



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



Look Who is Wearing
the Scarlet Letter!

Tim Badal | December 15, 2013 | Matthew 5:27-30

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 12

We're going to continue our series on the Sermon on the Mount. We have been looking at the "Upside-down Kingdom" that Jesus is articulating and inaugurating in the lives of His people. For the first eight weeks of our series, we focused on upside-down attitudes as we looked at the Beatitudes and what it means to live the blessed life. More recently we've been looking at the actions to which Christ is calling us.

As we've looked at these actions, we have learned that following Jesus is not easy. Many preachers out there say that following Jesus is easy. It is easy in the sense that you and I don't have to merit anything to receive salvation; we receive it by God's grace. But following Jesus is not easy at all. The life of sanctification is downright hard at times. It's filled with failures and times when victory seems to be out of our grasp. But—praise God—He has given us the victory in Christ Jesus to be able to find victory.

In His sermon, Jesus has been teaching us repeatedly what it means to live obedient lives and it's only going to get harder. Right when we think we've achieved a level of holiness that others tell us is good enough, Jesus says, "It's not good enough. Let Me expand what it means to obediently follow Me."

So Jesus is not calling us to something that is easy but here's the thing: when we are filled by the Spirit of God and are walking in fellowship with Christ, Jesus gives us the strength needed. As difficult as obedience is He tells us that His burden is light and we who were heavy laden can run to Him. We can cast all of our cares on Him because He cares for us. It is in that place of delight that obedience becomes easier. It's not a duty or drudgery. It's a delight for the followers of Jesus Christ to hear His words and respond in obedience to Him.

Now this sermon—like so many others—will cause us to desire nothing more than to push Jesus' words away from us. A sermon like this may have us looking at someone else and saying, "Boy, this sermon is for my husband. He needs to hear this," or, "The guy in the pew down the row needs to hear this," or "My teenager needs to hear this." I want us to stop for a moment and remember that it was easy for the Pharisees to push their issues and struggles onto other people. Jesus wants to do some work in our lives. Many of us are too quick to push away the teachings of Jesus—to "wiggle out of being called on the carpet." We are so quick to live by the Pharisees' interpretation of the law and look down our pharisaical noses at

others. We need to see that Christ's words are for all of us.

Let's take a moment to meditate on what God's Word says and have a moment of quiet with Christ. I want Christ to teach each of us as if we are sitting there listening for the very first time to that Sermon on the Mount. We need to listen for ourselves, not immediately take these words and apply them to someone else's life even though it may be needed. Someone else may need this but you and I need it as well. So let's look at our text, [Matthew 5:27-30](#):

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown in to hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Take a moment to meditate on those words.

Lord Jesus, prepare our hearts to hear from You. I am so thankful You are the Preacher of this sermon because I have failed in this area far more than I'd ever want to admit. My 37 years are filled with struggles like this. I'm not the only one in this room who struggles with these things. I am so glad that You sent Your Son Jesus Who lived a life of sinless perfection even in the area of lust. Though He was tempted He did not give occasion. We praise You for that—for Your perfect life. We praise You that You're the One Who gets to take the pulpit now and preach to every one of us.

Lord, some of us today might say, "This is the Christmas season. Let's celebrate the good things. Let's talk about the warm and fuzzy aspects of the story that we love so dear. Let's take a break and spend some time just enjoying the holidays." I have been struck this week that sin does not take a holiday. The devil doesn't take a break. There have been areas of great hurt and pain even this week from many of us giving into our lusts. I pray that we would take this moment to sit under Your teaching and that You would do business in our hearts and minds. Let us not push it away. Let us not say, "This is only for men," or "This is only for young people." Let us sit under Your teaching. You know us better than we know ourselves. Teach us, guide us and lead us to the way of obedience. Empower us by Your Spirit to do these things. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

In June of 1642, a crowd gathered in the Puritan town of Boston to witness an official punishment. A young woman named Hester Prynne was about to take a stand. She was guilty of one of the most heinous offenses of that day: adultery. She was given the charge that she must wear a scarlet letter all the days of her life. A red letter "A" would be affixed to her chest as a sign of her shame. Furthermore, she would have to stand on a scaffold high above the town square for three hours every day to expose her to public humiliation. Each day as Hester approached the scaffold, many in the crowd were angered by her great sin. They demanded the name of child's father—her partner in crime—but Hester refused. From that point on, Hester was known only for her sin. She was an adulterer. In this great story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, we learn that her accomplice in this sinful act held out until his dying moment before admitting his guilt.

