

Lust and the Biblical Strategy for Success

By Jay Wegter

INTRODUCTION: Every Christian man's battle is the fight for sexual purity. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thess 4:3-8).

Because of the explosion of sensual images in cyberspace, believing men need more than ever to be intentional about building a ‘perimeter around the heart.’ Behavior modification is ultimately shallow; all true change must begin with the Word of God implanted, and the character of God reckoned with, and the believer’s resources in Christ appropriated. Central to that strategy is what Jonathan Edwards referred to as **“the religious affections.”** We echo what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4, the best way to build a perimeter around the heart is to deepen our sight and savor for things above.

I. Purity is the prerequisite for fruitfulness and spiritual leadership (2 Tim 2:19-21; 2 Pet 1:8). Nothing in our culture is easier than for a man to be a **‘sensual opportunist’**. To live for pleasure directly is to be an enemy of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18-19). Our sexuality is not to be eradicated but reclaimed for Christ—let a man *purify himself of these things* (2 Tim 2:21). When a man indulges in unbridled lust, it makes him unfit to properly love his wife and disqualified to lead in the church.

II. Purity is the result of watching over one’s heart with diligence (Prov 4:23). The man of God builds a ‘perimeter’ around his heart affections (reserving his utmost for His highest). The cross has severed him from the love of the world (Gal 6:14-15). Gospel ‘logic’ is inseparable from moral logic. Spiritual ‘pleasures’ are apprehended by faith (sensual pleasures by *sight--immediacy*).

III. Purity is the ‘byproduct’ of delighting in God (Ps 37:4). Paul’s prayers in Ephesians offer exemplary access points to delight in God (Eph 1:15-23). Treasuring God in Christ moves us from duty to delight. **Impurity is a refusal to seek our highest satisfaction in God.** Delighting is a determination to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Rom 13:14).

IV. Purity is restored through repenting of, and forsaking heart idols (Ez 14:1-11). A ‘heart idol’ is an illicit affection. True repentance deals not only with sinful deeds; but with sinful desires (illicit affections). True repentance restores our delighting in God. True repentance is not content to live with guilt—instead it runs to the atonement. True repentance enlarges the heart to take in more of God. True repentance daily reviews its true treasure (Phil 3:7-14).

IV. Purity is maintained by meditating upon God’s truth (Ps 119:9-16). Know the benefits of purity and the consequences of impurity. Preach the Gospel to yourself every day. Realize that you were redeemed in order to be *staggered* by the supremacy of Christ (and His infinite fitness to answer our ruin in His

Person). Understand that your present ‘fight of faith’ is designed to fit you for a nearly unbearable weight of glory to come. Review the fact that the godly man’s ‘tool’ is his clear conscience (Acts 24:15-16).

The fight for purity is one of the most pivotal battlefronts in a man’s life. It involves the most intense kind of soul warfare; it is a battle for the mind and the affections. Compromise at the point of lust indulged sabotages the whole endeavor of godliness. Massive energy must be exerted to enjoy a united heart lifestyle; but all progress is a function of divine grace (1 Cor 15:10). Our spiritual arsenal is built around the central truths of divine grace as they apply to the conquest of lusts and indwelling sin. The internet **porn industry is assaulting cyberspace**. It is proving to be a devastating weapon in the hands of the enemy who is eager to destroy souls by further enslaving them to sensuality, and by defiling and searing consciences. Christian men are in desperate need of true biblical, gospel-based, ‘moral logic’ in the realm of personal sexual purity. The only way to survive spiritually in our sexualized culture is to learn how to build a ‘perimeter’ of safety around the heart—a man’s affections must be guarded by the arguments for personal righteousness enjoined in Scripture. **Proverbs:** “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot *one is reduced* to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched?” (Prov 6:23-28). **NOTE: today she is a ‘cyber-harlot’.**

This world is a moral and spiritual ‘wilderness’—a soul-draining place. Therefore, the believer must be adept at ‘wilderness survival’. The success of any campaign depends upon teamwork. When soldiers are on patrol each member plays a vital part in survival; there is a division of labor. Therefore we commend close Christian friendships for the purpose of spiritual growth (Rom 15:14).

