By the way, they'll do that. What are you willing to do? You say, "Tom, really? You just don't understand. I can't

survive in today's world without those things.” So is it easier to survive without those things or your right eye and your right hand? That's what Jesus is saying. Jesus makes it clear twice just how deadly lust is. Look at the end of verse 29 and the end of verse 30, “For it is better for you to lose one of the body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” He says it twice. “It is better; it's to your advantage for you, if necessary, to destroy one of the parts of your body than for God to throw your entire body into hell,” (Paraphrase).

Jesus' point is this, let me just give you a summary of what He's saying here. He's saying, “That the one who truly belongs to My spiritual kingdom understands how serious lust is, hates it, and will take whatever steps necessary to cut it out of his or her life.” Jesus' disciples, His true disciples, are committed to purity in body and mind. We must expend maximum effort to obey Jesus' command. Let me tell you, “Jesus isn't going to help you get rid of the slavery to lust if you're not willing to get radical and cut out of your life everything that leads you to lust like He commands here.” And let me just remind you that your body isn't yours. Do you know that? 1 Corinthians 6, verses 19 and 20, “Or do you not know...that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.” Your body doesn't belong to you; it belongs to Christ who purchased it with His own death, and He has a right to tell you what to do with it. So that's what Jesus means: “Get radical—do whatever is necessary!”

But how can we, in addition to this, cut this sin out of our lives? Well, we need to follow “What Scripture counsels.” You see, in other places in Scripture, we are given the recipe for dealing with sin, this sin, sexual sin, lust. How do you do it? Well, Scripture gives us several other practical means, in other places, to fight against sexual sin and lust and to fight for sexual purity. Here's how you do it. I'm just going to give you this list, and I'll give you the verses. I encourage you, if you struggle with this, go back, meditate on these things, work through them. But let me

give you a summary, okay? Several specific means to fight sexual lust. Number one, “Develop a habit of thanksgiving.” You say, “What? How does that help?” Well, remember Ephesians 5:3, talking about sexual sin, he says, “Don't let any of these sexual sins even be named among you.” And then he says, in verse 4, “but rather,” in Greek, it's a strong adversative, “Don't do that!” Instead, “Do this; in place of sexual sin and lust,” he says, “be in the habit of giving thanks to God,” (Paraphrase). You say, “How does that help?” Well, think about it. Sexual sin begins with lust, craving what I don't have. The opposite is giving thanks to God for what I do have. So, giving thanks is the virtue that must replace lust. You say, “What do I thank God for?” Thank Him for Christ. Thank Him for grace. Thank Him that He's cleansed your heart from sin. Thank Him for marriage. Thank Him for your spouse. Thank Him for physical intimacy in marriage. That's His idea, that's His gift. And thank Him that whatever your circumstances may be right now, He can give you the grace to live in a pure way. Thank Him!

Number two, “Use the Word.” Scripture is crucial in our pursuit of sanctification. Psalm 119:11, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” Jesus prayed in John 17:17, “Father (v.5, 11)...Sanctify them in (by means of) the truth; Your word is truth.” You're never going to grow in purity and sanctification apart from God's Word. And specific verses serve a crucial role in temptation. You remember back in Matthew 4, when Jesus dealt with those temptations, how did He respond? In every case, He knew, understood, and had memorized a short passage of Scripture, and He quoted that in the moment of temptation to defend against that temptation. That's how we should do as well. In fact, I have on all my devices a list of categories of sin that I struggle with, and within that I have verses that the Scripture addresses so that I have them at my ready disposal to respond to temptation. Use the Word. Ephesians 6:17, “And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Number three, “Pray.” Now, don't misunderstand, don't pray for some miraculous deliverance from all temptation, “Lord, just take all the temptations away.” It's not going to happen. He hasn't promised that. But pray in a spirit of dependence on God and His grace, asking for His help. You say, “How should I pray in temptation?” I love how Spurgeon describes it. This has been a great encouragement to me personally. He says, listen, “You will never be delivered from your besetting sin in any way but by the blood of Jesus. Take it to Christ.” And here's what he says to tell Him, pray this, “Lord, I have trusted you and your name is Jesus, for you save your people from their sins. Lord, I am one of yours and this is one of my sins. Save me from it.” This is how our Lord taught us to pray every day. In Matthew 6, verse 13, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Number four, “Run!” Sometimes this is the most appropriate response, run. What do I mean by run? First of all, “Leave the place of temptation.” Leave, like Joseph in Genesis 39, when grabbed by Potiphar's wife, what did he do? He left his garment there and he ran, got out. Get out of the place of temptation. If you work at home alone and that's where you struggle with pornography, then go to the coffee shop. Get out of the place of temptation. By run I also mean, “Stay away from people and places that tempt you to sexual sin.” Proverbs, chapter 5, verse 8, “Keep your way far from her (the immoral person) and do not go near the door of her house.” Can I just say if you know that there are people or places that tempt you to sexual sin, it is stupid for you, sorry parents, but it is stupid for you to do that.