Adultery has a way of causing us to run in fear and shame. There was another [man](#) who was punished for

his adultery. He was hanging out late one night at his house and happened to see his neighbor's wife taking an evening bath. As a man who loved God and whose heart was sold out to Him, this man knew it wasn't fitting for him to keep looking. It wasn't his fault that he had stumbled upon her, but lingering was. He stayed because she was far too beautiful and his imagination was sparked—something that is enough to ruin a man. His imagination and what he viewed from the comfort of his own rooftop was not enough for his hungry lust. He had to eat of the forbidden fruit. He was an important man and always got what he desired, so he took her and acted out his lust. He knew she was another man's wife and it didn't matter. Then things started to get complicated.

There are consequences for every bad decision. As the result of that night of passion there was an unwanted pregnancy. That unwanted pregnancy led to an unproductive cover-up. When we are caught in our sin, we try to figure out, "How can I remove myself from this sinful situation?" The man tried to connive a way to blame the pregnancy on the woman's husband but to no avail. The husband proved himself far more outstanding than the powerful man. So a premeditated murder was the only way to get rid of the sin and finally cover it up.

Scripture tells us that King David—the man in our story—remained silent. He thought everything was fine and it was successfully covered up. The baby was born. But he knew that what he had done was a great sin before God and before others. He found himself under the weight of that terrible sin. But in His grace, God sent a faithful and true man named Nathan. Nathan was a master storyteller who told David a story that must have been so eerily true to David's ears.

Here's the story that Nathan told to David. There was a rich man who had many flocks of sheep—more sheep than one could count. He owned more than anybody else in the whole region. His neighbor was a poor man who had a simple flock of just one lamb. The poor man loved and cared for that lamb and tended to it. In many ways, his whole life revolved around that one lamb. You would think the rich man was content with all the sheep that he had, but it wasn't enough. One day when he had a visitor, the rich man stole away the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his visitor.

When David heard this story, he was absolutely enraged. He wanted to enact judgment on the rich man but Nathan had prophetic words for David, the king of Israel—the most powerful man in the nation. This prophet who was faithful to God—no doubt he probably pointed his finger—said, "David, you're the man!" Scripture tells us one result of David's sin is that the baby died. David mourned for his child and was crushed by the agony of his sin and its consequences.

It's easy for us to be like David. When we hear stories of lust and disobedience, it is easy to become enraged. We think, "How could someone leave their family to go pursue another one? That man is mad. How could he do that?" and we are filled with rage. But we need to hear God's Word to us. He is saying, "You're the man. You're the woman."

Before we start pointing our fingers at others, we must recognize it is we who are wearing the scarlet letter. We're all adulterers. Maybe your adultery of the heart was done years ago. Maybe you are now mature in age and this isn't as much of a struggle as it used to be. Recognize that and know your life isn't clean.

Women, maybe this isn't as big of a struggle for you; we'll talk about that in a little bit. Maybe you're thinking, "Yeah, I'm glad Tim is talking to the guys. This is something they need to hear." No! Let us not push this away! Let us recognize that while our lust may be different, lust is still lust. We all have something to hear from Jesus' sermon.

1. The Declaration Jesus Gives

Jesus' words in our text once again go back to the Law. Last time in this series, we learned that Jesus talked about the issue of anger and told us that anger against our brother without cause is like murder. It's no different in God's eyes. So He has dealt with the sixth commandment and now He moves to the seventh commandment.

Notice the declaration that Jesus gives. I love this story about Jesus. In John 8:1-11 Jesus encounters a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. She was flung at the feet of Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees were ready to stone her—as we always are when it's someone else who is caught in sin. Jesus—the only One Who could cast a stone—knelt down to the woman, took her hand and gave her the command that is also meant for every adulterer and every person who has ever struggled with lust, "Go and sin no more." There is grace for you and me today.

In Jesus' sermon, it's as if He's been asked, "Well, what about the seventh commandment? Where are You at on that, Jesus?" He has been giving His "magnum opus" as a young rabbi and telling the people what His beliefs are. Verse 27 begins to deal with the question of adultery as Jesus says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*" I wonder if people—especially the Pharisees—were thinking, "Finally! Jesus is in agreement with us. We haven't agreed with everything He has said, but this time He's nailed it: 'Do not commit adultery.'"

Maybe the people felt that this was going to be a reprieve. They might have thought, "I can't be angry with my brother but at least I haven't committed adultery. At least I've been faithful in my marriage. The only person I've ever slept with is my spouse so I can take a load off and let someone else sit under the great weight of Jesus' teaching." I wonder if there was a sense of people saying, "You know what? I don't have to worry about that sin."

But notice that Jesus is giving a perfect word-for-word translation of the Law, "You shall not commit adultery." In essence, Jesus is saying, "Rabbis, you've gotten this right. This is the truth." They have done what they were supposed to in the sense of, "Yeah, that's what the Law says," if you stick to the strictest of interpretations. But we know that's not how the Law was meant to be used.