Our schemes to beat lust are vain apart from the cross. The cross of Christ is central in our strategy for purity. It is those who are humbled and broken by the sight of their sin, and the mercy of Christ who treasure the cross and stay close to the Savior and His finished work. The saints who have gone before us have been overcomers. They have conquered and overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil by the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ has been their conquering weapon (Rev 12:11). All true movement toward practical godliness is attributable to the transforming power of God’s Word.

Only God’s truth can do the transforming at the depth where it needs to take place; at the level of our root drives. Our battle for purity must not be reduced to simply moral behavior modification (but replacement behaviors). **God is interested in the heart.** He wants a man to consecrate himself as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). The Lord expects nothing less than the daily presentation of the members of our body to Him who loves us (Rom 6:12-19).

Success in the battle for purity turns upon the maintenance of our relationship with God. “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matt 5:8). Purity of heart can only be accomplished by abiding in Christ (1 Jn 2:28-3:2). The man who abides in Christ keeps his heart set upon the supremacy of Christ, and the hope of glory; therefore “*he purifies himself, just as He is pure*” (1 Jn 3:3).

The Mortification of Sin and the Believer’s Triumph over Temptation (adapted from *The Enemy Within* by Chris Lundgaard). The purpose of mortification (putting sin to death) is to arrive at the goal for which God in His grace laid hold of us. God accomplishes His purposes with a precise goal in

view. God declares the end from the beginning (Is 46:10). God decrees, He predestines, He foreordains—He works with the end in mind (See Eph 1:4; Rom 8:28-30).

We must cultivate the habit of mortification with the END in mind. All we do in our efforts at sanctification/mortification should serve an ultimate end—the end for which we were created anew in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Eph 5:27). **Sin twisted the image of God. The Lord recreates and restores His people to that perfect image** (the new man asserting himself) (Eph 4:22-32; Col 3:8-17ff.).

Mortification is absolutely necessary if you want to have spiritual life. It is not optional like elective surgery. Mortification is not easy. Mortification is mandatory for every true believer (Rom 8:12-13). No one who hopes to live in God and with God can decline mortification. The nature of our flesh demands constant mortification. Romans 7:7-25 depicts indwelling sin as an operative principle.

- Sin dwells in us as an operative principle
- Sin offers the incentives of power, pleasure, and freedom
- Sin is parasitic; it depends upon our consent
- Sin seeks to press us into its mould in order to bring us into subjection
- Sin wants sole (unshared) rule over an individual

You can't do anything pleasing to God unless you are putting the flesh to death. Because the struggle is constant; you'll have to overcome the flesh. In order to have victory; you'll have to think self-consciously about the battle (Gal 5:17-24ff.). **The believer must know his divine resources for mortification (see 1 Cor 10:13; Jn 3:34; Rom 8:32ff.). The cross, the Word, the gospel, and the Spirit comprise our divine resources for resisting temptation.** We must know the present value of the cross for present change. A new record in heaven and a new power over sin go together.ⁱ

The believer must not receive divine resources passively. Instead there must be diligent application and appropriation of the divine enablement provided for us. If you receive your resources passively; there will be very very slow spiritual growth. Dedicate yourself to mastery of the means of grace in order to defeat sin and the flesh. To do so; you will have to exert constant resistance against the flesh. **There is an immense difference between reading the Bible and meditating on the Bible. Reading is only 'brushing against' the truth. Meditating on the Word is what is required in order to have your life ordered and transformed.** Meditation requires interpretive skills; time for reflection; and penetrating application to one's own life. Those who meditate are deadly serious about *what the Word says as it intersects with their lives*—it is the work of a lifetime. (See Hebrews 5:12-14—fighting sin at a distance OR while clinging to your bosom.)

THE TACTICS OF TEMPTATION: Self-focused pleasure and the love of God are always locked in mortal combat (2 Tim 3:1-4). The more we seek to sow to earthly pleasure, the less we'll be seeking love from God. And so the strategy to overcome temptation, build a case for obedience. So we expose the deceitfulness of sin and enticement, and we must expose the cost and consequences because the flesh and the devil hide the price tag while pumping up the supposed benefits of doing the sin.

