

Intro

This morning we examine a provocative topic: sexual lust. And Jesus doesn't beat around the bush. He warns us that our eternal salvation is at stake here. Whoever you are, man, woman, checking out Christianity, already a follow of Jesus, your mind is probably racing in a number of directions as I mention this topic. The mention of lust inevitably brings pornography to mind, and practical implications abound.

How does my lust send me to hell? What is Jesus actually saying? Maybe you're thinking, this is too hard a teaching.

To others of you this hits home. Should I tell my spouse about my struggle? What will he or she do if they find out? What should I do if my spouse confesses their struggle with lust to me? What will other people think of me if they find out about my struggle? I feel so helpless. I feel like a slave. Can I really overcome this sin? Is there something uniquely wrong with me?

This morning I aim to help you see what lust is, how serious lust is, and how we can fight lust. This morning Jesus instructs us to...

BIG IDEA: Do whatever it takes to protect your heart from lust

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Sermon Caveats

If you have committed the literal sin of adultery my aim this morning is not to shame you. My aim this morning is to help everyone who's watching to see adultery like Jesus saw it. If you've confessed your sins to Christ, turned from your adultery, and trusted in Christ's alone for forgiveness, you can rest in God's promise of salvation. The death and suffering of Jesus on the cross, the God-man, who lived a sinless life, is an acceptable payment for your sin. Because Jesus' sacrificial death was an acceptable payment for sin, even adultery can be forgiven. If you're living in adultery today you need to heed Jesus' warning!

If you have engaged in pornography, and even if you engaged in pornography this week, my aim is not to shame you. My aim is to help everyone who's watching to see lust as seriously as Jesus sees it. And to help you defeat pornography by pointing you to some helpful resources.

Behind everything Jesus says in these four verses there stands a worldview framework that Jesus held to: sexual activity is reserved for one man and one woman united to one another in marriage. Any sexual activity outside of this realm falls in the category of sexual immorality. Sex is a good thing created by God and reserved for marriage, for our enjoyment and the multiplication of the human race. What's wrong isn't sex. What's wrong are the sinful perversions of sex that deviate from God's very good design.

There are two appropriate expressions of sexuality in Scripture:

- 1) Sexual relations between a man and a woman united in marriage (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Ephesians 5:22-33)
- 2) Chastity in singleness (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:6-9, 32-38)

Point 1: Sinful lust is an intentional looking that fantasizes about unlawful acts (5:27-28)

Explanation

In context, Jesus is countering the deficient religion of the Pharisees with the heart religion God's law intended. It's not enough to refrain from physical adultery. No, we need to live out the spirit of the 7th commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." Behind the command that prohibited sexual relations between a married person and someone who isn't their spouse, stood the intent of the law: sexual purity.

5:27 spells out what the law said. 5:28 spells out what the law intended: purity of heart. Since lust can be understood vaguely, let's nail down this one down precisely. Verse 28 literally reads:

"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman **in order to** lust after her already committed adultery (with) her in his heart."

The ESV has translated "in order to lust after her" as "with lustful intent." The problem is the purpose or goal of the looking: looking at a woman who isn't your wife in order to desire her sexually. The key is the intent. This is why the ESV uses "with lustful intent." So this isn't walking down the street and noticing that someone's attractive. No, it's when a married person intentionally gazes at someone who isn't their spouse to fantasize about unlawful sexual acts. Or gazing in this manner at someone else's spouse. And since the Bible confines sex to marriage, if you're single or dating, intentional gazes are unlawful for you too. Let's define sexual lust:

"Whenever we intentionally gaze at someone we're not married to in order to fantasize about unlawful sexual acts."

Besides the critical component of intent, sexual sins begin in the heart ("in his heart"). In fact, the sinful external act (adultery) stems sin inside us (intention gazing to imagine unlawful sexual acts). The urge to commit physical adultery doesn't come out of nowhere. It begins when we allow our hearts to desire what God forbids. Put another way, unlawful sexual acts are the fruit of a heart that desires the wrong things. So the battle for sexual purity begins in the heart.

Application

This is a unique challenge because of the fact that God designed men and woman to be attracted to one another. Scripture is not bashful and recognizes that men find women attractive (2 Sam 11:2). Of Esther, Scripture says, "The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at (Esth 2:7)." And if you're married, you probably were physically attracted to your spouse before marriage. So where do we draw the line?

Let's consider the example of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-5). David didn't sin when he looked out and noticed that an attractive woman was bathing. He sinned when he continued to look. He sinned when he intentionally looked and began to fantasize. He sinned when he acted on the sinful desires of his heart. So the best I can conclude is this: it is okay to notice that someone you're not married to is attractive, but it is wrong to continue looking and it is wrong to look with the intent to fantasize about committing sinful acts.

