

Overcoming Sin (Part 3)

The Lust of the Flesh

I John 2:15-17

I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. In our first two lessons we looked at **The Nature of Sin** and the importance of **Overcoming Sin**.
2. **3** Temptation comes through three avenues: **I Jn. 2:15-17**: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”
 - A. “the lust of the flesh” (v. 16),
 - B. “the lust of the eyes” (v. 16),
 - C. “the pride of life” (v. 16).
3. **4** To overcome sin it is essential that we learn how to handle these three avenues of temptation.
4. There are five different Greek words translated as “lust,” “crave,” or “desire” in the New Testament (*epithumia, hedone, epipotheo, orexis, and pathos*). Originally these terms were neutral and applicable to any strong desire or craving. But in time they came to be used in an almost entirely bad sense. Thus the word “lust” in the NT is primarily a desire for things contrary to the will of God.
5. In regards to the “the lust of the flesh” the word “flesh” does not refer to our physical body, but more properly to the source of evil appetites residing in man’s heart (**Rom. 7:25**: “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”). The “lust of the flesh” is a desire for the sinful things enjoyed by our flesh.
6. Overcoming “the lust of the flesh” is particularly difficult because these desires or cravings come from within us, they are part of us (**Mk. 7:21-23**).

“The essence of the flesh is this. No army can invade a country from the sea unless it can obtain a bridgehead. Temptation would be powerless to affect men, unless there was something already in man to respond to temptation. Sin could gain no foothold in a man’s mind and heart and soul and life unless there was an enemy within the gates who was willing to open the door to sin. The flesh is exactly the bridgehead through which sin invades the human personality. The flesh is like the enemy within the gates who opens the way to the enemy who is pressing in through the gates” (William Barclay, pp. 21-22).
7. Overcoming sin means overcoming the enemy within us, because we are undoubtedly engaged in a warfare, a spiritual warfare (I Pet. 2:11: “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,”). The “battle-space” is our soul, which must be defended at all costs (Matt. 16:26).
8. Fleshly lusts tempt us to sin and sin then destroys our soul: **Jas. 1:12-15**
9. ******There is a place in our mind, our heart that lusts or desires to sin; “the lusts of the flesh” have an alluring power that Satan uses against us. So the battle is on to give in to the temptation and satisfy our lust or resist the temptation and deny the fulfillment of our lust (2 Pet. 2:18: “...they allure through the lusts of the flesh...”; lure like catching a fish!).

II. Discussion:

I. **5** Specific Lusts of the Flesh:

- A. **** Drunkenness and Revelries**: **Rom. 13:13**: “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”; **I Pet. 4:2-4**: “...drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties...”

(I) Alcohol is the “drug of choice” for the majority in this world.

- (2) Alcohol consumption affects one's motor skills and judgment (David and Uriah; 2 Sam. 11).
- (3) I had a lot of "experience" with alcohol when I was younger and I can unequivocally state that alcohol consumption leads to nothing good. It leads to bad decisions, foolish and destructive behavior, shame, possibly even illegal activity, injury and death (1 Thess. 5:22; need stats?).
- (4) Many turn to alcohol to escape reality, but in the end alcohol produces a worse reality.