The role of the flesh in tripping us up is that the flesh seeks to USURP the role of the Spirit. The flesh wants to replace the role of the Spirit by proposing lustful objects of desire as being worthy and excellent. The Holy Spirit proposes objects which are worthy and excellent, Christ, the Kingdom,

knowledge of God, glory, all worthy objects.

God has given us the knowledge in his Word that the primary way temptation works is by deceit (Eph 4:22). To yield to sin is to be hoodwinked (ENTICED) by our own desires (James 1:14ff.). The sinful flesh has one goal—death. You are trying to mortify the flesh; the flesh is trying to kill you (1 Pet 2:11; James 1:15; Rom 8:6). The flesh pretends to be your friend—offering to make you happy if you sow to its desires. But the flesh has an agenda of slavery to sin and spiritual death. Why then is it important to know that the flesh is armed to deceive you, enslave you, and slay you? **The DEGREES of temptation are spelled out in James 1:12-15:**

- 1.) The mind is dragged away from being a watchman of the soul
- 2.) The affections become entangled and interested in sin's offers
- 3.) The will is overcome and consents to sin's offers
- 4.) The will and actions give birth to acts of sin
- 5.) Sin as master enslaves and results in death (not a description of believers)

The faculties of our soul must operate in unison in order to resist temptation. The MIND is renewed by God in order to discern what pleases God. The mind is a watchman of the soul—it makes discerning judgments about what is proposed. The AFFECTIONS respond to the mind. “Yes, this is a good thing.” Or, “No, this may look attractive; but I hate this—there is revulsion in it.” The affections respond to what the mind says whether good or bad. “Do, or don’t, develop an appetite for this.” The WILL seeks to consent to, and carry out, the ruling desire of the affections (whether holy or unholy).

The flesh tempts the mind; seeking to convince the mind of the legitimacy of its overtures to sin. The battle is for the mind. The mind is the sentry posted to keep the thief of sin out of the soul. The flesh has countless tactics to persuade us that a temptation is no real danger. The flesh seeks to weaken the perception that there is real danger in sin. The flesh wants to weaken our understanding of the purposes of God's grace (Titus 2:11-14).

The licentious thrust of the flesh is to separate the remedy of grace from the design of grace. To only focus on forgiveness is a ‘half gospel.’ The ‘half gospel’ neglects the gospel mandate of conformity to Christ and deliverance from the power of sin. The flesh uses a ‘half gospel’ to view grace as pardon only. A half gospel will make you far more vulnerable to sin—for the flesh uses the half gospel concept as a strategy to convince us that the present danger of sin has been carried away by Christ.

Note the severe warnings in Scripture about turning the grace of God into a license for sinning (Jude 3-4; Heb 12:10, 14-17). *The Gospel Gap is addressed in 2 Pet 1:4-11.* The temptations of the flesh also seek to incorporate the imagination. We are drawn into how delightful things might be. **We allow our minds to drift into scenarios in which we picture certain possibilities. These possibilities are then used to justify our actions—though they are contrary to God's clear commands.**

STEPS of sin through imagination are often as follows:

- A degree of discontent followed by coveting
- Fixing the mind on something or someone you think will bring happiness
- Feeding the desire until it becomes a ruling desire
- Plotting on how to bring the fantasy into reality
- Sell the soul for it—willing to die for it (sin's ‘madness’)

In order to obey God in anything, there must be an ongoing mortification of the flesh. God produced the new birth in us in order that our wills might have the power to choose only what is good for the soul. Nevertheless we are in a battle between flesh and Spirit (Gal 5:17).

- 1.) To obey God in anything we must mortify the flesh. The refusal to mortify is sin.
- 2.) Our battle is life versus death. It is resist sin or die (Rom 8:12-13).
- 3.) We must listen to the Spirit's resistance of the flesh. Walk in step with the Spirit and you will not carry out the sinful desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16, 18).
- 4.) The obedient believer yields to the Spirit and cooperates with the Spirit (Phil 2:12-13).

THE MASTERY OF MORTIFICATION: We become like what we worship (2 Cor 3:18). Watch over your heart with all diligence (Prov 4:23; Matt 6:19-21; Col 3:1-3). 'Put to death'—a refusal to allow the sins Christ died to destroy to express themselves through your bodies. We become **conformed** to the desires we seek—the desires to which we give the allegiance of our soul's faculties.

