

The Trial of Lust

October 5, 2014

The Internet is changing relationships. Statistics tell us half of us know a couple whose relationship started online. One in four know someone whose offline relationship ended because they met someone new online.¹ The Internet is a game-changer when it comes to dating, sex and romance. What makes the Internet so powerful? It is the Internet's ability to cater to our lusts.

The temptation to lust is everywhere. It is the woman on the billboard when you drive down the road. It is the life-size airbrushed woman holding a diet coke on the poster at Subway staring you down while you eat lunch. The opportunity to lust presents itself at work where people look their absolute best. Sex appeal means better business. An opportunity to lust presents itself at the YMCA. Can anyone say spandex? Of course there is the beach, the boat and bikinis. Seduction is calling out to us in the advertisements on our computer screens. Soft-core lust and hard-core lust, called Internet porn, are only a mouse click away. The temptation to lust is everywhere.

More money is spent in America on Internet porn than what we spend on pro baseball, basketball and football combined. Americans spend more money on Internet porn than the combined revenues of ABC, NBC and CBS.² I would say lust is a big problem. This morning we need to talk about it.

¹ <http://mashable.com/2013/02/14/love-lust-digital-age/>

² <http://www.solomononsex.com>

Lust is primarily, but not exclusively, a male problem. God wired men to respond visually. That makes life in the modern world especially difficult for men. Lustful images can thrust themselves in front of eyes in a split second from anywhere in the world on our phones, tablets or computers. This morning's message is geared toward men, but women, listen up. Many of you are also visual and you struggle with lust. If you are a woman who doesn't struggle with lust, listen close because the man you married or will marry finds lust one of the biggest struggles in his life.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. On both campuses we are in a series of studies on the book of 1 Peter called *Hope in Hard Times*. Today we come to 1 Peter 2:11-12. I ask you to take your Bibles, cell phones or tablets and turn to that passage. If you need a pew Bible, these verses are found on page 1,015.

While you are turning, you need to know these verses begin a turning point in the book. In earlier verses we learned how our identity in Christ carries us through trials and suffering. Last week we ended by learning that our identity as Christians is to literally inherit all the Old Testament promises to ancient Israel. God's plan is to make us the most blessed beings in the entire universe through Jesus.

This morning we begin a new section of this book where we learn ways that who we are because of Jesus changes the way we live for Jesus. In the weeks that follow we will talk about the ways our faith in Christ changes how we

relate to the government, how it changes our marriages and how it changes the way we work. Today we begin this exciting and intensely practical portion of 1 Peter by learning how Jesus changes the way we live in a sexually saturated society. Let's read this morning's passage before we begin.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:11–12 (ESV)

Our verses divide into two pieces. The first part tells us we are to avoid the passions of the flesh. The second part tells us what we should be doing with our lives instead of occupying ourselves with the passions of our flesh.

Avoid the passions of the flesh.

...abstain from the passions of the flesh... 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)

What are the passions of the flesh?

Lust and its unbridled expression known as pornography are considered by some men to be a sign of manliness, a right of passage to manhood. I want to propose the exact opposite. Men who give themselves to lust are not displaying masculinity, rather they are showing their lack of masculinity.

Puritan writer John Milton wrote the book Paradise Lost. In this fictional work, the biblical Adam was shown the great mass of men that would be seduced in the future by women. In classic Adam fashion, Adam instantly blamed Eve for the problem. It was Eve's fault for having such beautiful posterity. In the book, the angel showing Adam this vision disagreed with him. The angel explained to Adam that the men's seduction by women was their own faults. The angel said they were seduced because of their *effeminate slackness*. A man who is seduced

to lust after a woman is displaying femininity and weakness —- *effeminate slackness*.

The heart of masculinity is self-sacrifice, headship and leadership. A man possesses authority to lead himself and discipline his body. His leadership should rise to the point where he is not just capable of leading himself but he is also capable of sacrificing himself to lead and care for a wife and provide for his children. Men are designed by God for self-discipline and sacrifice so they can lead and protect those entrusted into their care, a wife and children.