B. 6 Fornication: 1 Thess. 4:3-5

- (1) We live in a sex-crazed society where fornication isn't even given a moments worth of care. People believe they can hop in and out of bed as casually as one would change their socks and there are no consequences. Recall the "sexual revolution" of the 1960's? There are consequences! Gal. 5:19-21; Matt. 19:9
- (2) All of us need to respect God's law concerning sexual activity (**Heb. 13:4**: "*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*") Don't be deceived there are serious consequences (**Prov. 6:20-29, 32-33**).
- (3) Satan uses many avenues to try to lure us into pursuing the "*passion of lust [of fornication], like the Gentiles who do not know God*" (e.g., advertising—sex sells; TV, movies, etc. all depict fornication as exciting, fun, satisfying, etc.).
 - (a) **7 Dancing**: by its nature, supplies an effective avenue whereby people are tempted to pursue sexual sins.
 - (i) The Bible speaks of "*lewdness*" and "*lust*" (Rom. 13:13; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:18).
 - (ii) "*lewdness*" is translated from the Greek word *aselgeia* (sometimes translated as *lasciviousness*) which means "wanton acts or manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females" (Thayer, pp. 79-80). This is a perfect description of modern popular dancing.
 - (iii) Dancing puts males and females in close proximity with provocative music and lewd bodily movements. Some Christians try to deny this, but worldly people recognize dancing for what it is: "The whole range of modern dances are designed to express love making" (Sach; *World History of the Dance*).
 - (iv) Some modern dancing simulates the same movements made in sexual intercourse.
 - (v) Why do high school proms have chaperones? Why do young people reserve hotel rooms on prom night? The answer is obvious to one who has a lick of common sense! Don't sell your soul so cheaply!

******"Dances are held for one main reason: sex appeal. Whether slow cheek-to-cheek, hip-to-hip swaying to sensuous music or bumping and grinding to pulsating beats, sex appeal (lasciviousness) is what dancing is all about. Dancing is a way to legitimize the sensual fondling of another. It is nothing but foreplay." --J. R. Bronger, *Are You Going To The Prom?*
 - (b) **8 Pornography**: is a plague on our society that supplies an avenue for individuals to pursue sexual sins.
 - (i) The entire purpose of pornography is to excite one's lust which violates Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 5:28**: "*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (e.g., 2 Sam. 11:2-4)
 - (ii) Pornography is addictive: "Porn is more addictive than 'crack' cocaine. That's what experts said when they testified before the U.S. Senate's Commerce Committee (wirednews.com). One expert testified that 'Pornography addicts have a more difficult time recovering from their addiction than cocaine addicts, since coke users can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever.' Further

testimony revealed that the sexual arousal caused by porn is much more powerful than addictive drugs since it causes the release of ‘naturally occurring opioids’ and in essence ‘does what heroin can’t do.’ Further expert testimony said porn addiction can lead to ‘compulsive and destructive behaviors centered on pornography’ more powerful than those caused by addictions to gambling or shopping. It’s no wonder one senator called the hearing ‘the most disturbing one I’ve ever seen in the Senate.’ Porn is not harmless!
Job 31:1: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?”

- (iii) Pornography destroys marriages: Viewing porn does not satisfy the exemption granted by Jesus in Matthew 19:9 (fornication is a physical act committed with our body, 1 Cor. 6:15-18); **but** spouses who view pornography make their mate feel as if they had been betrayed (“Why am I not enough for my husband/wife?”) People who view pornography end up with a distorted view of normal sexual relationships.
- (iv) Pornography is easily accessed! Google the word “porn,” 430,000,000 hits; “xxx,” 330,000,000 hits; it’s just a mouse click away. Do you know what your children are viewing on the internet?
- (c) **9 Immodest Dress:** Exposure of some parts of the body due to lack of clothing (“*not enough clothes on to wad a shotgun shell*”), tight fitting clothing, or flimsy (see through) clothing; all are designed to excite the “*lust of the flesh*” and invite sexual sins.
 - (i) The Bible recognizes the “*attire of a harlot*” entices men (Prov. 7:10).
 - (ii) Much clothing today, especially for females, is designed to attract and invite sexual attention.
 - (iii) Those wearing such clothing, whether purposely or innocently, are placing a stumbling block before others (**Matt. 18:6-7:** “*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*”).
- (d) **10 Mixed Swimming:** can excite the lust of the flesh in regards to sexual sins in two ways.
 - (i) First, the “clothing” is nearly always immodest (even one-piece bathing suit).
 - (ii) Second, swimming provides opportunities for bodily contact between males and females that can further excite the lust of the flesh.
 - (iii) Any young person who claims they never had to struggle with sexual impulses when at the pool, beach, or water park is either lying or needs their eyes checked (Matt. 18:6-7).
- (e) **11 Homosexuality:**
 - (i) Our society vehemently maintains that homosexuality is “genetic.” The “gay community (LGBT)” and their supporters would have the world believe homosexual behavior, is like blue eyes and blond hair; you get it from your mommy and daddy. In other words, homosexuals can’t help themselves, it’s just the way they were born (or the way God made them). BTW: such a “defense” actually condemns as it seeks to rationalize!
 - (ii) However, scientific research has been unable to confirm a genetic component to homosexual behavior. After reviewing much of this research, one scientist made this important observation: “The fact that sexual orientation is not constant for many individuals, but can change over time suggests that at least part of sexual orientation is actually sexual preference.” In other words, if you can chose you can change!
 - (iii) Undoubtedly the majority in our society will continue to rationalize homosexuality as “normal,” and vilify and ostracize those who condemn it for what it is: sin.