Another weapon against sin is the **'joy' of mortification**. There is joy in consolidating our affections on the Person of Christ. "Lord give me a united heart to revere Thy Name!" (Ps 86:11). Simple and pure devotion to Christ is a powerful weapon against the temptations of sin (2 Cor 11:3).

Don't reduce mortification to a task. Instead, see mortification as an expression of your love and submission to Christ—as a part of maintaining intimacy and loyalty to Him. True mortification is affection-driven says Paul; it must touch the depths of our hearts (Col 3:1-4ff.). **We must see the relational in mortification.** It is not an abstraction—it is looking unto Jesus Himself (Heb 12:1-3ff.).

THE CURATIVE ROLE OF CONFESSION: Sin and shame seek cover. When we yield to strong temptation to sin; we move to secrecy. The flesh loves darkness and secrecy. The flesh is a 'con-man' to break the strength of close fellowship with other believers. Solitude and darkness gives home field advantage to the flesh (Jn 3:19-21). Cutting oneself off from fellow believers makes the situation more disastrous (John Owen). The corporate aspect of confession is vital to spiritual health (James 5:16). A gospel-centered body of believers will welcome the role of confessing sin to one another.

Pray that God will make you the kind of person who can hear the confession of a brother. When you bring sin out of darkness into light it just shrivels and dies. God holds out real forgiveness for even the most wicked sins. God specializes in cleansing spiritual lepers. If you remain ignorant of your enemy (sin), you will justify yourself and behave impatiently toward those who reprove you and admonish you (2 Chron 16:7-10; Prov 9:8).ⁱⁱ What changed when the Psalmist confessed his sins? (See Psalm 32). **Part of our calling as Christian men is to help our brothers locate and remove the blockage to their sanctification by closing that divide between faith and practice, belief and life, belief and walk, love and life, duty and desire—closing that dualistic divide.** How to close that divide so as to bring that deepest need to Christ, otherwise if that gap between faith and practice, so that he wider it is, the more of an entry point there is for sexual lust and its illicit objects (lust, porn, illicit sexual relations) to jump through or enter in through that gap.

OUT-TRUTHING THE LIE: *Scripture sets forth the act of marriage (sexual relations) as God's gift; a gift filled with divine mystery and wisdom; a gift so complex we cannot say we understand it fully.*

Therefore to reduce marital relations to the physical alone is to degrade God's gift. There are too many *strands* that make up the act of marriage to reduce it to a physical/emotional behavior.

There is the strand of the **marriage covenant** (the first God-given ordinance – Gen 2:24); there is the **spiritual strand** (it has the power to make two into one flesh – 1 Cor 6:16); there is the **strand of shared source** (at creation the man was the source of the first woman's body, ever since Eve – woman is the source of man's body – 1 Cor 11:8-12); there is the strand of **physiological differences** as source of sexual desire and interest ("I said, 'I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks.' Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples," – Song 7:8;); there is the **strand of the love commitment** ('For love is as strong as death' – Song 8:6; Eph 5:25); there is the **strand of knowing the other person at the depth of their soul** ('know' is a euphemism for sexual relations – Gen 4:1); there is the **sacred strand of mutual authority** over one another's bodies (Scripture enjoins mutual surrender in the act of marriage – 1 Cor 7:4); there is the strand of **finding completeness** in one's marriage partner (1 Cor 11:11; Gen 2:18).

One of the great tragedies in our culture is that the act of marriage has been trivialized (and merely eroticized). The wonderful mysterious multi-strand cord that God has woven has been *unraveled*. The covenant strands and spiritual strands that bind the cord together have been discounted and often thrown away; while the erotic strand has been retained and worshipped.

In our culture, the act of marriage has been severed from the higher, spiritual part of man's being and reduced to an animal passion. As men, we know all too well that we are naturally *sight attracted*. That which titillates the senses runs ahead, and outpaces the spiritual. Our lower nature is easily *magnetized* by the erotic strand; its power to excite makes it appear that it can thrill; make a man feel alive; even vivify his masculine soul (**note the mirage factor**).

