

DELIVERED FROM DESIRE

by

THE ENCOURAGING TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND SEXUAL PURITY

| DARYL WINGERD |

DELIVERED ~~FROM~~ *by* **DESIRE**

THE ENCOURAGING TRUTH ABOUT
CHRISTIANS AND SEXUAL PURITY

DARYL WINGERD



Copyright © 2011 Daryl Wingerd
All rights reserved

ISBN 978-0-9820968-1-9

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, Copyright © 2000; 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.

All italics in Scripture quotations were
added by the author for emphasis.

Additional copies of *Delivered by Desire* and other publications
may be ordered online at www.ccwtoday.org.

Published by *Christian Communicators Worldwide*
Kansas City, Missouri, USA.

www.ccwtoday.org

Cover design by Tony Barmann

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	7
----------------------	---

Face Reality

Chapter 1

Two Men, a Park Bench, and a Confession	11
---	----

Chapter 2

The Significance of Desire.....	15
---------------------------------	----

Chapter 3

The Anatomy of Desire	19
-----------------------------	----

Despise Darkness

Chapter 4

Irrationality 101	27
-------------------------	----

Chapter 5

Marriage Poison.....	31
----------------------	----

Chapter 6

Fool's Vomit.....	35
-------------------	----

Acknowledge Deliverance

Chapter 7

New Creation	41
--------------------	----

Chapter 8

Obedient from the Heart	47
-------------------------------	----

Chapter 9

Body Language.....	53
--------------------	----

<i>Chapter 10</i>	
The High Calling of Being Yourself	59

<i>Chapter 11</i>	
It Only Works by Faith.....	67

Experience Freedom

<i>Chapter 12</i>	
The Weapon That Works	75

<i>Chapter 13</i>	
Be Battle Ready	83

<i>Chapter 14</i>	
Prepare Your Mind for Action.....	89

<i>Chapter 15</i>	
Kill the Enemy.....	93

<i>Chapter 16</i>	
Follow Your Love Drive	99

<i>Chapter 17</i>	
Fight <i>With</i> the Church and <i>For</i> the Church	107

<i>Appendix A</i>	
The Danger of Being Deceived	117

<i>Appendix B</i>	
Is the Regenerate Heart Deceitful and Desperately Sick?...	121

<i>Appendix C</i>	
Abusing the Body Language of the New Testament.....	129

<i>Appendix D</i>	
The Relationship Between Nature and Behavior.....	131

<i>Appendix E</i>	
Have Christians Laid Aside the Old Self or Not?	137
<i>Appendix F</i>	
Before Telling Your Wife.....	141
<i>Appendix G</i>	
My Personal Story	143

Preface

Most men believe that accountability is the invincible weapon for fighting lust, but many of us have found that this method falls short. It helps for a while, granted, due to the repulsive power of embarrassment. But what's next? We need something more potent if we are to experience lasting victory.

Daryl Wingerd dug up and brushed off the Bible's core explosive device for defeating habitual sexual sin. You won't find this concept in most self-help books on the subject—even Christian ones. I'm convinced you will discover here the volatile material able to finally decimate lust as a pattern of life, in you and in those you help. Like others, you may say, "I've not read a book quite like this for clarifying the biblical way to succeed over this troubling issue."

The author writes in an easy style with short chapters, but handles large and powerful biblical concepts. You won't be intimidated by his words, but his words will intimidate your sin. Wingerd has provided some questions at the end of each chapter for those who wish to use the book for small group discussions, and for the man who wants to reflect privately on what he has read. Due to the brevity of the chapters, your small group may be able to cover more than one chapter each time you meet. The book will be invaluable to men in general—single and married, younger and older. Lust will nip at us till the end if we don't deal with it biblically.

I'm often sobered by the idea that a sin neatly hidden in one man's life is the same sin that entirely ruins another. Where one man will find lust and satisfaction of that lust an intermittent problem at worst, another man will say that what began as a private, occasional sin proved catastrophic later. We're not dealing with trifling matters when we talk about sexual sin. It has destroyed many men, torn up many families, and blighted many histories.

Women may wish to read this book also. It will help them understand what their husbands and sons may face. Though writing from the man's perspective, the author is not unaware of how lust can become a woman's problem as well. In fact, believers

in general may wish to read this book to discover how to overcome other habitual sins. The biblical principles will apply.

We rejoice at the wonderful liberty men are experiencing as they understand and apply these truths. Enjoy that liberty yourself.

Jim Elliff

President, Christian Communicators Worldwide

FACE REALITY

You probably experience pornographic temptation almost every day, and the Internet is not the only source. Try walking through a video store without being tempted to lust. Watch primetime TV without your conscience often telling you to look away. Find a grocery store where you can check out without standing next to a display of sexually provocative photographs.

The regrettable truth is, you live in a pornographic culture.

one

Two Men, a Park Bench, and a Confession

Two men sit together on a park bench, talking. Even from a distance it is obvious that one of them is troubled about something. His head hangs in discouragement as he speaks. The other man listens, but says nothing.

When a young couple walks by holding hands, the discouraged man stops talking and looks away, avoiding eye contact. The listener looks up at the couple and smiles politely.

Now we are closer and able to hear their conversation. The man who was listening begins to speak quietly, doing his best to preserve privacy. I'll call him Nick and the discouraged man John.

NICK. I can't believe you're looking at pornography again. I thought you gave that up when you became a Christian last year.

JOHN. I thought so too, but sometimes I just can't resist the temptation.

NICK, *sarcastically*. Can't? . . . or won't? I'm tempted too, but I seem to be able to resist.

JOHN, *sounding defeated*. OK, now I feel like scum.

NICK. Sorry, that's not the way I meant it. But looking at pornography isn't just a bad habit. It's a serious sin.

JOHN. I know it's serious, but there are worse things I could be doing. After all, it's not like I'm breaking the law.

NICK. Now wait a minute. Just because you can't get arrested for looking at pornography, what makes you think you're not breaking the law?

JOHN, *with a puzzled expression on his face*. What do you mean?

NICK. You call yourself a Christian, and Christians are people who obey Christ. So how can you say you're not breaking *His* law?

(Long pause as John hangs his head again.)

NICK, *exasperated*. Why don't you just quit? Just tell yourself you won't ever do it again.

JOHN. You're right. I should quit, and I want to quit, but . . .

(Short pause. John sighs deeply.)

NICK. But *what*?

JOHN. This may sound strange, but I've tried and tried to quit and I'm finally realizing that I don't know how.

Why do so many men who claim to be Christians fail in the area of sexual sin? One possible explanation is that some may not be true Christians. They have been deceived into thinking they can

be saved while they go on loving and practicing their sin.¹ Despite this possibility, the “false convert” answer should not be our first response to confessions like the one Nick heard from John.

Real Christians are subject to temptation and may sin in many ways as long as they live. They are even encouraged to confess their sins to one another (as John did to Nick) so that other Christians can pray for them (James 5:16). Also, the church is given instructions concerning how to deal with true believers who are “caught in any trespass” (Gal. 6:1; cf. Matt. 18:15–17; Luke 17:3). If a man goes on cherishing his sin rather than forsaking it when confronted by other believers (in other words, if he does not repent), the church must consider him an unbeliever and remove him from their fellowship (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5). But we are never told to automatically conclude that a sinning brother is not a true Christian.

The Root of the Problem

Much of the difficulty among true Christians who feel powerless against sexual temptation stems from a lack of understanding (or even a complete *misunderstanding*) of the fundamental spiritual difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. Christians are not merely people who have been forgiven of their sins through faith in Christ. They have also been radically re-created by the Spirit of God. The Bible calls this creative miracle “regeneration.” I’ll discuss regeneration in more detail later.

The lack of understanding about regeneration affects Christians who are sinning and those who try to help them. Much of what Nick said to John was true and necessary, but was his response a model you should emulate? Should he have been more understanding and encouraging? Should he have been even more severe in attempting to shame John into reforming himself? Most importantly, how should he respond to John’s last statement? How would you respond? Is it enough to say, “Just quit”?

In this book you will discover the biblical response to a professing Christian who says, “I’ve tried and tried to stop looking at pornography, but I’m finally realizing that I don’t know how.”

1. Appendix A addresses the New Testament warnings about false assurance. Men who consider themselves to be Christians yet habitually view pornography or commit other sexual sins are encouraged to read this appendix thoughtfully.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What do you think are some of the factors contributing to the growing problem of pornography among professing Christians?
2. What would you have changed about Nick's response to John?
3. In what ways can you identify with either Nick or John?

two

The Significance of Desire

Moths are drawn to light. I don't know why, and I'm not sure the moths know either, but on warm summer evenings they fly away from dark places to flutter around whatever light they can find. Something in their nature makes them happy there.