The word seduction comes from the Latin word *seduco* which means, *I lead*. When a man allows himself to lust after a woman, either an actual woman in front of him or a virtual woman in a magazine or computer screen, he is abdicating his manliness. He is letting a woman lead him away from his wife and family rather than disciplining himself to exclusively love his wife and family. He is not displaying the self-discipline and leadership of a true man.

If a man is not married and he lusts after a woman this doesn't get him off the hook. By lusting after women he is not practicing the discipline necessary to be a married man. He is sowing seeds of lust that dishonor his manliness, dishonor his future wife and can lead to the destruction of his future marriage. When a man lusts after a woman, he is failing in his masculinity as he allows another woman to lead him into sin. If you struggle with lust, it doesn't come from too much testosterone, it comes from your effeminate slackness, your unwillingness to be a true man.

Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.
Proverbs 31:3 (ESV)

In this passage, King Lemuel's mother warned her son that even though he was a king and could have countless women in his life, giving himself in lust and love to many women would not build his manliness. It would destroy it. He would find his kingly leadership and masculinity destroyed by a mind saturated with lustful images of different women. Ancient kings that had their masculinity destroyed by polygamy are the ancient equivalent of modern men who have their masculinity destroyed by pornography. Lust always leads to a man's ruin.

In marriage, sexual expression by a husband to his wife is the opposite. It enhances a man's masculinity as he learns to love, sacrifice and lead his wife. Lusting after other women besides a wife destroys your masculinity, making your sexuality primarily about self-gratification. In marriage sex is about self-sacrifice and blessing your spouse.

The phrase Peter uses, *passions of the flesh*, has a long and rich history that stretches all the way back to Plato. In those days philosophers began writing about the destructive power of men given over to lust. Peter picked up this phrase as he wrote to the Christians in Asia about the trial of living in a sexually-saturated society similar to our own and he said, "We agree! Lust destroys!"

Let me give you a little sense of sexuality in the ancient world. Almost all Roman emperors were bisexual. Nero was known as every man's woman and every woman's man. If you wanted to advance your political career, you adopted the sexual practices of the emperor. The Spartan army even had an elite legion

called “The Lovers,” where the men join in pairs, homosexual pairs. The theatre of the day was similar to our movies but you were actually watching people in bed. It was a sexually-saturated world.

Peter gave us two reasons to steer clear of lust. Since this is such an important topic, I will give us additional reasons to help us understand the grave danger of lust with crystal clarity.

How can I avoid the passions of the flesh?

Remember the passions of my flesh wage war against my soul.

...abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)

He doesn't say the passions of our flesh, our lusts, wage war against our bodies and the danger to avoid is a venereal disease. The real danger is our souls. The literal picture is our passions are soldiers attacking the city of our souls, seeking to destroy us from the inside out. Every time we take a second look, every time we use our imaginations to fantasize about someone of the opposite sex, every time we think we are enjoying ourselves in the safe confines of our minds, the truth is we are destroying ourselves from the inside out.

In Proverbs 5, a father is teaching his son. He begged his son to be very careful about forbidden women. This father warned against lust that leads to a literal adulterous relationship. If the Internet was around, I am confident he would have warned against it since so many adulteries start online. Our fantasizes are only one step removed from our realities. Listen to his words.

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol... Proverbs 5:3–5 (ESV)

A man lusting after a woman he can't have, or shouldn't have, looks great on the front side but it leads to death on the back side. If a woman is drop-dead gorgeous and is in the February edition of Sports Illustrated but she isn't his wife, lusting after her will only lead to bitter pain and disaster. Lusting after her is using a shovel to dig your own grave.