One of the things we know to be true that Jesus has already articulated regarding anger is that killing is the worst of all our anger sins. You can't really get more angry than physically killing someone. Would we agree with that? While all sins are equal in terms of missing the mark in God's eyes, the most heinous thing you can do in your anger is to kill somebody.

Likewise Jesus says, "The most heinous thing you can do is break your marriage vows with your spouse and sleep with another individual." That's as bad as it gets. But here's what we know about the commandments.

When we studied the Ten Commandments a while ago, we learned that the Jewish people understood each of the commandments as an “all of the below” statement. When the commandments say, “Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery,” they start at the top and include all the sins that come underneath them. It’s not “all of the above” but “all of the below.”

So Jesus is saying that it is not enough for us to be able to say, “I haven’t committed physical adultery so I’m good.” He is saying that for far too long we’ve been living with the bare minimum in terms of obedience. When I was in school people would ask, “Why don’t you work harder in school?” and I would say, “C’s get degrees.” A’s, B’s and C’s all get degrees. Let me be honest with you: I was really thinking “D’s get degrees.” I didn’t work very hard.

As Christians, some of us have fallen into that mindset and it’s a terrible one to have. It’s terrible to have in school but it’s even worse to have in your spiritual life. It’s not a good thing when you start cutting corners as the Pharisees did and saying, “You can do whatever you want in your heart as long as you don’t commit physical adultery. Then you’re all good. Everything’s okay.”

Some of us right now are saying, “You know what? I like the Pharisees’ teaching on this subject. I don’t like Jesus’ teaching.” Well, Jesus is the One Who saves us. Jesus is our King. A Pharisee isn’t our king. A Pharisee didn’t lay down his life for us that we may receive eternal life. Jesus did and He says to us, “I have a word for you. If you think the bare minimum of not committing physical adultery is enough, then you’ve got another think coming.”

When Jesus says, “Do not commit adultery,” He is also saying, “Do not commit fornication.” Fornication is underneath adultery because fornication is any sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage. If you are dating and involved in sexual activity that is fornication. Jesus says don’t do that. It also involves homosexuality and bisexuality which are outside the confines of Scriptural marriage. This command means to abstain from all sexuality that is outside the norm of Christ’s teachings and the Word of God.

So before you get comfortable with the Pharisees’ understanding of the Law, notice that Jesus takes it up a notch. Look at what He says in verse 28, “*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” By the way, you can interchange these words man or woman. Now the people probably started to think, “Wait a minute. Now Jesus might be talking about me. I have to work on this. What is this teaching? Does this mean that my thought life matters?”

Jesus says, “Absolutely.” Some of you think, “If I’m not doing it in my body then I’m okay.” Last week we learned that the Bible tells us, “*...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matthew 12:34). The body will do what the heart is thinking, just give it time. But Jesus says, “Even if it doesn’t, your thoughts matter to God. They matter to your fellow brothers and sisters in this world. Your thoughts hurt people.” What kind of teaching is this? Jesus is telling us that we need to understand some things about this subject matter of lust.

Define the Word

First, we need to define the word. The word lust—referring to sexual lust—is “the elicited sexual buzz within the human being.” I looked long and hard for a good working definition and this one does the best job because it leaves a level of mystery to it. We can’t really define it. What part is the sexual part? I’m not talking about physically. What is it that is within us that makes us this way? This is a hard thing to understand. Where does our sexuality begin? We don’t know. God has created us in such a multi-faceted way that we don’t understand where one part begins and another part ends. So “lust” is that buzz that is a bit mysterious to us.

Lust is a willfully allowed, pleasurable gratification of wrongfully directed sexual desire that takes place deep inside. I am going to break this down for you:

1. It is willfully allowed. It is something you choose. If you struggled with an issue of lust this last week, you cannot say, “The devil made me do it.” He may have tempted you but he didn’t make you do it. You made a willful decision to allow that look to go on a little longer or a willful decision to linger on that impure thought. Giving in to it may be driven by a couple of different things. You might say, “I can’t help myself,” and that may be because of habit. Or it may be because you haven’t put up the right protections in your life. But every time you lust, you make a willful decision to do so. This is true for you, for me, for every man, for every woman and for every child.
2. It is a pleasurable gratification. We enjoy it. I don’t understand why, all I know is that God has created us to be sexual beings. He has allowed that for a reason: to share that intimacy between a husband and wife. I’m glad He has given that to us. It’s a wonderful gift. Teenagers and young people, it is worth waiting for. It’s something that God has made to be pleasurable for us.