Cockroaches, on the other hand, are repulsed by light. If you have ever lived in roach-infested quarters (like my apartment during college), you know that when you come home at night and turn on the lights, the roaches abandon the pizza crumbs and scatter for whatever dark place they can find. Light disturbs them. Something in their nature makes them happy only when they are cloaked in darkness.

Light and Darkness

In the Bible, the word “light” often depicts the nature and character of God—His holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth, and faithfulness. John wrote, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

The attributes of God are summed up in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3), and Jesus described Himself this way: “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

Darkness, on the other hand, describes sin. The Apostle Paul warned Christians to stay clear of sinful practices by saying, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). He also told us that “[God] has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

People naturally prefer moral darkness, even over Jesus. Notice how Christ described this preference:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19–20)

Every Man Has a “Wanter”

Please forgive my non-technical language, but whether you typically respond like a moth or a cockroach when faced with a choice between Light and darkness depends on what your “wanter” wants. Your “wanter” is the deepest part of you—the part that produces and expresses your most meaningful desires. In the Bible it is called your heart. It is who you really are, the moral and spiritual center of your being.²

Getting a New “Wanter”

The man without Christ is self-willed, inclined toward disobedience. As Paul said, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8). Just as a pig could never fly unless God were to redesign it with wings and a lighter body, a man cannot love and obey God in a way that actually pleases Him unless God gives him a new heart.

When God gives a person a new heart, it is called “regeneration” (Titus 3:5) or being “born again” (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). This New Testament language of new birth comes from God’s Old Testament promise to His people:

2. See appendix B for more about the meaning of the word “heart” in the Bible.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

Notice that God promised to “cause” them to walk in His statutes. *His* miraculous work causes their obedience. Regenerate people “*will* be careful to observe [His] ordinances.” This promise applies to every regenerate person, not just to those in the Old Testament. Jesus was referring to this promise of a new heart when He spoke of the new birth in John’s Gospel.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

If you are a true Christian (even if you cannot identify the precise moment when you became one), God has removed your old heart and has given you a completely new one—a heart that is inclined toward believing in Christ and practicing righteous behavior.

Regeneration does not totally destroy a man’s desire for sexual sin. As long as the Christian lives in a mortal body, he will experience desires for sin and for righteousness. John (the man in chapter 1) obviously wants to stop looking at pornography. That is why he confessed his sin to Nick and asked for help. At the same time, his desire for sexual sin seems relentless. The purpose of the next chapter is to help you understand and respond to both types of desire you experience.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What would your closest friend say you desire more than anything else? What would lead him to this conclusion? Do you think his conclusion would accurately reflect your heart?

2. Read John 3:19–20 carefully and answer the following questions:

- What is “the Light”?
- Does *everyone* who loves the darkness hate the Light?
- According to Jesus’ words, can a man love both the darkness and the Light? Explain your answer.

three

The Anatomy of Desire

John thought his desire for sexual sin would disappear now that he was a Christian. Instead the temptation was just as strong as ever. At times it seemed even stronger, which puzzled and troubled him greatly. He sometimes wondered if anything had really changed. Because John's struggle is common to many Christians, it will be helpful to understand the origin and anatomy of the often-confusing desires we experience.

The “Original Natural”

God created Adam and Eve with natural desires for food, for sleep, for companionship, and for sexual fulfillment. These desires (and others) may be thought of as “original natural” desires because they were part of God's original creation. They are inherently *good* desires. God was delighted with every aspect of His creation (Gen. 1:31), just as you would be pleased if you designed and created something special and it worked flawlessly. He was pleased when Adam and Eve walked and talked together, when they satisfied their hunger, when they slept, and yes, when they had sexual intercourse as husband and wife.

The “New Natural”

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He subjected their world to the curse of death and sin. Distorted and excessive desires erupted

from within the now-corrupt hearts of men, including the desire to experience sexual pleasure outside of the union of a man and a woman in marriage. The Bible tells us that “God gave them over to degrading passions” as a judgment (Rom. 1:26).

Because of God’s wrath following Adam’s disobedience, there was a “new natural” in terms of human desire. Sin—the excessive and perverse expression of the good desires God implanted in mankind at creation—became the new ruling principle in every person from birth.

Something in a man changes when he becomes a Christian, but not everything. When a man is born again (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23) he is given spiritual life from God—a new heart and the life of God’s Spirit dwelling in Him. This is what the Bible calls regeneration (Titus 3:5). But the spiritual difference resulting from regeneration is the only difference between the Christian man and his unregenerate neighbors, co-workers, and family members. Physically he is the same as he always was.

The butterfly is the same insect as the caterpillar it came from, but as long as it was a caterpillar, gravity bound it to the surface of the earth. Gravity still tugs downward, but the butterfly has the new ability to resist it and fly. Likewise, sin still tries to pull the believer downward, but he has the new ability to resist it and obey Christ. The butterfly’s new ability came from a physical re-creation called metamorphosis. Its body became lighter and it grew wings. The Christian’s new ability came from a spiritual re-creation called regeneration. He was given a new heart with a new nature, resulting in new desires.

The Two Sources of Desire

You might assume that your conflicting desires have the same source: the moral, spiritual center of your being, or what the Bible calls your heart. But you have only one heart as a Christian, and as we’ll see later, it is new and good.³ The desires that flow from your new heart (ultimately from God’s Spirit) are righteous and pure. The deepest part of you agrees with God at every point. Your

3. More about this in chapter 8.

continuing opposition to God (that is, your continuing desire for sin) has a different source: the physical, mortal, unredeemed part of you—your body.

When I write about the Christian's body I mean his whole physical being: his brain, which receives and stores information and produces thoughts, desires, and emotions; the glands and organs that produce the chemicals and hormones that affect other parts of his body in various ways; his eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers, skin, nerves, and muscles, all of which detect, transmit, and/or respond to physical sensations that influence his decisions and behavior. The body is all of these things operating together, and all in imperfect ways as a result of Adam's sin.

The Bible sometimes refers to your physical body using the word "flesh."⁴ The word is often used in a way that implies moral weakness or the tendency to sin.⁵ In other places the writers of Scripture (particularly Paul) simply refer to the unredeemed part of you as "your mortal body," "your members," or "the members of your body."⁶ As with the term "flesh," these straightforward references to the human body are often used in ways that imply moral weakness and the propensity toward sinning.⁷ Your body itself is not evil, but as pastor and author Charles Leiter says, it is "the place where sin tries to reign or gain a foothold."⁸

The most important thing for you to understand at this point is that even though you have been born again, not every part of you has been made new. You are living your life as a Christian just like Paul lived his life—"in the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:2) with all of the bodily lusts for sin that are characteristic of

4. Rom. 7:18, 25; 2 Cor. 10:3; 12:7; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:3a; 5:28–29; Phil. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:2; etc.

5. Rom. 7:18, 25; Eph. 2:3a; etc.

6. Rom. 6:12–13, 19; 7:5, 23; 8:10–11, 13, 23; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 5:10; etc.

7. Rom. 6:12; 7:5, 23; etc.

8. Charles Leiter, e-mail message to author, March 1, 2009, quoted by permission.

fallen humanity.⁹ When you are tempted to view pornography or commit other sexual sins, your unrighteous desires are not coming from your new heart or your reborn spiritual nature. The sinful desires you experience as a Christian are due to your *physical* attraction to sin.

Because your righteous and unrighteous desires have different sources, they also have different qualities and characteristics. The next three short sections describe these important and encouraging differences.

1. Your righteous desires are spiritual rather than fleshly.

The unregenerate man wants what appeals to his flesh—his unredeemed physical body. Even if he appears religious or moral, it is for reasons of pride or fear. He possesses no genuine desire to please God (Rom. 8:5–8). On the other hand, the true Christian is characterized by spiritual desires—desires that come from the Holy Spirit. His body is unredeemed, so his fleshly desires for sin will always trouble him, but God has implanted new desires within him—desires for purity and righteousness.

Spiritual desires produce an ever-increasing degree of Spirit-led (i.e., godly) behavior in every true Christian. In fact, the characteristic of “being led [morally] by the Spirit of God” is one way in which the Bible *defines* the true Christian (Rom. 8:14).