And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house...
Proverbs 5:7–8 (ESV)

This father warned his son to not to even entertain thoughts about a woman he shouldn't have. Don't even let yourself think about the lady. The way lusting after a woman works is lust plants an image of a woman in a man's mind. It is a seed. Even if you successfully avoid sinful actions in the moment, when you least expect it, because the lustful image rooted itself in your psyche, that mental picture returns in living color when you are tired and weak. It is very difficult to steer away from sin the second time around.

...lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner... Proverbs 5:10 (ESV)

Very practical. If you give yourself to lusting after a forbidden woman, you will waste your money on lust, not just your time. Like we discussed earlier, Americans spend more money today on Internet porn than the revenue of pro baseball, basketball and football combined.

I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. Proverbs 5:14 (ESV)

What a great summary of the end game in lust. It leaves you on the very edge of ruin. How many marriages are ruined from the seeds of lust that began

by a hand engaging in a little harmless lust? How many families are torn apart and how many children grow up in a split home all because a man chose to engage in harmless lust that he thought nobody else would know about? How many men found their net worth decimated through court costs and divorce settlements? It all began with what they thought was innocent lust.

On the flip side, because many young men give themselves to lust they never mature to be a self-disciplined, self-denying good husband and father. They never learn to do more than serve themselves and be a slave to their hormones. Look at King Solomon.

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. 1 Kings 11:4 (ESV)

The reason we avoid the passions of the flesh, the reason we don't lust is because our very souls are on the line. Don't think you can lust and not pay the consequences. Solomon, the smartest man in the world, was outsmarted by his own lusts. Samson, the strongest man in the world, was destroyed by his lust. If Solomon and Samson were destroyed by tinkering with a little harmless lust, what makes you think you are any different?

Remember lust is deceptive and temporary.

...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires (passions)... Ephesians 4:22 (ESV)

The word *desires* is the same word used in 1 Peter 2:11 translated as *passions*. Lust is a deceitful desire. Lust promises satisfaction but in the end it leaves men bitter, angry and disgusted with themselves. The classic example is Amnon in the Old Testament. Many of you remember he fell in love with a very

beautiful girl named Tamar. Unfortunately, she was a relative. He didn't discipline himself to get her out of his head. He kept lusting and feeding the passions of his flesh. Lust took deep roots in his heart, and like a drowning swimmer grasping for air, to satisfy his lust he raped Tamar. Look what happened.

But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up! Go!" 2 Samuel 13:14–15 (ESV)

Lust is deceptive and temporary. Men who give themselves to lust will do wicked and foolish things in an attempt to satisfy those lusts. When I lived in Michigan a young man in our town proposed to a girl. He told her would just die if he couldn't marry her. She wasn't ready for marriage so she turned him down. He told her that if he couldn't have her he would just die. He ran in front of a car and killed himself. As he lay in the road dying all he kept saying was, "How could I be so stupid?" He was right. That was a royally stupid move. Give yourself to lust and you will act like a fool. You will hate yourself for doing it. Lust isn't harmless. It is effeminate slackness, a lack of manliness.

Remember God promises to judge sexual immorality

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous... Hebrews 13:4–5 (ESV)

The marriage bed is where our sexual desires should be satisfied. Satisfying our sexual desires through lust dishonors God. God tells us to save our sexual desires for our wedding night. Fornicating before the wedding night and if you are married, not confining your sexuality to your marriage invites God's

judgment upon your life. While this is certainly talking about extramarital and premarital sex, it is also talking about extramarital and premarital lust. The Greek word for sexual immorality in this verse is the word *pornea*, from which we get our English word pornography. Look at what Jesus says is the standard for Christian sexuality.

“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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

God’s standard for Christian men is absolute purity. That includes our eyes, our thoughts and our dreams. This is a very high standard that apart from the Holy Spirit’s work is not possible. Why does God say this? God is not a prude. Remember our fleshly passions are like soldiers seeking to destroy us. God’s high standard of purity is for the sake of our souls, the success of our marriages and the blessing of our lives. An entire life can be destroyed from what we call harmless lust.

Remember God sees the same things I see.