But Scripture tells us that when the erotic strand is unraveled from the sacred covenant cord of God's making it cannot stand alone from marriage – it **instantly becomes pornea** (Grk.-- sexual immorality). It damages the soul of man; it is death. "Flee" is the biblical mandate; don't trust your passions; don't let them set the standard for your behavior (Rom 8:5-8; 1 Cor 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22).

GUARD YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS: *When a man takes his deepest needs to something in creation; it becomes an idol, or false integration point.* Ephesians 4:22 describes sensual *false integration points* as "the lusts of deceit." Illicit objects of sexual lust are **filled with deception**. What they promise – fulfillment and satisfaction – they cannot deliver.

The **deception factor** is bound up in the fact that they do impart momentary pleasure; even excitement. The temporal pleasure is the "hook." But a **lust of deceit** can never be transmuted into true satisfaction. A lust will always remain "bogus bread" that cannot do anything to nourish the soul (Is 55:2). As a result, the sexual idolater pursues the object of his lust with greater vigor and resulting bondage. The tragedy is that lust indulged *trains the heart in greed* (2 Pet 2:14).

WHY GOD HATES LUST: (it misrepresents His nature; it objectifies others (sinning against love); it wages war upon the soul: 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that fleshly lusts wage war against the soul. Porn-fed lust has the destructive power to hollow out a man and make him a shell of what he was. The very

faculties of soul needed for love, empathy, worship, tenderness, and responsiveness to God are enlisted for craving and greed instead. **It can fragment the soul and deface the image of God and make a man into a moral coward.** It can neutralize a man spiritually – it so defiles the conscience that a man loses his ability to be fierce for the truth. It sheathes his sword and fills him with a sense of hypocrisy; it makes him ambivalent about ministry. ***Christian men must tell themselves the truth about pornography; it is a satanic weapon that wages war against the soul.*** Porn is not merely about forbidden objects of desire – it is a worldview about the body which denies God’s good design and enthrones lust. It is nothing short of war against the knowledge of God.

In order to lust with abandon, I must first tell myself a lie about God’s goodness. Sensual lust grows out of the ancient lie that God is withholding some good from the creature (Gen 3:5). When lust is indulged, it taps into the ancient lie that God is not infinitely good to His creatures; therefore man has a ‘right’ to be fulfilled by sin.ⁱⁱⁱ God also hates lust because it alienates the soul from His goodness. Therefore lust is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness. Mental lust works against righteousness because lust is an avenue for the expression of overt sins of the body (Jas 1:13-15).

The practice of lust, like all other sin, is the practice of lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4). When a person gives in to lust; he circumnavigates truth by reasoning that he has the right to make myself happy in violation of God’s clear commands.^{iv} When we choose to fill our soul with a substitute for God it is a terrible loss. We’re made to find our joy in God; when we trade the truth of God for a lie it is tantamount to idolatry and it inches us toward destruction. God loves us; therefore He hates lust because it is destructive to the creatures made in His moral image.^v

Lust weakens the conscience because we have to bribe and bypass the conscience in order to sin presumptuously. We lie to the conscience in order to indulge in lust; it gradually enfeebles the conscience and makes it increasingly like scar tissue (1 Tim 4:2). Habitual lust is mental surrender to sexual temptation – when we allow lust to rule us it functions as an obsessive controlling force. The more lust is fed; the more of a tyrant it becomes. Lust indulged makes way for more sin – it spoils our duties.

One sin harbored unfits us not only for worship, but also for suffering. When we carry the weight of a guilty conscience we won’t carry the cross of Christ – we won’t deny lust and we certainly won’t lay down our lives for Christ. God says *kill it* – Romans 6:12).^{vi}

Jesus said if you don’t fight lust you won’t go to heaven (Mt 18:9). **Lust is sexual desire minus honor and holiness. It is the sex drive removed from honor toward another human and missing reverence for God.** The source of lust is our **evil desire** by nature. **Lust is an unholy desire** – when we sow to it, the ‘payoff’ is that we lust even more. Lust robs us of freedom and joy – when we are controlled by our sensual appetites we are ‘jailed’ and enslaved (Phil 3:18, 19; Jn 8:34).^{vii}