Here’s the thing: it’s pleasurable whether you do it in the confines of marriage or in the confines of sin. I don’t understand why God has allowed that. It would make things a whole lot easier if sexual activity would not be fun unless you are married. It would be great if a light switch comes on as soon as the pastor says, “Now you may kiss your bride” and then it becomes pleasurable. But in His level of common grace, God has allowed for all people to enjoy it, whether a part of marriage or not. We have to be careful with it because it is a pleasurable thing. It is gratifying. When lust happens, something clicks inside us—something is engaged within our hearts. We may claim that we aren’t doing anything and can fool others, but we can’t fool God. We are actively doing something. We’re willfully making a decision to allow that thought to move into action even if it’s only action of the heart and mind.

3. It is a wrongfully directed sexual desire. We’re focusing our attention and desire on something that is not right. The buzz God created within us—that feeling, that emotion, that ability to enjoy sex—is to be found in a proper place and that is within the marriage between a husband and his wife. This is hard for us to accept—especially when we’re in bondage to lust—because our bodies tell us we have to have it. Even secular doctors and psychologists say that when we allow ourselves to pursue things that cause us to lust, something happens in the brain. Chemicals are released. These are unbelievers saying, “Something physically changes us and makes us yearn for it more and more.” The Scriptures say that and have been saying that for some time.

4. It happens deep within us. We can't understand it fully but something takes place. Our response is deep-seated. It's incredibly personal. Lust occurs quickly and unmistakably. Sometimes it's a long time before any external, visible evidence is seen—long before it comes to the outside of our body because it begins on the inside.

I'm glad Jesus doesn't give that definition. Instead, Jesus uses a simple phrase and says, "If you allow that look—which is on the inside—to go to lust on the outside, then you've committed adultery in your heart." With penetrating elegance and simplicity, Jesus tells Christians that we cannot dismiss lust—even inside the heart—because it is sinful.

Disclaimer

What is Jesus not talking about? Jesus is not talking about admiring someone for their beauty. The Bible does this on myriads of occasions. The Bible says that David was a young, ruddy man. The best understanding by the most conservative scholars is that ruddy (*'admoniy*) literally means he was a good-looking man. God says that.

The Bible says that Bathsheba was an incredibly beautiful woman. The Bible admires beauty because God is the Creator of all beauty. God made her beauty. Over and over, we see there is beauty created by God. But be careful. Be careful. Be careful because what begins with admiration can lead to lust in less than a nanosecond.

So you can say that someone is beautiful or good looking and not lust. Here's what Scripture commentator A. B. Brews says, "What Jesus is describing is not a casual look but one that is deliberate and persistent. A desire not involuntary and momentary but one that is cherished, one that looks again and again."

Description

Let's further describe what Jesus is saying. He's not saying that the first glance is a sin. He's saying the second one is—the one that swells up with lust and feeds on the subject. Jesus is putting on His Judge hat in this description. Notice the verb tenses in verse 28, "*But I say to you that everyone who looks [that's present tense, they're looking] at a woman with lustful intent...*" There's a hunger for something so it's the present tense. You're looking at someone and you have a desire in your heart. He condemns it and says, "[He] *has already [past tense] committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

You're anticipating what that desire may be like and Jesus is condemning it saying, "The deed is already done." Do you understand that? Jesus is saying that the sneak preview is just as guilty as the show when it's not in the right place. So lust is something that is an irreversible done deed in the eyes of God. Robert Guelich puts it this way, "Jesus categorically declares that a lustful desire to have another man's wife incriminates the entire person." This is our Savior's teaching on a very important theme.

Now I know I have given you many intellectual things concerning lust so far. Let me help you understand this idea by way of an illustration. Think of yourself as a car. You can be a minivan, a sports car or whatever you want. Imagine that you are a car that has been turned on and is just idling. That's how sexual desire is within every one of us. Just as gasoline runs through a car so it will run or idle, so sexual desire is there as

long as you have blood running through your veins. Everybody has sexual desire. It's a part of who we are. That's how God has created us.

Lust takes that idling car and puts it into gear at the wrong time. The right time to put that car in gear and take it for a spin is when the pastor says, "Now you may kiss your bride." Then you can go and enjoy sex within the confines of marriage. But lust puts that car into gear when we haven't been given God's permission to do so.

Here's what we as Christians do: knowing we can't put our cars into gear, we say, "I just want to rev the engine. I want to hear the ponies run a little bit. They were made to run. I have these feelings and desires. I have to let them run around a little bit." So we put the car into gear, put our foot on the brake and then start tapping on the gas. We think, "As long as my foot is on the brake I can rev the engine because I'm not going anywhere. I just want to let the engine roll a little bit."

Some of us are revving that engine right now and we're lusting. We have the gas pedal down and every part of us is itching to move. Try this in your car sometime to see what happens. When the gas is pushed, the car is supposed to move. Right? So when you put the foot on the brake the car is going to gyrate in all kinds of ways. It says, "You're telling me to go and do something. I need to do it!" When you lust you think, "I have my foot on the brake," but your body is saying, "I have to do this! I have to!" That's why lust always leads to more.