For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. Proverbs 5:21–23 (ESV)

These verses come from Proverbs 5, which is the passage where a father warns his son about staying away from seductive women. He tells his son that when he lusts after a woman, God knows exactly what his eyes are looking at. That is a scary thought. There is no hiding our inner thoughts from God.

A man's lusts are described as literal a trap that ensnare him like he is a raccoon that catches his paw in a trap. Once a man starts to give way to his lusts they are very difficult to escape. He may ultimately die because of them.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1 (ESV)

Job, who was one of the most righteous people to ever walk the planet, made a covenant with his eyes that he wouldn't dress down a young woman. He wouldn't lust after a woman. He was richly blessed because of it. God sees everything and knows everything we are thinking.

Robert Murray McCheyenne was a famous minister that lived a few hundred years ago. I memorized one of his quotes when I was young. It is a great reminder to strive for absolute purity and what happens when we don't.

According to a man's holiness, so shall be his success.

Don't expect God to use your life in a mighty way if you are caught in the trap of lust in your heart. God can't raise you up on the outside because you can't handle the weight on the inside.

Remember lessons from the Bible so you don't have to repeat them.

The Bible is full of examples of men whose lust got the better of them. We already mentioned Solomon and Samson and there are many more.

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 1 Corinthians 10:8 (ESV)

In this example, the men of Israel began going after Moabite women. Moabite women were an easy catch. Catching a Moabite woman was like catching sunfish off a dock in the summer, you don't even need to put a worm on

the hook they are so eager to bite. Moabite women were accustomed to promiscuity and seduction so they were an easy trap for Israelite men. God judged Israel with a plague that killed 23,000 in a day because they gave in to their lusts and practiced effeminate slackness. We think Ebola is bad. Learn from the examples of Bible history. God disciplines his people for lust and sometimes quite severely. If you are a guy that finds yourself not taking lust seriously, think again. Today is the day to repent and change and take lust seriously.

Remember the grace of Christ.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... Titus 2:11–12 (ESV)

Growing in our understanding of how much Jesus loves us and forgives us is something that literally changes our hearts. Going to church helps men beat lust. Reading the Bible and reflecting on what Christ has done for us will help men beat the sin of lust.

This is very important. The grace and forgiveness of God is what turns us away from all forms of sin. Skip church and struggle with sin.

Remember physical discipline helps build spiritual strength.

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

Paul spent a lot of time building his physical discipline to help himself stay spiritually disciplined. There is a connection between the two. I think everybody knows I am married. Our three kids were not adopted. We made them at home the old-fashioned way. Unfortunately, Cindy has not been around this summer

and a portion of this fall. She is gone so much that this week a lady at the YMCA asked me if we were separated. Of course the answer was, “No!”

Most of you know she spent the summer and part of the fall at my parents’ taking care of my mother who is dying of cancer. I fly out tomorrow to be with my amazing mother in her final days.

All that to say a summer and fall without a wife is no fun. One of the things I learned years ago from high school and college sports is the connection between high levels of physical discipline and spiritual discipline. Part of keeping myself spiritually healthy for when I am emotionally weak is I exercise. There were times this summer when I went to the YMCA for three-hour workouts. Other times I went to the YMCA three times a day. It burns stress. It helps me organize my thoughts. It helps keep me spiritually-disciplined. It is all biblical.

Get married.

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. Proverbs 5:18–19 (ESV)

This is that same passage in Proverbs where a father is giving sexual advice to his son. In the previous verses he told his son to avoid lusting after a seductive woman that he can’t have. Don’t even let yourself think about her. What is this young man to do with his sexual desires? Get married and express them! God gave men and women a strong sex drive for a reason. It is to drive men and women toward marriage where they can express their sexuality. God is honored when a man passionately and selflessly makes love to his wife. God wants a man to literally be intoxicated by his wife’s love. God is very pro sex. It

was his idea. He just wants all the energy to be focused with laser-like precision upon a wife or a husband, not diffused in a hundred different directions through lust. That will kill you.