The battle begins with our thought life. You turn on the TV. A beautiful woman or attractive man comes on the screen. You're tempted to keep looking. You're tempted to fantasize. This is where the battle begins. If we don't fight it right now, who knows where our sinful thoughts will lead? It isn't a sin to be tempted. We sin when we act on the temptation. We sin when our gaze continues and our mind drifts to unlawful desires. This is the critical moment. We can reject the temptation from the start. Recall God's word. Resolve that indulging in sexual fantasies is sin. Confess your struggle to God on the spot. Ask for his help to fight these desires. Fear the consequences of where these sinful thoughts will lead.

Voluntary slavery to pornography doesn't happen in a moment. Pornographic enslavement begins when we don't guard our thought life. Pornographic indulgence is the fruit of a misguided heart. A heart that desires

the wrong things. If we are going to have victory in this area, our heart needs to be shaped with truth so that we desire the right things and don't give in when temptation calls.

But this isn't a danger for men only. It was Potiphar's wife that sought out Joseph and repeatedly said to him, "lie with me (Gen 39:6-12)." And the Proverbs portray the adulterous woman as one who stalks men as prey (Prov 2:16; 5:3-4; 6:23-25; 7:10-23). Women are not immune to unlawful sexual desires. Women can fantasize about forbidden relationships too.

On the flip side, it's sinful whenever someone dresses with the intent to entice lust. This is why the Bible commends modesty to women (1 Tim 2:9). If it's sin to lust after a woman who isn't your spouse, it's sin to dress in a way that promotes and encourages lust.

Point 2: Do whatever it takes to defeat lust (5:29-30)

Explanation

Jesus stresses the urgency of fighting sexual sin. Two actions are commanded, with the same reason given for both. First, if your eye causes you to sin, get rid of it. Second, if your hand causes you to sin, get rid of it. Why the eye and the hand? Perhaps because adultery starts visually and ends physically. So Jesus says get rid of both. Because "it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." This raises some interpretive questions.

First, should I really maim myself? Here Jesus is using metaphors to convey spiritual realities. Maiming ourselves illustrates the radical measures needed to fight lust. Jesus is saying, whatever it takes, get rid of anything that causes you to sin. Eliminate the things in your life that cause you to sin.

John Piper says this:

"The point is not that inward desires can be controlled by external maiming. The point is how enormous the stakes are. They are so great, we must do what we have to do to defeat the bondage of sinful desire."

Second, what about Jesus' implied warning that if you don't get rid of sexual sin, you will wind up in hell? Jesus' logic is that it's better to get rid of those things that cause sexual sin than to end up in hell.

Hell is the final destination of the unbelieving. It's described as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Sorrow, anguish, and fright go on forever and ever in hell. It's a place to be avoided at all costs. It's severe because sin is a serious offense. Sin is serious offense because of who it's against: the infinitely holy triune God who is perfectly righteous, untainted by sin, and wholly opposed to sin. Because sin is so serious, Jesus had to die for us. If a perfect substitute didn't suffer for our sins and take the penalty our sins deserved, there would be no way to escape the wrath to come that is hell. This is the good news: that guilty sinners can be forgiven because Jesus took our punishment.

If you're listening today and not a believer, maybe you're recognizing that God is holy and you've sinned against him. And you're recognizing that God is serious about sin. And you know you've sinned against God. And you're asking, how can I be forgiven? Respond to God by repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus. Trust Jesus by changing your mind about sin and refusing to take it casually, by trusting God's promises and relying on Jesus alone for forgiveness of your sins.

Jesus is giving a real warning to a real people so I think he means it. There are eternal consequences for how we deal with sexual sin. But isn't salvation by faith alone? Doesn't my salvation depend on what Jesus did, not what I do?

Here Jesus is assuming something about the nature of truth faith. Like when he previously said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (**Matt 5:7**)." Our faith profoundly affects our manner of life to the point where Jesus can say that the people who will receive God's mercy at the final judgment are people who

are merciful to others. In our case today, Jesus assumes the people who will receive mercy at the final judgment are people who live sexually pure lives. This is essentially what another beatitude says:

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

So Jesus assumes that a person's faith affects their manner of life. Always accompanying faith is what Scripture calls regeneration, or being born again. And regeneration results in altered conduct so that being sexually pure is a fruit of salvation rather than a grounds of salvation. We are not accepted by God because we live sexually pure, but we live with purity because Christ lives in us, because of our new attitude towards sin (repentance) and our trust in God's promises (faith). So sexual purity is a consequence of our salvation, not the cause of our salvation. An evidence of faith, not the grounds of our salvation. The only basis for our salvation from hell is Christ taking our punishment for us, not our works.