2. Your righteous desires are overcoming rather than defeated.

Jesus Christ won the ultimate victory over sin when He died on the cross. The Bible tells us that God “condemned sin in the flesh” when He poured out His wrath on His beloved Son (Rom. 8:3). Christ’s

9. An important note about the meaning of “in the flesh”: Christians live in physical bodies—in other words, they live “in the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:3; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:2). But in Romans 7:5 and 8:8–9 we are told that Christians are no longer “in the flesh.” This is not a contradiction or a different meaning of the word “flesh,” but rather a different way of using the word “in.” In Romans 7 and 8, “in the flesh” means “*under the control of the flesh*.” Ephesians 2:3 expresses a similar idea: “We too all formerly lived *in the lusts of our flesh*, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” As Douglas Moo puts it, to be “in the flesh” in this sense is to be “enveloped in,” and hence controlled by, narrowly human, this-worldly principles and values” (Douglas Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed., Gordon D. Fee, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 418).

victory over sin belongs to all who trust in Him. As Paul said, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:56–57).

Your desires for righteousness are overcoming desires. They are the fruit of Christ’s death and resurrection. As Peter said, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24; cf. Rom. 6:1–7; Titus 2:14). When you desire and practice righteousness, you are living out Christ’s victory over sin. On the other hand, your continuing desires for sexual sin are defeated desires, tempting you to invest in a losing cause.

Everyone could understand a man buying stock in a small company with little chance of survival. The financial returns might be phenomenal if the company succeeds. But it would be irrational for a man to invest money in a business that has already failed and is in the economic grave. This, however, is the kind of investment you make when you give in to your defeated desires for sexual sin.

3. Your righteous desires are permanent rather than passing.

If you are a true Christian, you will live forever in “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). Your permanent, eternal desires are for righteousness. Your current desires for sexual sin may seem strong at times, but they are passing desires—only temporary.

Compare your eighty-five-year life on earth (or however many years the Lord gives you) with eternity. Even after fifty trillion years in heaven, it will not be true to say that “forever” is partly over. “Forever” has no parts. Since your experience in heaven will be one of everlasting righteousness with no hint of desire to do evil, why give your time or affection in this indescribably brief life to “the passing pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25)?

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Read Proverbs 5:18–19. Suggest several words or short phrases to describe God's disposition toward your legitimate sexual desires.
2. Read Proverbs 7:6–23. List the numerous ways in which the immoral woman appeals to the young man's fleshly desires.

DESPISE DARKNESS

I recently attended a military graduation where a veteran officer read the text of a radio conversation between an Iranian radar operator and the pilot of an F/A-18 Hornet (the U.S. fighter jet flown by the Blue Angels demonstration team). The Iranian official thought the American jet had strayed into airspace controlled by Iran, so he ordered the American pilot to leave. The American pilot replied that he was over Iraq, not Iran. The Iranian, not convinced, warned that if the American warplane did not leave Iranian airspace immediately, Iranian fighter jets would intercept—to which the American pilot replied confidently, “Send ‘em up. I’ll wait.”

This may have been a case of ill-advised showmanship, but it revealed the pilot’s justifiable confidence in the dominance of the U.S. Air Force over every other air force in the world. I would not want you to become *overconfident*—confident to the point of waiting around for temptation rather than running away from it (1 Cor. 6:18). But you *should* have confidence as you move forward from this point because the battle you are fighting has already been won by Jesus Christ. I will return to this encouraging truth later, but first I need to help you understand what pornography really is.

Imagine a juicy burger on your dinner plate. Now imagine that you know the meat is saturated with *E. coli* bacteria. Would you eat it anyway just because it looks good and would satisfy your hunger? Of course you wouldn’t. Every rational person knows that having a full stomach isn’t worth eighteen hours of vomiting and perhaps a trip to the emergency room. Instead you’ll throw the whole thing in the trash and scour the plate with hot water and strong soap.

Pornography is *E. coli* for your soul.

The purpose of the next three chapters is to reveal the ugliness of sexual sin as one means of helping you hate and avoid it. (Only a fool would go on eating what he knows is making him sick.) Hatred of sin is not all there is to experiencing victory as a Christian, but it is an important part. When a man turns toward the beauty of Christ, he also turns away from the ugliness of sin. The Bible calls this turning around “repentance.”

four

Irrationality 101

When Paul wrote, “No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” (Eph. 5:29), he was reasoning on the basis of the fact that rational people seek their own good, not their own harm. Only those who are not thinking and behaving rationally practice self-destructive behavior.

If you continue in your habit of viewing pornography, you will be a case-study in irrational thought and behavior. You will be harming yourself in the following ways:

By viewing pornography in order to obtain sexual pleasure, you will rob yourself of sexual pleasure.

The common human experience is that focused, concentrated pleasure becomes less intense and less enjoyable when it is diluted through overexposure. The person who grazes throughout the day on snack foods obtains what he feels like he needs at any given moment, but all the while he is reducing the satisfaction he will experience when a proper meal is served. The same principle applies to the married man who grazes on sexual pleasure by viewing pornography (or even by allowing his eyes to wander lustfully in other ways throughout the day). He is robbing himself of the undiluted satisfaction he might otherwise experience with

his wife. Likewise, the teenage boy or unmarried man who views pornography and/or masturbates rather than waiting for God to bring him a wife is already working to dull the pleasure of marital sex.

Sexual sins will torment your conscience.

When a man's conscience is troubled by feelings of guilt related to sins he has committed, the experience can be so unpleasant that it can even cause physical distress. Consider King David's testimony following his sexual sin with Bathsheba:

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat
of summer. (Ps. 32:3–4)

O Lord, rebuke me not in Your wrath,
And chasten me not in Your burning anger.
For Your arrows have sunk deep into me,
And Your hand has pressed down on me.
There is no soundness in my flesh because of
Your indignation;
There is no health in my bones because of my sin.
For my iniquities are gone over my head;
As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.
My wounds grow foul and fester
Because of my folly.
I am bent over and greatly bowed down;
I go mourning all day long.
For my loins are filled with burning,
And there is no soundness in my flesh.
I am benumbed and badly crushed;
I groan because of the agitation of my heart.
(Ps. 38:1–8)

David's oppressive conviction was God's way of drawing him to repentance. By the time God sent Nathan to rebuke David (2 Sam. 12:1–12), he was so broken in spirit because of the Lord's corrective discipline that he repented without hesitation (12:13). He simply

could not bear any longer the feeling of being “pressed down” by the hand of God.

Feelings of guilt or conviction often lead to other harmful consequences. One man may withdraw into isolation and depression. Another may seek relief by focusing attention on the sins of people who are worse than him as he attempts to minimize the seriousness of his own sin. Yet another may become critical of the smallest faults in his wife and children as he attempts to divert his conscience away from his own sin. Sadly, feelings of guilt or conviction may even cause a man to neglect teaching his own children about the dangers of sexual sin. He would feel like a hypocrite, after all, warning them to stay away from the very sin he is practicing.

Viewing pornography today makes you more susceptible to sexual temptation in the months and years to come.

Pornographic images, once viewed, are permanently stored in your brain. Even if you completely stop viewing pornography at some point, images stored in your mind from previous acts of sexual sin will provide ready sources of temptation. These images can reappear in dreams, during times of depression, when you are angry with your wife, when you are tired, or when you are lonely. Even worse, they can reappear when there is no apparent reason at all. What you allow in will always threaten to come out. Therefore, as Paul instructed, “Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

A so-called expert in human sexuality once claimed in my hearing that viewing pornography might have a positive social benefit. She claimed that it can prevent rape in some cases by gratifying a young man’s lust in “harmless” ways. But viewing pornography only partially satisfies a man’s sexual desire. Far from gratifying his lust in harmless ways, it actually makes him more dangerous. It feeds and strengthens sexual lust, creating an ever-growing inclination toward masturbation, premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, or even criminal forms of sexual sin like rape, incest, child abuse, and bestiality. Almost every man who commits the worst forms of sexual sin began with something he thought of as less serious. The man who carefully avoids the sin of viewing pornography is far less

likely to be “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13) to the point of engaging in these worse practices.

How deeply will *you* plunge into sexual sin if you start (or continue) down this immoral road? The fact is, you cannot know.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What harmful effects of viewing pornography would you add to the ones listed in this chapter?
2. Given the irrationality of viewing pornography (and committing other sexual sins), why do you think it will continue to be a temptation for the Christian who has read this chapter?
3. Read Proverbs 7:21–23. Name the various word pictures the writer uses in verses 22–23 to describe a person giving in to sexual temptation. What is the common theme of these word pictures? How do these word pictures relate to the instructions given in verses 1–5 and verse 24?

five

Marriage Poison

Though they work at different speeds, termites and tornados both do serious damage to houses. Pornography has the same effect on marriage, whether suddenly or over the span of many years.