You might think, "I'm okay because I'm not moving." Do you know what? Vroom, vroom! You're not moving yet but you're going. One of two things will happen:

1. You'll sit still for a while but at some point it will get really hard to keep your foot on the brake. The more you push on the gas the harder it becomes. At some point that you're not going to choose, your foot will slip off the brake. You're going to careen out of control because the car is going to say, "It's time to go."
2. Eventually your car's safety mechanism—the brake system—will give up. The brakes will fail, the car will go and you won't be able to stop.

Right now some of us are sitting in the parking lot of our lives, revving the gas and saying, "I'm okay. I'm not hurting anybody." Maybe you're not hurting anybody right now in the sense that you haven't done anything from a physical standpoint but God says you're already sinning just by playing with the gas. If you say, "But I haven't gone that far," just wait. Something will happen and it will be too late. It will always lead to not just one sin but many—just look at David's life. If you think, "I'm better than that," let me remind you that David was "*a man after God's own heart.*" You don't get better than that and he fell. Samson was a strong dude and this blew it for him. I have idolized some godly preachers who have eventually fallen to this sin. You don't think you can fall into it, but just give it time. Just keep revving that engine.

2. The Dominance of Lust Today

Here's the reason why lust is such a big issue for us: there is a dominance of lust today. Lust has been a formidable opponent to man throughout the ages. It seems like once again the battle is heating up. We ought to be careful because we tend to say, "It's never been any worse than this." Yes it has. It's been going

on for years. The battle may be different now but it's still there. For whatever reason—maybe it's because of our relaxing morals, maybe it's because of the sexual revolution of a generation ago—the battle is heating up here in America. Maybe the battle is a little more than it has been before all at one time, I don't know. But I do know that the Bible talks a lot about it so it must have been going on in the early church.

Maybe it's because technology has allowed more vehicles of lust to enter the world. It seems very easy for the devil to bombard us with images and scenarios that make us think ungodly thoughts and turn to sin. Have you noticed that sex sells everything today? It sells cars, cheeseburgers, clothing, potato chips, deodorant and web hosting companies. The number one commercial on television right now is a group of young men in their boxer shorts thrusting their pelvises to sell boxer underwear.

Brothers and sisters, it doesn't take much for us to pursue the issue of lust. It's all around us. When my parents were raising us, they had to worry about things like a billboard on the interstate. . . She would always try to distract us from it. "Do you see the deer?" God bless her. There was never a deer. I love my mom but eventually we caught on to her efforts.

My parents had it easy in comparison to what I have with my boys today. We don't worry about a billboard on the interstate; we worry about the information superhighway. This is probably one of the greatest enemies when it comes to fighting lust. I have no doubt that God put it in the hearts of men to create the internet. It has been one of the greatest inventions created by man. It is a wonderful way to communicate and a way for the gospel to go forth.

But let me tell you what else the internet has done for us. Because of the internet, pornography is a \$97 billion industry globally. Thirteen billion of that comes from the United States alone. Twelve percent of all internet sites—more than 26.6 million sites—are dedicated to pornography. Two and a half billion emails a day are pornographically related. Twenty-five percent of all search engine requests each day—whether Bing, AOL, Google or Yahoo!—are pornographic in nature. That means one out of four people are going to those search sites looking for pornography. Seventy percent of all 18 through 24-year-old men visit pornographic sites in a typical month. Sixty-six percent of men in their twenties and thirties also report being regular users of pornography.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. That's the world. What about the church?" Surveying evangelical churches, 70% of Christian men and 47% of women admit to struggling with pornography in their daily lives. Now you think, "Okay Tim, that's a lousy sample." So let's reduce that. Let's cut it in half. That means 35% of men and 23% of women struggle with it. That's still one in three men and one in four women who admit to dealing with this. Forty-eight percent of Christian men and 20% of Christian women admit to having an addiction to pornography. These are real statistics from the beginning of 2013.

You might say, "Well Tim, not at Village Bible Church. We are not an average evangelical church." Yes we are. Our giving is average. Our attendance is average. Our involvement in the church is average. So why in the world would we push this away and say these statistics aren't true for us in this room today? We have a problem.

I have had some ladies say, "We don't need to talk about this because ladies don't struggle with this stuff. This is a guy thing." We beat up on men all the time. How many men have gone to retreats and heard this talked about? Every time men get together this subject is discussed and rightly so. This is something that's tearing up men. But let me tell you something. If you're going to say women don't struggle with this, I'm going to disagree with you whole-heartedly. Here's my reason: just look at the magazines women are buying in the checkout aisles at grocery stores. Don't they talk about sex? Aren't they all about issues of lust? You had better believe they are. If women don't struggle with lust, then who in the world is reading almost 100 million copies of Fifty Shades of Grey? It was the best-selling book of 2012 and 2013. Do you think women don't struggle with lust? Let's not forget that Wal-Mart never gives floor space to things that don't sell. I went to Wal-Mart this week on a scientific study and I found that this leading American retailer has half an aisle for fantasy romance novels. I don't think men are the ones buying that stuff.