Lust comes in on the heels of lies that argue for compromise. Lust lies try to convince us to drop our guard and leave off watchfulness. *God accepts little sins; I’m human; it’s my body; it won’t affect me; the sex drive is not totally controllable; illicit pix won’t hurt me; there aren’t any consequences; the pleasure promise is better than the God promise; fulfilled lust satisfies; I can get away with it; purity is fanaticism that will keep me from enjoying beauty.*^{viii}

The lustful man sees the omniscience of almighty God as a disturbing intrusion into his pursuit of pleasure. It is reminiscent of the statement about the wicked in Job 21:14 – *who say to God, “Depart.”*

Summarizing: God hates lust because it is contrary to all His purposes to make us eternally happy by making us holy like Himself (Heb 12:12-14; 1 Jn 3:2, 3).

LUST AND THE AMPUTATION FACTOR: *If you neglect doing violence against your sins now, there will be no help for you after death. When men shall open their eyes and see into what a damned condition they have sinned themselves, oh now what would they not do! What violence would they not use if there were the possibility they might be saved! Thomas Watson*

Jesus proclaimed that lust must be put to death if we are to avoid missing heaven. And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands and two feet, to be cast into eternal fire (Matt 18:8ff).

So serious is matter of our eternal destiny that our Lord compared the decisive action we must take against sin to amputating a body part. The *amputation factor* highlights the exertion necessary, and the pains we must take, to remove stumbling-blocks from our lives.

We must make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Rom 13:14). How grave is the issue? In order to drive home its seriousness, Jesus tells us that the body member that is making us stumble; whether foot, hand, or eye, will do us no good in hell. Picture yourself as an amputee hopping on one foot; now think of how much trouble it would be to commit the same sin again. There is no substitute for forsaking sin. We are to eliminate the old occasions of temptation by casting away all provisions for fleshly lust.^{ix}

Romans six tells us that there are but two masters in this life; sin and righteousness. We daily and hourly present our bodies to one master or the other. The daily presentation is not a private matter; for how we use our body is a public declaration of *who our true master is. Those who are headed for heaven are those who have been freed from sin and enslaved to God – they make it a daily habit to present their bodies to God.* The result of a lifestyle of presentation to God is *sanctification and the outcome eternal life* (Rom 6:22). Eternal life is both the believer's possession and destination; but he reaches the destination by a life of *enslavement to God*; by a *life of presentation* of his body to God. The *amputation factor* reminds us that we may have to take radical steps in order to mortify sin.^x

The presentation principle taught in Romans 6 teaches us that our possession of eternal life depends upon which master rules our body. Scripture tells us that the body is *for the Lord* (1 Cor 6:13). When Christ set forth the *amputation factor*, He was driving home the point that this brief life is a battle for the eternal soul. Paul told Timothy that he must *take pains* in his ministry because so much is riding upon the proclamation and application of God's Word (1 Tim 4:15).

Holy 'violence' in our quest for heaven involves the resolution of the will; the vigor of the affections; and the strength of endeavor. Puritan Thomas Watson's observations on *amputation* are most penetrating. *Because the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit*; the pampering of the flesh is the quenching of God's Spirit (Gal 5:17). Says Watson, the affections are violent things: *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?* (Ps 42:2).^{xi}

The wise Christian, (the man who is running the race with endurance), begins the self-examination of his soul as if it were the Day of Judgment. He is ruthless in his honesty because he knows that self-love works against objectivity. He knows that his salvation depends upon taking pains in

self-examination. By contrast, the false professor seldom examines the state of his own soul; he is too busy spying on the faults of others.^{xii}

To those weaned on cultural Christianity's 'easy-believism', Watson's words sound eccentric to our ears. Listen to his description of the *amputation factor* in action: *But if we [are to] get to heaven, we must force our way; we must besiege it with sighs and tears, and get the scaling ladder of faith to storm it. We must not only work, but fight.*^{xiii}

We ought to treat sexual lust (and its accompanying pornographic stimuli), as our worst enemy. Think of Satan using porn in an attempt to drag your soul into hell. In order to gain the victory, you will have to call upon the Lord countless times and resist the devil's temptation with all your might.