- (iv) As our society continues to remove restraints from sexual sins, individuals will continue to plunge themselves into a cesspool of perverse and unnatural activities in an effort to pursue pleasure (California and New Jersey actually have a law banning psychological therapy given to minors, even if they consent, if the goal of that therapy is to persuade them to abandon homosexual behavior.).
- (v) Contrary to society's new norms condoning, yea celebrating, homosexuality; the Bible clearly states that homosexuality is the result of an unrestrained pursuit of vile passions and burning lusts:

Rom. 1:26-27: *For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;*

2. **12 Overcoming the Lusts of the Flesh:** as we studied in our last lesson, through the grace and power of God we can overcome sin and temptation (Eph. 1:15-22; 3:20; 1 Cor. 10:13). But we must work alongside God because His grace teaches us that we must deny worldly lusts through the practice of self-denial and self-control (Titus 2:11-12; Matt. 16:24). Now, let's look at some specific, concrete things we can do to overcome the lust of the flesh through the practice of self-denial and self-control.

A. **** Have a "can do" attitude: Phil. 4:13:** *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

- (1) God does not ask us to do what we cannot do!
- (2) We must rid ourselves of the defeatist's attitude; by believing we cannot win the battle we defeat ourselves!
- (3) Whatever lust we struggle with, we must develop the determination to overcome it. We must see it as something we can accomplish, because we can! Eph. 3:20

B. **13 Pray**

2 Pet. 2:9: *"...the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations..."*

1 Cor. 10:13: *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

1 Pet. 3:12: *"For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers."*

- (1) Do you believe what those passages tell us?
- (2) If so, then spend time in prayer asking for God's help and guidance! **Matt. 6:13:** *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one..."* Don't ever give up! Lk. 18:1-8
- (3) Don't put your life on "cruise control," be proactive! **Matt. 26:41:** *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

C. **14 Walk in the spirit:**

Gal. 5:16-18: *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

- (1) To "walk in the Spirit," is to be willing to live according to the direction (i.e., teaching) of the Holy Spirit as revealed in God's word (Matt. 5:6).
- (2) If we make a purposeful effort to live according to the teachings of the Holy Spirit we will not act upon our sinful desires.

- (3) **BUT**, this requires a conscious choice on our part. We can take one of two paths (**Rom. 8:1, 5-9**: i.e., walking “according to the flesh” or “according to the Spirit”). One excludes the other:
- (i) The carnal mind (flesh) is not subject to the law of God (i.e., refuses to subject itself to God’s laws).
 - (ii) But, the mind that walks in the Spirit willingly, happily, and faithfully subjects itself to God’s laws and is determined to obey the will of God, not the desires of the flesh; who truly knows God? I Jn. 2:3-5

D. **15 Control our thoughts:**

Rom. 8:5: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”

- (1) Our minds are not our own personal playground. We are to set our mind upon things of the Spirit (conscious choice!), not fulfilling the desires of the mind (**Eph. 2:3**: [sons of disobedience], “among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”)
- (2) Controlling our thoughts (Prov. 23:7) requires a heap of self-discipline (2 Cor. 10:3-5).
- (3) Achieving victory over the mind requires the development of a new “mind set” (**Col. 3:1-2**: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”).
- (4) We cannot constantly go “window shopping” for sin without giving in to our lust.