Do you think that's not enough to prove women struggle with lust? I can assure you that it wasn't men who spent \$113 million this summer watching the movie Magic Mike—a movie about male strippers. We struggle with it, ladies. We do. It's different, but we struggle with it.

Listen to the words of Jonalyn Fincher from the magazine Christianity Today who says:

In the Middle Ages, priests informed the laity that women were naturally more lustful, insatiable and visually stimulated. Can you imagine that? Women were the sexually charged ones. Men, the celibate priests taught, were the naturally spiritual and rational ones.

I like that! She goes on:

How times have changed. In our Christian subculture men are [continually told that they alone are] the visually stimulated, carnal ones. "Women give sex to get love" (Every Woman's Battle). Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn explain in For Men Only, "Your body (no matter how much of a stud you are) does not by itself turn on her body" (page 133).

Personally, I beg to disagree.

A man's body can turn a woman on...ask any woman about how she feels in an Abercrombie and Fitch store [with all those young men barely wearing anything]. Or ask the bride in Song of Solomon, "*As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste*" (2:3).

Okay, you might say, "But once the honeymoon is over and you've got kids and you're sleep deprived? No woman sustains this kind of attraction to sex, not long-term. That's why Playboy sells more than Playgirl. That's why men talk about struggles with porn and women don't."

Well, I have news for you.

The internet filter review from ChristianityToday.com documents 70% of women keep their cyber activities secret. But, one of three visitors to all adult websites are women. Women's attraction to the male body is a widely experienced but little publicized reality. Because of that, women stay in the shadows instead of getting the freedom that only Christ can bring.

That's not from me. That's from a woman.

In this dominated-by-lust world, we need to learn that lust is something that affects young and old, male and female. Sadly it seems like we're losing the battle.

So what do we do? Our society tells us that looking doesn't hurt; it's harmless and no one has to get hurt. Let me tell you that you're getting hurt and your relationship with God is getting hurt and when that happens, the next thing that will get hurt is your relationships with other people, whether they're your spouse, your friends or your family. Others will get hurt.

3. The Downward Spiral of Lust

The world says you can dream and fantasize about whatever you like and—as long as you aren't infringing on someone's rights—have fun. The Bible tells us that way of thinking is absolutely moronic. It's from the devil. It isn't logical. C.S. Lewis said this about the issue of sex and lust, "In its proper place sex is like a fire in a fireplace for all of people to enjoy, to receive heat from and to be admired. But when fire is taken out of its proper place—the fireplace—it will only bring great harm to all those around it."

Some of us are playing with fire. The Bible addresses it this way in Proverbs 6:27, "*Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?*" The answer is no. You're always going to get burned. If you're looking at stuff, you're going to get burned. If you're thinking stuff, you're going to get burned. It's just a matter of time. Lust always demands a price. Like all sin, lust will take you farther than you want to go, it will keep you longer than you want to stay and it will always cost you more than you want to pay.

Deception

James 1:14-15 tell us that lust begins with deception. Some of us are deceived right now because we think what we are consuming is harmless.

Amanda loves Christmas and Christmas movies. When I was working on the small group curriculum for this week's lesson, she was watching the Hallmark channel. I was trying to prove the subtlety of lust. Some people say, "The Hallmark men are hallmark heavenly." No, they're not.

I know I have to turn in my man card for watching a Hallmark Christmas movie with my wife, but we make sacrifices in our marriage. By the time we were done watching the movie, a woman could totally have given her heart to the man who sweeps her off her feet. I tell you, Tim doesn't do what Hallmark channel men do. In fact, I don't know any red-blooded man who does the things those men do in the movies.

It's the same in those fantasy novels. It's easy for us to ask, "Why doesn't my husband do that?" or "Why doesn't my wife do that?" We're feeding a lust for other people to do things for us that our spouses or future spouses may not do. It's deceiving. It looks good but the Bible says that the devil masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Disobedience

Lust can move quickly from deception and it always leads to disobedience. What starts in the heart will inevitably come out.

Do you wonder why we do the things we do? It starts in the heart. It isn't that you made one bad decision. David made a dozen bad decisions—a myriad of mistakes—before he ever looked at Bathsheba. Did you know that? If you read the text with an investigative mind you will end up asking, "David, what are you doing at home while your army is at war?" A king should go with his army but David was strolling along his rooftop. Also, David had already taken on many wives. He wasn't supposed to do that. God had condemned him for it but David still did it. David had already made terrible decisions long before Bathsheba was out there bathing.