Now let's think about the words used by our Lord when He set forth the *amputation factor*; and then personalize our combat by adding additional terms: *In order to gain the victory over the enemy of my soul, I will dig in; hack my way; chop, pluck out; I will cut off all occasion for sin. I will deny myself and I will trust and praise my way to freedom; and I will stay free in Christ my Champion.*^{xiv}

Like Timothy, we must flee from youthful lusts. We must have a working knowledge of our armor and our spiritual weapons. When we are serious about the *amputation factor*, there will be no gaps in our armor. Then, like Timothy, God can use us to assist others. We must guard ourselves and be pure if we are to be useful in the battle for eternal souls (2 Timothy 2:21-22).

OUR BATTLE WITH LUST IS A FAITH FIGHT: *Faith is central to our victory; every failure in our fight against lust always begins with a crisis of faith however small.* When we turn away from Christ in order to be satisfied in other things it is unbelief; we are disobeying the command to be *strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (2 Tim 2:1). Faith therefore is a vigorous principle that maintains an appetite for God in the heart.^{xv}

The fight of faith is the battle to stay satisfied in God. When we *battle* to stay satisfied in God; we take our thirst and desire for satisfaction to *all He is toward us in Christ Jesus*. Whenever we fail in our battle for joy in God, our repentance ought to be immediate and not delayed. When we repent we are turning from self as a source of satisfaction; we return to Christ Jesus for our enjoyment.^{xvi}

Finding our pleasure in God goes even deeper than death to self, and self-denial. The reason for this concerns our ever present thirst for contentment. We could draw a straight line, like a graph, between contentment and coveting. At one end of the graph is contentment in Christ; and at the other is coveting. To the degree we cultivate contentment in Christ; our hearts will be guarded from coveting (and lusting). Contentment is the overflow of joy that comes from godliness (1 Tim 6:6).

In one sense faith is our only fight. The reason for this is that our battle is all about whose promises we will believe. Each battle is won or lost at the level of spiritual sight. Faith in God's Word beckons me to trust in God's promises. Jesus tells us that He is able to satisfy our soul thirst now and forever (Jn 6:35). When we bring our desire and our faith to Christ's promise; we believe the promise of God more than the promise of lust. Trusting God makes us conquerors; how we need to *preach* this to ourselves; especially when lust's false promises are screaming at us in full crescendo.^{xvii}

The soul of man was made to worship, to adore, and to pursue happiness; even to crave. If the believer goes any length of time without tasting the love of Christ, and when Christ ceases to fill the heart with the sense of His presence and with satisfaction; the soul will go in silent search of other lovers. This is why seeking satisfaction in the Lord is so important to our sanctification.

The experience of biblical enjoyment of God is not abnormal or extraordinary, but part of our inheritance (Eph 1:14). “Earnest” or initial payment is not confined to the doctrinal, or theoretical. The “down payment” of our inheritance strongly implies that the enjoyment of God is to be expected, looked for. What is the love of Christ in the heart? It is the experience of the love of God being shed abroad in the heart (Rom 5:5). **It is God making His love wonderfully real to us so that we are made profoundly aware of it.** It is the impression upon the human spirit of the love which God has for us in Christ. **This experience is accessible by meditation on the Word or God and by prayer.** Our daily duty and privilege is to seek this experience from Him until we are joyful partakers of it. To taste this once is to not be satisfied nor rest content, but to seek to have it again and again.

When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He makes His wonderful love real to us. This gracious communication to us in this life by the Spirit generates felt joy and exhilaration in connection with the consciousness that one is a child of God. This experience is not confined to the N.T. God is my *exceeding joy* (Ps 43:4). *Taste the goodness of the Lord* (Ps 34:4). “Tasting” is experiential; it is the ecstasy of the Spirit poured out in the heart – that we might *pant* after Him, *thirst* for Him, desire to *appear* before Him, and long to *enjoy* His lovingkindness forever.

The godly expect this ongoing “tasting;” it is not just mental understanding, but heart-warming experiences. It is *felt* enjoyment of the love of God (Ps 63:2-7).^{xviii} Guarding time with the Lord in which we seek Him passionately births new triumphs over sin. *To pray well is to have studied well* (Luther). To be effective we must excel at fellowship with Christ. Faith in God’s promises is vital; I must believe that God holds me in His heart of love and that He desires my fellowship.