Below are a few reasons why pornography and marriage cannot coexist peacefully. The warnings in this chapter are also for the man who is not yet married but may be some day.

Viewing pornography is adultery.

Viewing pornography is not just a bad habit that can be tolerated in a marriage relationship. Marriage is defined by faithfulness and defiled by unfaithfulness. The married man who views pornography is cheating on his wife just as surely as if he were sleeping with another woman. As Jesus said, “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).¹⁰

10. There is a difference between the mental adultery described in Matthew 5:28 and the kind of adultery that involves sexual intercourse with another person. I would not want to be perceived as saying that both types of adultery are equally devastating to a marriage or equally defiling to the person who commits them. Nevertheless, since Jesus used the same word to describe both sins, we should never deny the seriousness of mental adultery.

Actually, a habit of viewing pornography is more like sleeping with *many* women. The married man who buys a pornographic magazine or logs onto a pornographic website is willing to commit adultery with whatever woman happens to be on the page. He doesn't even care to know her real name in order to have this imaginary relationship with her.

Jesus used the word “adultery” in Matthew 5:28 to refer to a married man's sin, but this doesn't mean single men are exempt. Don't believe the lie that says pornography and/or masturbation are not sinful for the teenage boy or the unmarried man. Paul encouraged singleness as a viable option for people who were otherwise permitted to marry, but he recognized the fact that singleness without self-control results in sexual sin. He therefore gave the following instruction: “But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9). Paul prescribed marriage, not masturbation, as the lawful remedy for sexual desire in single people. As the writer of Hebrews said, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:5).

Viewing pornography is a degrading insult to your wife.

When a married man views pornography, he is saying by his actions that he finds his wife less appealing than the women he views in magazines, in movies, or on the Internet. He may not intend to say this. His wife may be exceedingly beautiful, and he may regularly tell her so. But his actions speak louder than his words.

Consider just how far the husband who views pornography falls from the biblical standard regarding how he should treat his wife:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her. . . . So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church. (Eph. 5:25–29)

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way . . . and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life. (1 Peter 3:7)

Think deeply about the way your sinful habit contrasts with the commands to “love,” “nourish,” “cherish,” and “honor” your wife. When you look at pornography you come far closer to slapping her in the face and calling her ugly.

Nothing compares with the insult and emotional pain a wife feels when she learns that her husband has been looking lustfully at other women.¹¹ She once assumed that he found her more beautiful and desirable than other women, but now she wonders if it was all a lie. Most wives patiently tolerate many character flaws in their husbands, but this defect they simply cannot bear without deep pain. The Christian wife will forgive her repentant husband, but she cannot erase the past from her memory. The pain of betrayal may grow faint, but it will never disappear.

Viewing pornography as a single man will make you more likely to commit adultery as a married man.

Many single men who have been overcome by sexual sin comfort themselves by thinking, “At least this won’t be a problem once I get married.” How wrong you are if you are thinking this way. Marriage will not eliminate your fascination with sexual sin. By viewing pornography, you are actually increasing your desire for sexual sin while fostering a perverted concept of the frequency and nature of sexual gratification.

Habitual premarital sexual immorality is also an indicator of a heart that is unfaithful. Paul’s prescription of marriage for the Christian who was being tempted to fornicate (1 Cor. 7:8–9) does not mean that the habitual fornicator is a true Christian. As Paul said in chapter 6 of the same letter, fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Unmarried Christian ladies beware. If the man you intend to marry professes to be a Christian but has shown a pattern of unwillingness

11. Please read my caution in appendix F before confessing sexual sins to your wife.

to wait for sexual fulfillment until marriage, it is unlikely that he is a true believer. Apart from the grace of God in regeneration, it is also unlikely that his heart will be faithfully yours throughout the marriage.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Read Hebrews 13:4 carefully. What does this verse tell us about God's disposition toward sexual intimacy in marriage? According to this verse, *why* is the marriage bed to be undefiled? What other words might you use in place of "undefiled"?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. Do you think the warning to fornicators and adulterers in this passage applies to the man who practices mental fornication or adultery (Mat. 5:28) but refrains from committing these sins physically? Explain your answer.
3. What are several benefits a single man can enjoy by staying away from pornography?

six

Fool's Vomit

I once heard about a man who spit himself to death. As the story goes, he died while competing in a distance-spitting contest on a bridge. Running toward the railing in order to build up speed, and being a bit drunk, he underestimated his forward momentum and overestimated the ability of the three-foot barrier to stop his six-foot, top-heavy frame. His foolishness was tragically rewarded when he hit the rocks below.

Another foolish fatality story (authentic or not, I don't know) involved a man who was showing his son the proper way to handle snakes. When the rattlesnake he was holding bit his hand, he angrily bit the snake back. Actually, he put the snake's head in his mouth and tried to bite it off, which explains how he died.

Even if these stories are untrue, senseless tragedies do occur. In a well-publicized incident, a man accidentally killed his wife when he shot a bullet through the wall of his own house. Why would he do something so foolish? Investigators determined that he used the gun to punch a hole in the wall for his satellite TV cable, but neglected to first account for the whereabouts of his wife, who was standing outside.

The Foolish Behavior Principle

Anyone can have an accident, but someone who acts foolishly is different in that he is certainly (or at least probably) headed for tragic consequences. Everyone should know better, but not everyone learns before it's too late.

In the Bible, the foolish behavior principle is repeatedly applied to sexual sin. Giving in to sexual temptation seems like a good idea at the time because it powerfully appeals to our fleshly desires. But later there are only negative consequences and regret. That's why the Bible warns us to flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and calls people who engage in it "fools."

Proverbs 6:32 says, "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it." In Proverbs 7, the man who commits sexual sin is once again described as "lacking sense" (7:7). He naively goes to the immoral woman "As an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool" (7:22). "He does not know [even though he should] that it will cost him his life" (7:23). Proverbs 5 sums up the foolishness of sexual sin like this:

For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an
adulteress
And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?
For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord,
And He watches all his paths.
His own iniquities will capture the wicked,
And he will be held with the cords of his sin.
He will die for lack of instruction,
And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.
(Prov. 5:20–23)

The New Testament continues this theme. Paul warned believers to stay away from fornication, among other sins (Eph. 5:5). He then wrote, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15–17). In another place he wrote, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3).

The overarching biblical principle is this: “Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly” (Prov. 26:11).

The Consequences of Playing the Fool

Our society would have you believe the exact opposite about sexual sin—that it is rewarding rather than risky, fulfilling rather than foolish. Mainstream media has dramatized, romanticized, and sanitized sexual sin for public consumption as a means to huge financial profits. Perverted sex plays a starring role in the movies and on TV. It sells music, magazines, make up, clothing, cars, cell phones, shampoo, diet plans, sporting goods, and just about any other product you can think of, to the tune of billions of dollars each year. Immorality is marketed so cleanly and professionally that most consumers have come to see it as normal, desirable, and without serious consequences. Even “decent” people who shake their fingers at prostitution and pornography go right on laughing and lusting at the parade of “respectable” immorality in the media.

Please don't play the fool yourself. It's all a huge lie. Sexual sin is not cool, funny, romantic, or profitable. It is grotesque in God's sight, and it leads to death just as surely as the hand of the butcher leads the ignorant ox to the slaughter. No one who views pornography can ever legitimately claim that he became a better person by checking out a pornographic website. In the end, no one will ever be glad he decided to spend all those hours looking at sexually explicit images. As mentally and physically gratifying as sexual sin seems at the time, the stimulation is temporary and unsatisfying in any meaningful or permanent way. The end result is always regret and remorse because of the bitter consequences in this life, the suffering of hell for eternity, or both.

Ask yourself what Paul asked the believers in Rome: “What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death” (Rom. 6:21). Sexual sin provides no benefit, only pain and sorrow.

Surely the fish frying in the skillet would have refused the bait had he known about the hook.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why do you think the foolishness of sexual sin is emphasized so strongly in the Bible?
2. Read Proverbs 26:11 and then 2 Peter 2:20–22 (also see Heb. 3:12–14). Based on these passages, what is the greatest danger of returning to sexual sin after professing faith in Christ?
3. How might what you learned in this chapter help guide you as to what you should or should not watch on TV or in the movie theater?