Some of us are not dealing properly with our hearts. Something is going to come at the wrong time, in the wrong place and we are going to fall. When you feel neglected, abused or like you're not getting your way, the devil is going to come and say, "Alright. I'm going to show you what disobedience looks like. It's beautiful. It's wonderful."

Proverbs 7 tells us all about lust. A young man is pursuing an adulterous woman and verses 21-22 says, *"With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter..."* Do you know what the Bible says happens after we are deceived and disobey? The Book of James says it leads to death (James 1:14-15).

Listen to what happens to this young man in Proverbs, verses 22-23 and 25-27:

All at once he follows her,
as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast
till an arrow pierces its liver;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
he does not know that it will cost him his life...

Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths,
for many a victim has she laid low,
and all her slain are a mighty throng.
Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death.

Brothers and sisters, did you know that lust will cost you your life? Do you think you're having fun? Wait until it kills you. Wait until it kills your marriage, your reputation or your opportunity to do ministry. It will kill you all at once and it will drive you crazy how many times it will kill you over and over again.

So what do we do? Some of us are on a collision course toward disaster. This is why we preach even the hard things. This is an uncomfortable sermon to preach. The only thing that would make it more uncomfortable is if my mom was here.

4. The Deliverance that Sets Us Free

Psalm 119:9 says that which you have in your hands—God’s Word—is what will be able to keep a young man and a young woman pure. God has given you the antidote for lust.

A Painful Action

There is deliverance that sets us free. Yes, there’s a downward spiral but the gospel brings life. It brings deliverance, including deliverance from lust. So how do we deal with lust? In our text Jesus tells us there’s a painful action that needs to take place. He says, *“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away... if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”*

Then we have to ask, “Is He speaking literally or spiritually?” Let’s look at the literal side for a moment. The early church father Origen was reported to have castrated himself because he was tired of dealing with lust. The Council at Nicaea spoke against the practice of castration in fighting off lust. They said, “Don’t do it!” So castration must have been an active process if the church council had to speak against it. They spoke against castration because your privates aren’t what cause you to sin. Getting rid of them isn’t going to fix anything. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* The human heart is the problem. We need to change our hearts.

Let’s apply Jesus’ teaching to today’s culture: If your computer is causing you to sin, get rid of it. If your phone is causing you to sin, get rid of it. If your television is causing you to sin, throw it away. If a relationship is causing you to sin, end the relationship. If a book or a magazine is causing you to sin, get rid of it no matter how noble you think it is. Jesus says, “It’d be better to be maimed than to go to hell.”

This is real! Churches are impacted by this every day because great men and women have not heeded the words of Jesus and done the hard thing. Some of you are unwilling to get serious with God and do the hard things. Sometimes I am not willing to do the hard things to keep me from sin. These are painful actions, but we need to do the spiritual surgery that is necessary.

A Proper Avenue

Scripture talks about this over and over again. Here are some of the passages that describe the proper avenue.

1. Run from temptation. When the Bible talks about lust and sexual temptation, it has a singular word for it. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:18. We think that when sexual immorality comes our way, we need to act like men, “Stand strong and I will be just fine. Be a man! Be a woman! I don’t have to fall for that stuff, right?” Is that what the Bible says? No! The Bible says, “You can’t handle it. You’re never going to win on your own so run for your life.” Be like Joseph in Potiphar’s house. Run! Do whatever you must to get away from that thing that is causing you to head for destruction. Get rid of it. Run away from it as fast as you can.
2. Rely on the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says when we are walking in and are filled with the Spirit we will not gratify the sinful nature. Here’s the best illustration for it: I will not long for potato chips and junk food if I’ve just finished a prime rib dinner. Some of us are saying, “I can’t help myself.” Are you feasting on the things of God? Have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? We taste and see

that the Lord is good so that we're able to distinguish the bad. Some of us don't know the good cooking that Jesus is offering us so we're just hungry for the junk food anybody will offer us. So you need to be in God's Word, focusing on the things of God and relying on His Spirit.

3. Renew your minds with godly things. Romans 12:2 tells us, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" Make a conscious decision this week, "I am not going to look at that stuff. I'm not going to read that book or magazine. I'm not going to think on those things. I'm going to transform my mind under the cross of Jesus Christ."
4. Repent of your sins. Even when you do these things, you still may fail. Jesus says, "Repent of your sins" (Matthew 3:2, 4:17; Luke 5:32 and many other places). Say, "God, I'm sorry. I don't want to do this evil thing. I don't want to turn away from you and pursue wicked things. I know it will lead to my destruction. I know Jesus went to the cross for sins like this. Please forgive me." First John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" That includes this sin of lust.
5. Be romantic often (for married couples only). My advice for married couples is very simple: be romantic often. The Bible says that we are not to pursue sexual relations with anyone and everyone who comes our way but that we are to literally—and very poetically—drink from our own cisterns (Proverbs 5:15). It goes on to say that the wives of our youth should satisfy us (Proverbs 5:18). Solomon even uses very visual terminology when he says that the breasts of our wives should satisfy us (Proverbs 5:19). That's good advice!