But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 1 Corinthians 7:9 (ESV)

Paul said that if a young man is struggling with lust, don't fornicate. Get about the business of finding a Godly woman who loves Jesus even more than she loves you and get married. I tell my boys I am not opposed to them getting married in college if they meet the right woman. Their earthly father and their heavenly father do not want them fornicating before marriage. Their heavenly father and earthly father want them passionately making love to a wife in marriage. A good marriage is a great guard against lust. You won't be shaking your neighbor's peach tree if your wife is serving peach pie every night after dinner. A great marriage does not automatically solve all sexual temptations but it is a huge help.

Run!!

Every time the Bible describes a serious struggle with lust, the answer is run. Don't sit and negotiate with sexual sin. Don't even stay in the same room when tempted to lust. You literally need to run.

In Genesis 19, when Potiphar's wife was trying to seduce Joseph *he ran*. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22 to *flee youthful passions*. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul told the Corinthians to *flee sexual immorality*.

When you are struggling with lust on television don't keep sitting on the couch with the remote in your hand negotiating with your passions. Don't keep

sitting in front of your computer screen. Turn them off and literally run from the room before you talk yourself back into sin.

As Christians, we are to be known for abstaining from the passions of the flesh, effeminate slackness. To successfully win the battle with lust, we don't just need to avoid lust, we need to replace it with something. We are to replace it with good works.

Pursue a life of good deeds.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

Christians who take a hard stance against lust will be called weird for not watching R-rated movies. They will be called sexual prudes. They will become the targets of demonic temptation and taunting by their peers. It is hard enough dealing with the lustful desires on the inside of our heart. It is a real struggle to face persecution from outside our lives. How do we counteract this? Peter's answer is that we are to be a people devoted to good works. We are not to be a people devoted to sitting at home feeding our lusts through media but we are to be known for getting out of the house, getting off the phone and serving others like Christ served us. Everywhere you cut the Bible it bleeds this theme. ISIS is known for its bad works. As Christians we are to be known for our good works.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

God has good works prepared for us to do. If you are sitting home lusting, you are failing to do a good work God has already planned for you to do some place else.

...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

We are to be zealous for good works. Don't whine about having people over for dinner. Don't say you are too busy. Don't think of a good work as inconveniences in your schedule. Be zealous to love and serve people. If you are busy serving people, you won't have nearly as much time to serve your lustful thoughts and desires.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

Our good works are not to be confined to the church but we are to do them in the church first, then the community. Whenever we have the opportunity, we are to do good for others. Here are a few suggestions:

- Find somebody you don't know at church and ask them out for lunch or over for dinner. The best church is the church where people actually play together outside of church. Take one or two nights a month and invite someone from the church over your house for dinner. Stop just being a Sunday-only Christian. God is calling some of you to repent.
- Volunteer to be a woman that makes a meal. Many women bring meals to those in crisis. It is a great ministry. It made a huge difference with my kids this summer. Don't just serve yourself. Serve others. Be zealous about this.
- Volunteer to help in the community by coaching a sport at the YMCA.

- Visit a nursing home. Set a date in your schedule once or twice a month and read the Bible to people in the lobby.
- Offer to help in the student ministry or AWANA on Wednesday night.
- If you are in college, organize a Bible study or time of prayer in your dorm.

Write a note of encouragement to a teacher or coach thanking them for investing in you. I know you will tell me that you are already too busy. Replace some of the time you use for lusting with serving.

Conclusion

As Christian men at CrossWinds we are to have a reputation. We are to be known for abstaining from the passions of our flesh. We are not men given to pornography and lust. We steer clear of the effeminate slackness that rules the men of the world, destroys true masculinity and wages war against the soul. We have strong passions but we are to be known as one-woman men that focus our passions with laser-like precision on our wives in marriage. We don't pander to serving our lusts but we are known for serving others both inside and outside the church community. That is what we are to be known for. If you will join me, will you stand as I close in prayer?



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