E. **16 Arm ourselves with Scripture:**

- (1) The Lord has given us the most powerful weapon in the universe we need to defeat worldly lusts which war against our soul: “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17).
- (2) It must be a good defense, because Jesus Himself used it! Matt. 4:4: “It is written”; 7: “It is written again”; 10: “For it is written”
- (3) Here’s how we do it: **Psa. 119:9-11**: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.”
- (4) Only by diligently putting God’s word into our heart will we be prepared to use it to resist temptation. That requires frequent, diligent and thoughtful Bible study (memorization).

F. **17 Consider ourselves dead to sin:**

Gal. 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

- (1) Paul put his “self-will” to death every day in his pursuit of pleasing God.
- (2) We must imitate Paul (**Gal. 5:24**: “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”)
- (3) Crucifixion is an execution; there can be no peaceful co-existence between these warring parties (flesh v. spirit). The enemy is within the gates and must be consciously put to death each day. This requires spiritual stamina and focus.

G. **18 Consider ourselves slaves to God:**

Rom. 6:16-18: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

- (1) When we became a Christian we were set free from the slavery of sin to become a slave of God, a slave of righteousness.
- (2) Slaves have no choice but to serve their master. As Christians we must realize we have no choice but to abstain from worldly lusts. By indulging in the flesh we are disobedient to our Master!

H. **19 Do not put ourselves in harm's way:**

I Peter 2:11: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,”*

- (1) Instead of getting as close to sin as possible, we need to get as far away from it as possible!
Rom. 13:14: *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”*
- (2) It should be evident that the worse thing we can do is to intentionally expose ourselves to temptation (**Prov. 6:27-28:** *“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? 28 Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?”*).
- (3) We must end the battle before it begins; if we have a problem with sin, we must stay away from the people, places, and things that tempt us to fulfill the desires of the flesh.
- (4) As soon as we find ourselves in harm's way, we must look for and take the way of escape rather than linger in the “danger zone”! 1 Cor. 6:18: *“Flee sexual immorality...”*; 2 Tim. 2:22: *“Flee also youthful lusts...”*; Gen. 39:11-12 *Can't stand in the middle of the street and not get hit!*

I. **20 Make ourselves accountable:**

- (1) It is important for us to have brethren with which we can confide and who will hold us accountable.
- (2) It can serve as a strong deterrent against sin and motivate us to practice self-control.
James 5:16: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*
- (3) We all need to pray for and serve in this capacity for our fellow brethren. However, it certainly couldn't hurt to cultivate a close personal relationship with a brother/sister to help in this regard.

J. **21 Consider our example:**

Matt. 5:13-16: *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

- (1) A Christian's influence is a very powerful thing! But it is also a very fragile thing (Dave Allen).
- (2) What would brethren, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. think of us if they knew we did not exercise self-denial and pursued the lusts of the flesh? Hypocrites!
- (3) We must jealously guard our example! **Matt. 18:6-7:** *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”*

K. **22 Learn to tell ourselves “no”:**

- (1) The very first step in following Jesus is learning to deny ourselves—to tell ourselves “no.”
Matt. 16:24: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”
- (2) Ultimately we are the only person who can do this; no one, not even God, can keep us from fulfilling the lust of the flesh.
- (3) People can help us and encourage us; but the battle with lust is a personal battle we must fight on our own; ultimately we have to be the ones to tell ourselves “No!”

III. **Conclusion: 23**

1. Make no mistake, we are in a war as fleshly lusts war against our souls (**I Pet. 2:11:** “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,”). They entice the enemy within us...the flesh.
2. Overcoming sin is an internal (mind, heart) battle and a life-long battle.
3. However, it is a battle God expects us to win and He supplies us with the weapons to win.
4. We need to stop waving the white flag of surrender to sin and take the battle for our soul seriously (Matt. 16:26).

Adapted from *Overcoming Sin*, by Heath Rogers, 2013, One Stone Press, Bowling Green, KY (pp. 23-29).

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