First Corinthians 7:2-5 says it's not good for us to give our bodies to everybody to have sex with them. Because there is so much sexual temptation out there, each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband. Paul goes on and essentially says, "Be romantic often." He says nobody should be depriving each other of their sexual rights. The man's body is not his own but belongs to his wife. Also the wife's body is not her own, it belongs to her husband. We need to be living that.

Wives, do you want your husband not to be tempted by other things? Then fulfill your husband's desires. Husbands, be real about that desire; wives, too. There is desire and we need to be satisfying that desire as husbands and wives. It needs to be happening often and in a way that's pleasing to our spouses.

6. Get real with your kids. My ten-year-old son is starting to learn about some of this stuff. He's been learning it in a progressive way. Even my eight-year-old is beginning to learn some of these things. My conversations with my son usually include him saying, "Dad, I know where you're going. I've heard it all." God bless him.

I then reply, "Son, what you've heard is probably all wrong so let's just go over it again."

Here's what you need to know: your kids are hearing it. You might say, "Tim, your kids are in public school. My kids are at a private school." They're hearing it in the private school, too.

You might say, "My kids are homeschooled. I know they're not hearing it." They're hearing it. If we get real with our kids and ask them what they know, they would tell us a lot more than we want.

Maybe you have been lucky enough to protect them so far, but they're going to hear it. So start getting real with them. You need to be talking with them about God's intention for sex. Don't let other people talk to them about it. You be the one to tell them. That way when they see the

counterfeit they know the real thing. They know that what the world is pursuing is evil and what God is giving is good. The best thing that you can tell your children is, "Sex is great." The best thing my father and my youth pastor taught me about sex is, "It's awesome." I am here to tell you, "Yes, it is! But it's only great when it is in God's proper channel of marriage."

We need to announce that to our kids, not hide it from them so that they wonder, "Well, there's something there. I want it. Everybody's talking about it but not my parents." Some of you are not telling your kids these things and you are hurting them spiritually.

Here's the other thing that we need to be doing. As a family with three boys, I have my internet on not one, not two, but 5,000 filters. We'll never be able to search for a thing on our computers. Don't ever come looking for a map or anything on our internet because you just aren't going to get it at the Badal house. Some of you have allowed every adult video, every adult book and every adult thing into your home. You might say, "I've never been into a place like that before." If you have an internet with no filters, then you're doing it. Your kids are running into it and you don't even know it. Here's the thing: this generation of kids knows far more about computers than you ever will, so you need to help them. The church is going to provide you with a bevy of resources to help you do this. The best thing you can buy your kids and family this Christmas is an internet filter. Put it on there! Even have someone come over and put the password in for you because you don't trust yourself. Just put that filter on there and be done with it. It will be the best thing you ever did for your kids. Your kids will come back—along with their spouses—in the future and they will thank you for doing this. Your kids' spouses will thank you that they don't have spouses who have run amuck with all the garbage of the world.

Brothers and sisters, let's get this lust issue fixed. Let's be a transparent place. Many of us have fallen and God's grace is there, but we need to live out God's grace with one another. We need to be His hands and feet to help each other be the best believers we can be, even in the area of lust.

Let's pray.

Father God, I plead with You to protect Your people from this terrible disease. We have seen so many in our world run away from God for the things of this world. I pray that none of us would fall. I pray that for myself. I am so flawed. I am so selfish that I am willing at times—even in my own wicked heart—to leave everything that I love and know to be good and true for the things that will make me "feel better." If that is true for me as the preacher of this body, then I have to believe there are others who are feeling that way as well. Protect us. *"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil"* ([Matthew 6:13](#)). Let us do the hard stuff this week to be changed so that we may glorify You, honor You and please You in every good way. Help us do these things even in our private thoughts and desires. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit. Make us new. Challenge us in our thinking. Challenge us with what we watch and what we read. Encourage and convict us to be able to turn away from these things and turn to you.

Lord, I pray for those who find themselves neck deep in this sin. I pray that they would find the courage to talk with someone trustworthy who won't condemn but will bring love, grace and even the hard truths that need to be heard. There are consequences to sin but they can be overcome by Your grace as Almighty God. Let us be real and true. Let us live out Your Sermon on the Mount so that we may truly be Your followers—

not just in the external, but even to the core of who we are in our hearts. I pray that this message has been productive for our people and that we would leave changed. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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