Application

But what if I'm struggling with pornography and the lust Jesus warns us about? Does that mean I'm currently going to hell? Does that mean I'm not a believer? What if I am presently trusting Jesus for salvation but I'm struggling with pornography?

If you are presently fighting sexual sin, you should have confidence that you belong to Jesus and are not under his judgment. Fighting sin is a fruit of salvation. Romans 8:13 speaks of how believers, through the Spirit, "put to death the deeds of the body." If you are fighting sin, that's proof the Spirit dwells in you. Today Jesus is calling us to do whatever it takes to root sin out of life. So if we are fighting sexual sin, we are doing what Jesus instructs us to do. And we should have confidence that God forgives all of our sins (past, present, and future), because Jesus took our punishment. We don't need to be flawless, but we should see evidence of spiritual life. We should see Godward direction, not perfection.

If you are giving into sexual sin without remorse, you have no desire to stop it, and you think God has no problem with it, you are in danger of being self-deceived. You are the person Jesus is warning. Your casual attitude toward sexual sin betrays a lack of faith and repentance. Assurance of salvation primarily comes when we are presently trusting in Christ and there is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our life. If you can't see any evidence of the Spirit's work in your life, you have reason to doubt you are right with God. If this is you, what should you do? Change your mind about sin and trust what God says about helping you to overcome sin. Confess your sins to God. Ask for forgiveness. And ask God to help you fight your sexual sin.

Don't doubt your salvation if you are doing what Jesus says. Are you presently trusting Christ? Are you fighting pornography with God's help? If you are, cling to Christ and don't doubt his desire to help you overcome this.

Entering into battle

The battle is hard because of cultural norms we encounter. We can't go anywhere without being bombarded by images. I watch AFV with my family and there's a sensual commercial about some dating reality show with women in revealing clothing committing unlawful acts. I look up a sports article on the internet and advertisements with beautiful women appear to the right of the screen. I watch a Patriots game with cheerleaders in little clothing. The culture screams at men: women are their body and you exist to lust over women. The culture screams at women: your identity is your appearance and you exist to make men lust. The battle is real. How should we fight?

First, include the church in your battle. Don't go it alone. Get help. You're thinking, what will people think if they find out? But you should be thinking, what will happen if I don't get help? Where will this lead? Lust and pornography are serious because they lead to other sins. Deception and lying to hide the sin because you're petrified of being caught. Distance from God because you're ashamed of your sin. Unfaithful stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us. And even adulterous and sexually immoral acts.

So confess your sin to a trusted and wise Christian friend **of the same gender**. Enlist their support to pray for you, hold you accountable, and encourage you in the pursuit of holiness. After getting their support, confess to your spouse if you're married. Or to the person you're dating. How should you confess to your spouse?

Jeremy Pierre

- 1) Have an undistracted meeting that allows your spouse plenty of time to ask questions (don't rush it)
- 2) Confess the exact nature of your sin and ask for forgiveness

“You should be prepared to tell your wife the duration and extent of your porn use, though not necessarily the sordid details of it...when the problem began, how frequently it has happened, the type of material he has viewed, and what other sins have accompanied it...The grimy details of specific websites, publications, actor/actress names, etc. are usually an unhelpful burden to a reeling wife.”

- 3) Describe your present conviction that led you to confess
- 4) Express your dedication to fight this and your plan for change
- 5) Confess your sin to God in front of your wife
- 6) Be prepared for your wife to struggle immensely with this news

She's thinking:

“You don't love me.”

“I wasn't pretty enough to keep you satisfied.”

“I've lost all respect for you.”

If you're a wife in this situation, share your pain with a trusted Christian friend **of the same gender** and get support in your time of need.

Second, trust in God's promises and the power of his grace. You are not beyond God's grace. Jesus' instruction assumes we can defeat sexual lust. Frame your struggle in the gospel story. The good news is freedom from the penalty and power of sin through Christ. You feel like a slave, but God provides rescue. There are spiritual resources available to you. Victory and freedom in this area come like it does with all other sin: through faith and repentance.

Third, guard your influences. What desires is your entertainment feeding? Is sensual humor clouding your view of sexual purity? Are you watching shows or movies with immodestly dressed women that feed pornographic lust?

- pluggedin.com
- Common Sense Media
- IMDB parents guide
- Amazon Prime = can't watch anything after reviews (not talking about just nudity)

Conclusion

Do whatever it takes to protect your heart from lust. Lasting change won't happen by a sermon alone. Lasting change won't happen by a prayer alone. No, sexual purity requires vigilance.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Sexual purity is a discipline that requires intentional and persistent effort. It requires being transformed by the gospel. Pornography feels like addiction. It's really voluntary slavery. Use your shame, guilt, and hopelessness. Let them drive you to Jesus and his community, the church. Get the help you need.