ACKNOWLEDGE DELIVERANCE

Whether you have been a Christian for three months or thirty years, deliverance from sin is not something that is happening to you or might happen to you some day. It *has* happened to you. This deliverance is described in the Bible with two words: justification and regeneration.

Even if this is the first time you have heard the word “justification,” you probably know what it means. It means that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin when He was crucified (1 Pet. 2:24). It means that when you first believed from a repentant heart, God applied Christ’s payment for sin to your account, proving Himself to be “just [by punishing sin as sin deserves] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). It means that good behavior could never make you any more acceptable to God than you already are (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16, 21). It means that through faith *alone* you are fully reconciled to God, standing rock solid in His grace (Rom. 5:1–2).

Justification delivered you from sin’s penalty.

Regeneration delivered you from sin’s power.

I said earlier that I would explain regeneration more fully, and we have arrived at that point. You once had a wicked heart and a corrupt nature, but God made you a new man—a righteous man with a pure heart and a good nature. You once were sin’s slave because of your inner corruption and fleshly desires, but now, having been re-created by God, you are mastered by your love for Christ and your desire to do His will.

seven

New Creation

Getting the old you to look at pornography was as easy as getting a hungry dog to devour a juicy piece of meat.

Don't misunderstand—I'm sure you resisted sexual temptation sometimes (maybe even most of the time) because of social concerns or religious expectations. Perhaps you wanted to avoid offending your parents or your wife. Maybe you knew it would set a bad example for your children. You may have even restrained yourself because your conscience told you God was watching. This only proved that you were like a well-trained dog.

Dogs love bacon, but my dog has been trained to hold a piece of this savory meat between his front teeth and to wait until I say "OK" before eating it. The trick is obviously difficult. His strong desire for the meat makes him tremble with anticipation. Sometimes his tongue even begins to explore the bacon ahead of time. But he waits obediently, and as he grows more and more accustomed to performing as we expect, he is willing to wait longer and longer. "Good boy!" we always say. But even though he is well-trained, his desire for the meat is unchanged. He is only waiting for permission to do what his dog nature longs to do. When all external restraints are removed, his strongest desire determines his behavior and the meat disappears quickly.

Everyone knows that this is the way things are with dogs, but it is also the way things are with unregenerate people like the old you. When you restrained yourself from sinning, it was only because you lacked permission. Your response to external restraints may have made you look good on the outside, but the outward appearance of righteousness did nothing to please God or to solve your problem. As Paul said to the Colossians, external restraints “have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*” (Col. 2:23).

The Old You Was Enslaved by Desire

As an unbeliever you gratified your desires for sexual sin whenever outside restraints were not strong enough to hold you back. Paul speaks about this in Romans 6, reminding Christians what they were before regeneration:

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. . . . For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (Rom. 6:17–20)

Slavery to sin was not just sometimes your condition as a non-Christian. You were always a slave of sin, even when your behavior appeared outwardly righteous. Romans 6 is not the only place where the Bible says so. Paul said this in his letter to Titus: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures” (Titus 3:3). Paul didn’t use the word “slavery” in Ephesians 2, but he described the same bondage:

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph. 2:3)

The old you was a slave of sin, held captive by fleshly desires. The Bible could not have said this any more clearly.

But the Old You Is Dead

Now that you are a Christian you are no longer like a well-trained dog, refraining from sinning only because you lack permission. Your behavior has changed and is continuing to improve, but not solely because of external restraints. The pattern of your life is different because your desires are different, and your desires are different because *you* are different. You are not the same person you once were. That man ceased to exist the moment you became a Christian.¹² Pay attention to the death terminology in the following passages, and remember that what Paul says in each passage is true of you, the believer:

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. (Rom. 6:5–7)

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (2 Cor. 5:14–15)

I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1–3)

These are obviously not references to your physical death, because as you read this page your heart is still pumping blood through

12. See appendix E for further discussion of what the Bible says about your “old self.”

your body and your lungs are still filling with air. But they do refer to a *real* death—the end of existence for one person and the beginning of existence for another.

You Are a New Creation

Even though you are the same as you always were physically, you have a completely new identity as a Christian, one that is defined on a spiritual level. You look like the person you once were, but you are not him. This is why Paul can say what he says in 2 Corinthians 5:

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;¹³ the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Cor. 5:16–17)

Your physical body is only a temporary dwelling place for the real, eternal, newly created you who will live forever in paradise with Christ. As Paul said, “while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6). His own preference was “to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). Peter spoke of his own impending death as “the laying aside of my earthly dwelling” (2 Pet. 1:14). I will speak more in chapter 9 and appendix C about the relationship between you and the mortal body you temporarily inhabit, but it is important that you begin thinking of the real you—the person who will exist long after your mortal body is dead and in the grave.

You Are No Longer of This World

Christians live on earth physically, but spiritually they are citizens of heaven. As Paul said, God “raised us up with [Christ], and seated us with Him in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6). He “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

13. Or, “there is a new creation.” It is possible that Paul is not focusing specifically on the individual Christian’s new nature and identity, but on the fact that in Christ *all* things are made new. If this is correct, the “new creation” is not exclusively a reference to what the individual Christian *becomes*, but to what he becomes *a part of*. Even so, to be *part of* a new creation is to *be* a new creation.

It was this reality that enabled Paul to correct an error among the Colossians. He addressed them by asking why they were behaving “as if you were living in the world” (Col. 2:20). “*As if* you were living in the world”? What an amazing statement. Christians move among and interact with the people of this world (John 17:15). But as Jesus said of believers, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16; cf. 15:19).

Imagine that you died and went to heaven, then later came back to the earth for a brief visit. Would you have any interest in trifling with pornography after experiencing the beauty and purity of heaven? Of course you wouldn’t. Now stop imagining and start enjoying, because your new existence and citizenship *is* heavenly. As Paul said, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:2–3).

Always remember these four things about yourself:

- The old you was enslaved by desire.
- But the old you is dead.
- You are a new creation.
- You are no longer of this world.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Notice that I have not said, “If you do something your old self *will be* dead,” but rather, “Your old self *is* dead.” What is the difference between these two statements? What benefit does one have over the other?
2. Read Colossians 3:1–11. What facts are stated in this passage? What commands are given? What is the relationship between the facts and the commands?

eight

Obedient from the Heart

Just as children resemble their earthly fathers physically, Christians resemble their heavenly Father morally and spiritually. Paul described your new self as that which, “in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24). Peter described Christians as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9). God’s children “are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10).

Christians are not defined by a corrupt nature as they were before regeneration. They are now “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). John described Christians as those who have been “born of God” and whose behavior imitates the character of their heavenly Father:

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin [i.e., as a matter of practice] because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:9–10)

Your new identity as God's child is in one sense like adoption, but being God's child involves much more than a legal decree. You have been re-created in His likeness. You were born in the likeness of sinful Adam, but then you were born *again* in the likeness of our holy God.

You Have a Pure Heart

In regeneration you were given a heart that fits the psalmist's description of the man who may enter into God's presence:

Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?
And who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart. . . . (Ps. 24:3–4)

Jesus said the same thing about those who will enter into God's presence: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Like the psalmist, Jesus was describing the true believer—the regenerate man.

Good Fruit Comes from Good Trees

If you wanted to grow and harvest grapes, would you plant thorn bushes? You wouldn't make much money as a farmer if you did.

Each time Jesus used this illustration in His teaching (Matt. 7:15–20; 12:33–35; Luke 6:43–45), His point was to show the difference between the nature of the good man and the nature of the evil man. Just as grape vines produce grapes and thorn bushes produce thorns, the good man produces righteousness and the evil man produces sin. Following this illustration in Luke 6 He said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil" (Luke 6:45).

From this we learn something important—something that might be different than what you have been taught before: not every person should be classified as "evil."¹⁴ Some people are evil "by nature" while others are "good" by nature.

14. See appendix B for a discussion of Matthew 7:11 where Jesus refers to His listeners as "evil."

Jesus tells us who these good people are in Luke 8:15. They are true Christians—“the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.” They were born the first time with the same corrupt human nature as every other person, but then they were “born again” (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). They were given new hearts and good natures when God gave them spiritual life.

This is regeneration. God changes human “thorn bushes” into human “grape vines.” Because of this work of God in transforming their nature, Christians no longer produce the “thorns” of sin like they did when they were unbelievers. Now they produce the “grapes” of righteousness—that is, they believe the truth, love Jesus Christ, and do God’s will.¹⁵

You Have Been Delivered by Desire

Paul does not use the term “regeneration” in his letter to the Romans, but he clearly wants us to think of it in Romans 6:17–18:

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Believers “were slaves of sin,” but they have “been freed from sin.” More than that, they have become “slaves of righteousness.” This leaves just one question: what causes a man to end his old devotion to sinning and establish a new devotion to practicing righteousness? The answer is found in the phrase Paul inserts between former slavery and present freedom: “You became obedient from the heart.” God’s creation of a new heart caused a change of desires, which in turn caused a change of masters.