I also mean, “Make it hard to sin.” Romans 13:14, “Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust.” Listen, don't make it easy to sin. If your problem is a computer, pop it in the middle of the living room. If your problem is after your spouse goes to bed, promise her and God that you

will go to bed with her every night. Do whatever you have to do. Don't make provision for your sin.

Number five, “Enjoy the gift of physical intimacy in marriage.” If you're married, commit to regularly enjoy physical intimacy with your spouse. In the words of Proverbs 5, to “be intoxicated with your spouse's love, to be drunk on that and not on sexual sin,” (Parphrase). 1 Corinthians 7 says your body doesn't belong to you. That doesn't mean that your spouse has the right to take it, it means that you have the responsibility to give it. If you're unmarried, pursue marriage. 1 Corinthians 7, verses 8 and 9, “I say to the unmarried...that if they do not have self-control, let them marry.” Now don't misunderstand, marriage doesn't end the temptation to sexual sin, but it is however, according to Paul, one of God's means to help deal with and address that temptation.

Number six, “Rely on biblical resources.” God has given us such rich resources. If you seriously struggle with lust, especially pornography, let me recommend some resources to help you. First of all, I encourage you to read *Sin and Temptation* by John Owen. There's a newer version of that that is a whole lot easier to read, edited by Capik and Justin Taylor. We have it in our bookstore—very helpful to understand how to deal with sin and temptation. I heard about, it was recommended to me, a book, that I read this week, so I could see if I wanted to recommend it to you, and I strongly recommend it. It's a book called *Finally Free* by Heath Lambert. Very biblical, very pastoral, very helpful if you struggle with lust and pornography. My own message, “Putting Sin to Death,” sermon on Romans 8:13, I preached back in 2025 because this is one of a number of sins we should be putting to death in our lives, and the process is the same.

Another resource is “A mature biblical counselor or elder.” If you are locked into this and you're not making progress, you need help. Galatians 6:1 says, “If anyone is caught in any trespass, let the one who is spiritual come alongside and help,” (Paraphrase). You need somebody to help.

Number seven, “Depend on Christ.” I mean, “Rely on Him and plead for His help in the midst of temptation.” Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 15 and 16:

For 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 let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

What's the time of need? The time of temptation. Our kids sing a song at VBS. One of the lines says this, and this is exactly right, “When I feel like sinning, right at the beginning, let me look to you alone.”

“Rely on, as well, and plead for help from Christ for sanctification.” You know, as Christians, we're prone to think that we needed Christ to get in, and now we're kind of on our own. Listen, without Christ, you cannot become pure; you cannot grow in sanctification. John, chapter 15, verse 5, “apart from (without) Me, you can do nothing.” Ephesians 5:25 and 26, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her so that He might sanctify her.” The various biblical means I've just described, the other six, including the seventh that our Lord mentions in our text, of pursuing sexual purity, those means will fail if you try to do them with faith in yourself, in your will, in your strength, in your resolve, in your promises. Instead, our complete faith for the success of all of those other means must be in Christ and His Spirit because only Christ and His Spirit can change us. Romans 8:13, “if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” As you and I expend maximum effort, and we have to, we

have to do whatever's necessary to cut the sin out of our lives, but as we expend that effort, the Spirit of God does what we can never do—He gradually changes us at the heart level, and we go from being someone who was sexually dirty to someone who is pure. That's what the Spirit of God does.

Now, as you seek to obey our Lord's commands in this passage, there are a couple of crucial perspectives to keep in mind, and I'll just mention these to you. Number one, “Don't fight the war on only one front.” In other words, don't spend all your energy only fighting the sin of lust. Fight lust but fight and focus, instead, on a total life of obedience to Jesus. John Owen makes the point that God's not going to free you from the sin of lust so you can go and enjoy other sins. No, there has to be a desire for total obedience.

Number two, “Don't forget the war is for a lifetime.” I wish I had better news for you. The good news is, if you fight, you will find that you increasingly are saying no to sin and increasingly are saying yes to righteousness. You will see a diminishing pattern of sin in your life, and you can even reach the point in this life where you're not giving in to that sin at all. But the temptation will always be there, and you must fight, inch by bloody inch, the rest of your life until you die or Jesus comes. And if you're a believer, you're going to keep fighting.

And number three, “Don't forget the ultimate goal.” It's not to stop certain sins. The ultimate goal is to be like Jesus. Romans 8:29, “For those whom He (God) foreknew (that is, those on whom he set His love in eternity past), He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son.” God's goal for you is for you to be as sexually pure as Jesus was and is—nothing less!

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for how it speaks to our lives. Lord, help us who are in Christ to take what our Lord teaches here seriously; help us to use the

means that You have provided to us. Help us to be diligent. And then, Lord, we pray that You would help us to depend on You, on Your Son, on Your Spirit, because only They can ultimately change us.

And Father, I pray for those who are here this morning who are enslaved to sexual sin or to lust.

Lord, I pray that today they would see that the One, the Son makes free shall be free indeed.

And Lord, I pray that today You would draw them to Yourself in repentance and faith so that they can know that freedom, that they could be finally free. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.