Trust in God’s promises is the very pulse of our Christian walk. It is the first line of defense against straying into lust. God has saved us for a life of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, and self-control. It is God’s Spirit who empowers us to live the life of a *new creature* (2 Cor 5:17).

When, by daily presentation, the Spirit controls every part of our lives; including our sexual desires; we are navigating the narrow path spoken of by Christ (Mt 7:13). All of our progress in sanctification is *faith-driven*. Faith in God’s Word keeps us moving in a God-ward direction. At salvation God graciously placed us in Christ giving us a perfect positional righteousness. All of our resultant *practical righteousness* grows out of our positional righteousness by means of faith (Col 3:1-5).

The Holy Spirit produces in the believer an entirely new disposition which loves Christ and desires His approval more than self-recognition, self-indulgence, and self-glory. It is an entirely new life that severs us from the old; it’s a perspective based on faith in God’s promises.

Happiness in God is a learned behavior. In Christ’s school of happiness the very first lesson to be learned is deny self (Luke 9:23). Natural reason begins and ends with self. God’s truth about the secret of satisfaction is a paradox. For nothing satisfies without God and without God in it. Everything we attempt to feed the soul without God in it will prove to be *bogus bread* (Is 55:2). Jesus taught that He alone makes people truly happy (Jn 6:51; 7:37; 10:10; 16:24).

The growing Christian learns to know his own heart; his affections are the barometer of where he is headed. His heart is the revealer of where he is looking for satisfaction; and what he is trusting in. He is able to see from a distance where his desires are becoming different from God’s desires. When his heart is restless and in danger of truant affections; he notices and takes appropriate action; he renews his diligence in seeking happiness in God; he feeds his faith on God’s promises.^{xix}

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1.) Look at James 1:14-15 again. “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” Lust is filled with self-deception which “entices” a man. **Describe the connection between *enticement* and entertaining sexual fantasies about another person. What steps may a Christian man take in order to first recognize, and then put to death the *enticement stage of temptation*?**
- 2.) The flesh opposes the Spirit’s role in our lives. “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal 5:17). The flesh seeks to usurp the role of the Spirit by proposing forbidden objects of desire (sexual lust). The Spirit seeks to move our thoughts and affections back to “things above” (Col 3:1ff.). **Describe why cultivating satisfaction in God by means of the Spirit would guard our heart from the lustful invitations of the flesh.**
- 3.) The cross of Christ has severed us from the world and made us true worshippers (Gal 6:14). The cross has slain (judged) the dominion of the old man, and as a result the believer is dead to sin and alive to God (Rom 6:11-13). **Describe why it is so important for the believer to know the present value of the cross when it comes to dealing with what remains of indwelling sin. Why is “reckon” a stronger word here than merely know? What does “reckoning” look like in our fight to mortify lust?**

Endnotes:

ⁱ Timothy Lane, Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, New Growth Press, 2006, p. 32

ⁱⁱ John Owen, *Triumph over Temptation*, p. 198

ⁱⁱⁱ Oswald Chambers, *The Philosophy of Sin*, (London: Simkin Marshall), pp. 13, 14

^{iv} Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 121

^v Randy Alcorn, *The Purity Principle*, p. 12

^{vi} Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), pp. 146-149

^{vii} Joshua Harris, *Not Even a Hint*, (Multnomah Publishers, 2003), pp. 38-41, 45

^{viii} *Ibid.*, pp. 152-158

^{ix} Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change*, (Zondervan, 1986), p. xiv

^x Randy Alcorn, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*, (Multnomah Press, 1985), p. 205

^{xi} Watson, *Heaven taken by Storm*, (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), pp. 7, 9

-
- ^{xii} Ibid., pp. 30-33
- ^{xiii} Ibid., p. 48
- ^{xiv} Mike Cleveland, *Pure Freedom*, (Focus Publishing, 2002), p. 131
- ^{xv} John Piper, *Future Grace*, (Multnomah Books, 1995), pp. 27, 49, 68, 86
- ^{xvi} Ibid., pp. 94, 97, 224
- ^{xvii} Ibid., p. 334
- ^{xviii} Ibid., pp. 61-63
- ^{xix} Ibid., pp. 26, 30