Tom Schreiner, in his commentary on Romans, helpfully explains the meaning of this phrase, “you became obedient from the heart”:

People do not submit to sin against their will. Rather, they “freely” and spontaneously choose to sin. In other words,

15. See appendix D for further discussion about the relationship between nature and behavior.

unbelievers are slaves to sin in that they always desire to carry out the dictates of their master. This does not mean that those with addictions (e.g., to alcohol, pornography, or gambling) never wish to be freed. It means that the desire for these things is ultimately greater than the desire to be freed from them. Sinning is what they want to do. Only God, therefore, can release them from such subjection, for new desires are necessary to escape the bondage of sin. Of course, this is precisely what God has done. He has liberated them from the tyranny of sin so that they “have become obedient from the heart” to the gospel. He has planted new desires within them.¹⁶

People are enslaved by what they want most. What you formerly wanted most was sin, but now that God has changed you on the inside, what you want more than anything is to do His will. The good nature He has created in you is producing the good fruit of righteous behavior. It has happened to you just as God promised in the Old Testament:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

As you know all too well, Christians can and do sin. But when sinful behavior erupts from a righteous man like you—a man who has become “obedient from the heart”—we must consider the source of that sin to be something other than his regenerate heart.¹⁷

The source of sin in a Christian—that is the subject of the next chapter.

16. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Romans,” *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed., Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 337.

17. See appendix B for a discussion of Jeremiah 17:9 and Mark 7:20–23 (with its parallel in Matthew 15:15–20), passages that are often thought to prove that the regenerate heart is a source of evil.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Read Luke 8:4–15 carefully and answer the following questions:

- In this parable what is the seed?
- What do the four kinds of soil represent?
- What word does Jesus use to describe the fourth kind of soil?
- When He explains the meaning of the parable in verses 11–15, what two words does He use to describe the heart of the person who is illustrated by the good soil?
- What does this parable tell us about the difference between the heart of a Christian and the heart of an unbeliever?

2. Read 1 John 3:7–10. Do you think other Christians would describe your practice of righteousness as “obvious”? How would the non-Christians you associate with describe your pattern of behavior?

nine

Body Language

In some ways the Christian is like the proverbial chicken with its head chopped off. Because of muscle and nerve memory, the bird's body continues flapping its wings and running around for some time even though detached from the control center that formerly commanded those movements. When I once cut the head off of a very large snake, the headless body continued moving like a snake. Even the detached head kept opening and closing its mouth as if it were trying to bite something.

Beheaded chickens and snakes are dead, but their bodies, which are accustomed to making certain movements, continue acting as though they were still alive. Likewise (though there is not an exact parallel), the old you has died, but because your unredeemed body is physically, mentally, and emotionally accustomed to sinning, you still have the desire to act like you did when the old you was alive.

One Christian writer described the corrupt pre-programming of his unredeemed body this way: "Countless automatic, chain reaction thought patterns have already been computerized away in my brain, ready for instant recall."¹⁸ Whether these "chain-reaction thought patterns" draw you toward sexual sin, drunkenness, greed,

18. David Needham, *Birthright* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1978), 126.

or selfishness, your regenerate heart is not the source of the sin. The culprit is your unredeemed body—your flesh.¹⁹

At this point I should remind you again that when I write about the Christian's body, I mean his whole physical being: his brain, which receives and stores information and produces thoughts, desires, and emotions; the glands and organs that produce the chemicals and hormones that affect other parts of his body in various ways; his eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers, skin, nerves, and muscles, all of which detect, transmit, and/or respond to physical sensations that influence decisions and behavior. The body is all of these things operating together as a unit, and all in imperfect ways as a result of Adam's sin. Your new heart is pure and inclined toward righteousness, but your body is still subject to the lure of sin. It is "the place where sin tries to reign or gain a foothold."²⁰

You Are More Than a Body

The human body can be scientifically analyzed in an attempt to understand why people do what they do, but there is a spiritual aspect to the Christian that is beyond scientific examination. If you are a Christian, you are more than a body. God has created a completely new identity that cannot be seen or analyzed by scientific methods, and it is this new spiritual you that tells your brain how to think and how to direct the other members of your body to act. If this were not the case, you would still be a slave to your body's lusts, but the Bible assures us that you are no longer enslaved in this way. Physical corruption still influences you, but you have a new spiritual control center—a new heart—created, equipped, and directed by the Spirit of God.²¹ Three passages in Romans 6 and 8 are particularly helpful in revealing your relationship to your unredeemed body with its lusts.

19. Despite the weakness of the flesh, it is never appropriate for a Christian to blame his body for the sins he commits while considering his new self exempt from responsibility. The Christian is one whole person with one will. For more on this see appendix C.

20. Charles Leiter, e-mail message to author, March 1, 2009, quoted by permission.

21. It is appropriate to describe the unregenerate heart as the "spiritual control center" of the non-Christian, but it is a spiritual part of him that is morally dead from birth as a descendant of Adam (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12–21). As Paul said, all people are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; cf. Col. 2:13) until God makes them "alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5; cf. Col. 2:13).

Romans 6:12–13**Your body is your subject, not your master.**

As an unbeliever you were given over to obey your body's sinful passions (Rom. 1:26). You were "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3). You were living "in the lusts of [your] flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3). You were voluntarily practicing "every kind of impurity with greediness" (Eph. 4:19). But your body is no longer in control. *You are.*²²

Based on your spiritual connection with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–11), Paul gives you three commands in Romans 6:12–13:

1. Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.
2. Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.
3. Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Paul exhorted the Roman Christians like this because for them, the power of sin had been broken. They had been given the ability and authority to stop using their bodies as tools for sinning, and to start using them as "instruments of righteousness" (6:13). As a man who has been born again, you are like them. Because of your new desire and ability to govern your body properly, you too can carry out God's will.

Romans 8:12–13**You are putting to death the deeds of your body.**

Christians are not playing tug-of-war with their sinful passions. They are routing them out of their hiding places and killing them.

22. Just to be clear, your body does not have a separate identity or a will of its own. When we speak as if the body has a separate will, we are simply illustrating the source of the Christian's sinful desires, and we are following a biblical model. In Romans 6:12 believers are told not to obey the body with its lusts for sin, and in 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul speaks of disciplining his body and making it his slave.

Paul commands Christians to do this in Colossians 3:5:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col. 3:5, ESV)

In Romans 8:13 Paul uses similar “put to death” language, but this time he is describing the Christian rather than exhorting him:

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:12–13)

Romans 8:1–14 is not a list of things Christians are supposed to do. It is a portrait of the Christian’s new nature, and of the behavior that characterizes every true believer as a result of the Holy Spirit’s presence and influence. In this passage Christians are described as follows:

- **They are regenerate.** That is, they “are according to the Spirit” rather than “according to the flesh” (Rom. 8:5).
- **They live by faith and desire righteousness.** That is, they set their minds on “the things of the Spirit” rather than on “the things of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5).
- **They are under the influence of God’s Spirit rather than the influence of sin.** That is, they are people who “are being led [morally] by the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:14) rather than “living according to the flesh” (Rom. 8:13).
- **They are killing sin.** That is, they are people who, “by the Spirit,” are “putting to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13).

Romans 8:13 doesn’t tell Christians to “put to death” the deeds of their body. Instead it informs them that true Christians are already doing so. If you are a true Christian, you are “putting to death the deeds of the body” by the power of God’s Spirit.

Your relationship to sin is like the relationship you would have with a deposed dictator who has been overthrown, locked in prison, and condemned to death. He once ruled over you, but a new conquering authority has defeated him and has set you free. Likewise, “the law of the Spirit of life [i.e., the Holy Spirit] has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2, ESV). Sin continues to exert its influence through your fleshly desires, but exerting influence is not the same as possessing authority. Sin has no more prospect of ultimate victory than a condemned man who struggles all the way to the gallows. He will bite you, stomp on your toes, and kick you in the shins on the way there, but he won’t avoid his hanging.

Romans 8:23

You are anticipating the redemption of your body.

Paul encourages Christians later in Romans 8 by assuring them that the body they struggle with now will one day be radically transformed:

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15:50–57)

The Spirit of God dwelling in us is a down payment on what we will be given later (cf. Eph. 1:13–14). Because of His presence and work we have a new heart with a new nature, and we are free from slavery to sin. The Spirit’s presence also assures us that we are heirs of the kingdom of God. The one thing we lack is a body that *will not* be subject to the influence of sin and the temptations of the devil—a body that *will* be capable of enjoying the unimaginable pleasures of our future life.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. In what specific ways does it encourage you to know that your body is the only part of you that remains unredeemed?

2. Read Galatians 5:24 and 6:14.

- What do you think Paul meant by “crucified the flesh” in Galatians 5:24?
- Would you say Paul gives the word “crucified” the same basic meaning in 5:24 and 6:14? Why or why not?
- Galatians 5:24 sometimes leads Christians to believe that it is abnormal for them to have sinful passions or desires. Do you think Paul intended for his readers to draw such a conclusion? Why or why not?

3. How might “automatic, chain-reaction thought patterns” tempt you to commit sexual sins? How about sins that are not sexually motivated?

ten

The High Calling of Being Yourself

You are not a spiritual schizophrenic. You don't have two hearts or a heart that is partially good and partially evil. You are no longer governed by a heart that is corrupt, or even partially corrupt. You are governed by an altogether new heart. The biblical foundation for saying this is the fact that your old heart has not merely been added to, modified, improved, or softened. It has been replaced. That was what God promised His people when He said, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). Jesus Himself called the Christian's heart "pure" and "honest and good" (Matt. 5:8; Luke 8:15).

You also have just one nature, not two. Your battle against sexual sin is not a fight against a "sin nature" that dwells alongside your regenerate nature. It is a fight against your fleshly desires and against the tempter (Satan) who works in deceitful ways to entice you to give in to your fleshly desires. Because of regeneration you are a completely new creation with a completely new (and good) nature.

The Influence of Unflattering, Unbiblical Language

Charles Spurgeon was a pastor in London in the nineteenth century. His sermons, books, and devotional writings are still in print and are well worth reading. The following is Spurgeon's outstanding summary of what the Bible says about the Christian's nature.

In the spirit of humility, we should recognize the true dignity of our reborn nature and then live up to it. What is a Christian? If you compare him with a king, he adds priestly sanctity to royal dignity. The king's royalty is often seen only in his crown. But with a Christian, it is infused into his inmost nature. He is as much above other men through his new birth as the man is above the beast. Surely he ought to conduct himself in all his dealings as one who is not of this world, but chosen and distinguished by sovereign grace. Therefore he cannot live in the same way as the world's citizens. Let the dignity of your nature and the brightness of your future constrain you to cling to holiness and to avoid every appearance of evil.²³

In another place, however, Spurgeon spoke of the Christian's nature in a decidedly different way. Referring to himself as a Christian he wrote this:

[I have] to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted, debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me.²⁴

Spurgeon's unflattering description of his own nature as a Christian was undoubtedly intended to reflect the reality that even as a

23. Charles Spurgeon, *Evening by Evening* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 127.

24. Charles Spurgeon, "One Aspect of Christ's Death," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 52, 1906, p. 293, found in *The Ages Digital Library Sermons*, Albany, OR, USA, 1997. Sermon #2986, preached on Oct. 14, 1875.
http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-9/LIBRARY/SPR_SR52.PDF.

regenerate man he was troubled by fleshly desires.²⁵ His theological point was correct: because of the influence of their unredeemed bodies, Christians not only are capable of sinning, they do sin, sometimes in terrible ways. Nevertheless, he erred when he used unbiblical terms to describe this biblical reality. His “polluted, debased, depraved nature” language simply has no basis in Scripture with reference to the Christian.²⁶

We should appreciate the overall contributions of many fine teachers like Charles Spurgeon—men who have described the believer’s heart and nature in negative ways when wrestling with the reality that regenerate people sin. But we should also admit that these unbiblical descriptions of the believer’s heart and nature, though well-intended, have often served to downplay the greatest spiritual difference between believers and unbelievers: believers have been born again, unbelievers have not.

The Christian Is a “Not Guilty New Creation”

I am not merely concerned about the technicality of using the right words. I am concerned about the influence of the words we use. By using degrading language to describe the Christian, many otherwise excellent teachers not only have strayed from the consistent emphasis of the New Testament, but have also persuaded regenerate people to think of themselves as nothing more than justified sinners—filthy by nature yet forgiven. How much more encouraged the Christian would be in his battle against sexual sin if he learned to think of himself as he really is:

- justified *and* regenerate or “born again” (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23)
- God’s spiritual workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10)

25. The author’s opinion is that a person only has one nature, either good or evil (cf. Matt. 7:15–20; 12:33–35; Luke 6:43–45). Many teachers, however, define the Christian’s flesh as his unredeemed human “nature” or “sin nature,” while acknowledging the newness and goodness of the spiritual nature created by God in regeneration. In other words, they say the Christian has two natures, one evil and one good. See appendix D for more on the Christian’s nature and the best terminology to use when describing it.

26. See appendix B for a discussion of Jeremiah 17:9 and Mark 7:21–23.

- “a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17)
- a partaker of “the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4)
- created “in the likeness of God . . . in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24)
- a “saint” or “holy one” (Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:1–2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 2:19; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2, 26; Rev. 14:12; 19:8; etc.)
- “not of the world, even as [Christ is] not of the world” (John 17:16; cf. 15:19)
- “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8)
- “obedient from the heart” (Rom. 6:17)
- an obedient child of God (1 Pet. 1:14; cf. 1 John 3:1–2, 9–10)
- “full of goodness” (Rom. 15:14)
- a “good man” (Matt. 12:35; Luke 6:45)
- a man with “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15)

Christians have been justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) even though they have not completely been removed from sin’s influence. These two factors (justification plus the continuing ability to sin) are what generate the common labels “justified sinners” and “sinners saved by grace.” There is precious truth contained in these labels because no Christian is without sin and all are dependent upon God’s grace in Christ. But to claim that either label fully describes the Christian is to overlook what God has done inside of the Christian. The Christian is more than just not guilty. He is a not guilty new creation.

What If I Told You to Harvest Grapes from a Thorn Bush?

If you are still corrupt by nature, as many well-meaning Christians say you are, then by encouraging you to stop viewing pornography

they are asking you to do something that is contrary to your nature. They are saying in effect, “Though you are polluted, debased, and depraved by nature, as a follower of Christ you must maintain a consistent pattern of sexual purity.” In other words, “You must produce behavior that is uncharacteristic of what you really are.” This not only sounds impossible, but also contradicts what Jesus said about grapes not coming from thorn bushes and figs not coming from thistles (Matt. 7:16). A bad tree cannot produce good fruit (Matt. 7:18).²⁷

The reason for the unregenerate man’s inability to obey God is the downward drag of his sinful heart and nature. He cannot elevate his desires above what he really is. If your heart is still corrupt even though you have been born again—if “bad” is what you are by nature—then why should you expect to produce a harvest of goodness? Why should you not instead expect yourself to go on sinning habitually? Consider an illustration from author Tom Wells on this point:

Tell a healthy man that he is nearly dead. Then have someone else—a doctor, an expert on sickness—tell him the same thing. Have the diagnosis confirmed by a specialist. Would you be surprised if the man began to feel ill? Would you be amazed if he began to think that his prospects were not good? What else could he think? How else could he feel?²⁸

The Christian can fall into a similar trap. Respected Christian leaders tell him that his heart is corrupt, or that he is still corrupt by nature. Because he often feels corrupt due to the influence of his flesh, he takes every sinful thought as fresh evidence that what he has been taught is true—that he is still characterized (at least in part) by a “sin nature.” Naturally he begins to expect his behavior

27. Jesus used the “bad tree/good fruit” illustration to refer specifically to false prophets (Matt. 7:15–20), but the principle itself is universal, illustrating the difference between *all* unbelievers and *all* believers. In Luke 6:43–45 Jesus used the same illustration to refer to believers and unbelievers in general. See appendix D for more on the relationship between nature and behavior.

28. Tom Wells, *Christian Take Heart* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 68.

to reflect this “sin nature,” and since sinful behavior is what he expects, it is what he often settles for.²⁹

Be Righteous by Being Yourself

Henrietta (Hetty) Green was one of the wealthiest women of the early twentieth century. She received an inheritance of \$10 million, and by the time she died in 1916 she had grown her fortune to \$100 million (somewhere around \$1.5 billion in today’s economy). Sadly, Hetty was also a miser. Though financially she was able to maintain a comfortable and generous lifestyle, she greedily clung to her money, consigning herself to a life of poverty and living in cheap boarding houses in New York City. When her son injured his leg, she chose to treat the wound herself rather than spend money for medical care. After two years, when the injury still had not healed, she sought free medical treatment, which the doctor refused when he learned who she was and knew she had the ability to pay. Eventually, because of her unwillingness to part with the paltry sum of money for his treatment, her son’s leg had to be amputated.

Hetty Green somehow became convinced that hoarding money was better than spending it wisely. Her bizarre and tragic behavior resulted from this faulty perception of reality. You may not be a miser, but you will be like her in other ways if you go on ordering your life around a faulty or incomplete understanding of who you are in Christ.

Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). Eleven chapters of biblical instruction preceded this exhortation, and I would not want to oversimplify the connection of this verse with the rest of Romans. But whatever behavior Paul’s statement refers to specifically, he was unarguably describing the relationship between thinking and behavior: by learning to think according to the truth, you will begin to act in ways that correspond to God’s will. The truth is this:

29. Romans 7:14–25, when wrongly understood and/or applied, leads many professing Christians to accept patterns of habitual sin as part of the ordinary Christian experience. For more on the meaning and proper application of this passage see the author’s article entitled “The Conviction of Fleshly Man: Why Romans 7:14–25 Cannot Describe the Christian Life,” at www.CCWtoday.org.

- You have been delivered from sin's penalty *and* you have been delivered from slavery to your fleshly lusts.
- The old you no longer exists. You are a completely new person, created by God in righteousness and holiness.
- You live in an unredeemed body and often experience strong desires for sexual sin, but this does not prove that you are compelled to sin, or that you are evil, bad, or corrupt by nature.

The biblical realities summarized in this chapter are powerful spiritual weapons. In the mind of a regenerate man they represent an arsenal of encouraging ammunition, supplied by the Holy Spirit through the writers of the New Testament, for waging an effective battle against sexual sin. If by God's grace you use these truths to renew your mind, you will come to understand and enjoy your new identity in Christ, and you will begin to act consistently like the righteous man you really are. You will learn to be righteous by being yourself.

On the other hand, if you go on thinking of yourself as being forgiven but still filthy, pardoned but still governed by a corrupt heart or a "sin nature," you will be inclined to go on acting like the slave you are not.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why do you think many teachers choose to describe the believer's heart as corrupt or deceitful? What benefit do you think they hope Christians will gain by thinking of themselves as having a "sin nature"?
2. How can a Christian maintain a proper sense of humility while at the same time acknowledging his deliverance from sin and the goodness of his regenerate heart and nature?
3. How does the message of this chapter differ from what psychologists and some religious teachers might call "the power of positive thinking"? (Consider this question in light of John 8:31–38.)

elev

It Only Works by Faith

A race car engine is a well-machined but powerless piece of metal. It was designed to depend upon the explosive power of racing fuel and the skill of a trained driver for its proper functioning. Likewise, you have been re-created spiritually in the likeness of God, but you were designed to resist sexual temptation by depending on the power and wisdom of the One who created you.

Analyzing Peter's Moral Train Wreck

Peter voiced his confidence that he would follow Christ even to death if necessary (Mark 14:27–31). Later that night, when Peter had the opportunity to ask God for strength to resist the temptation to deny His Lord, he fell asleep. Jesus found him and said, “Simon [Peter], are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?” (Mark 14:37). Then Jesus said something that should have gotten Peter's attention: “Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).

When Jesus said, “The spirit is willing,” He was referring to Peter's willingness to obey—his good intentions. Even with good intentions and strong personal resolve, Peter was hampered by the weakness of his flesh. On his own, he could not and would not avoid his infamous denial of Christ.

You probably know what happened later that night: Peter was hauled away by four masked men armed with huge swords who threatened to chop off his head if he didn't renounce his loyalty to Christ. . . . OK, so that's not exactly the way it happened. Peter was confronted by a servant girl, twice, and then by a few bystanders who suspected that he had been with Jesus. No armed men, no threats of beheading, and yet Peter did exactly what Jesus said he would do, what he himself never thought possible: he denied Jesus three times in pathetic weakness. And then, when the rooster crowed, he wept (Mark 14:66–72).

Peter was overconfident and he lacked spiritual discernment. He thought he was strong enough and wise enough, but because he misunderstood his own weakness he was unprepared when the temptation came. Perhaps he would have stood firm if he had been approached by men armed with swords, so the devil sent a curious servant girl instead, along with a few nameless bystanders who were probably more interested in gossip than persecution. Faced with these “dangerous foes,” Peter collapsed into sin.

The Schemes of the Devil

When you sin, you cannot blame another person, or God, or even the devil himself. You are to blame, and your physical body is the place in you where sin operates. But there is another influence—a spiritual enemy who draws believers toward sin. I am referring to Satan, who is also called the devil (Matt. 4:1; Eph. 6:11; 1 Pet. 5:8), the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5), and the adversary of believers (1 Pet. 5:8).

Satan rules over unbelievers. He has blinded them spiritually so that they cannot see the glory of Christ or believe the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). He holds them captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). They are slaves of their own fleshly lusts, and also of the devil who uses their lusts to hold them in bondage. Addictions to pornography, alcohol, or gambling may even be the result of demon possession in some unbelievers.

Satan possesses no authority over believers. The Holy Spirit now rules in their hearts, producing affection for Christ and the desire to obey Him. Even so, because of the Christian's bodily passions,

the devil represents a dangerous influence. The following words were written to believers:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:11)

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pet. 5:8)

World War II soldiers talked about fighting Hitler when they were actually describing their struggle against German soldiers under his command. Likewise, the writers of Scripture often spoke of the devil himself being the threat when the believer's usual contact is with one of the many demons under the devil's control. As Paul said, we struggle against "the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

It is probably impossible to pinpoint the devil's exact abilities and tactics, but he works in at least two ways to tempt believers to sin:

1. Satan tempts through false teaching.

False teachers are Satan's servants. Jesus called Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Paul warned Timothy that "in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

Peter warns us to expect that false teachers will introduce "destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1), going on to say that as a result of their teaching "many will follow their sensuality" (2:2). "Sensuality" may not refer exclusively to sexual sin, but it is clear that Peter was concerned about false doctrines that permitted or promoted fleshly living of some sort. These false teachers will "entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error" (2:18).

The Bible rejects any doctrine that promotes or permits sexual sin, assuring us that "immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Eph. 5:3).

“Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, . . . nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, . . . will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Some of Satan’s most energetic false teachers abuse the Bible in a different way. Rather than misinterpreting or glossing over individual passages that forbid sexual immorality, they strike directly at the root by tempting people to doubt the authority and accuracy of the Bible. A growing number of professing Christians are being told by these scholarly pawns of the devil that because of centuries of translation errors, scribal additions, and other factors, the Bible we now read is not a reliable or complete record of the words of God.³⁰ Then, once a person begins to *doubt* the Bible, it is much easier for him to *disobey* the Bible.

As with every other form of Satanic attack, your only sure defense against this onslaught is “the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16).

2. Satan tempts believers by sending his captives to do his will.

The Bible doesn’t tell us explicitly that the servant girl was sent by Satan to tempt Peter, but we do know that Satan has the ability to send people in this way. There is no doubt that Satan influenced Judas to betray Christ (Luke 22:3–4), and we know that many other people are held captive by him “to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26).

Another glimpse into Satan’s influence over humans is found in the book of Job. God permitted Satan to afflict Job when He said, “All that [Job] has is in your power” (Job 1:12). How did Satan choose to exercise the power God had given him? First he stirred up (or you might say he sent) the Sabeans to steal Job’s oxen and donkeys and to murder his servants (1:13–15). Then he stirred up (or sent) the Chaldeans to steal his camels and murder more of his servants (Job 1:17). The Bible does not use the terms “stirred up” or “sent,” but these evil people were not merely obeying their own impulses. They were doing Satan’s bidding.

30. To learn more about the way false teachers misrepresent the facts in their attempts to cause people to doubt the Bible, see the author’s review of Bart Ehrman’s book, *Misquoting Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), at www.CCWtoday.org.

How did Satan stir up these evil people to do these evil deeds? Did he whisper in someone's ear? Did he implant evil thoughts into their minds? We are not told *how* he did it, just *that* he did it. And if he was able to send these people to do his will, why could he not send a servant girl to tempt Peter, or a seductress like the one described in Proverbs 7? Most importantly, why could he not send someone to lure you into sexual sin?

You won't see Satan opening a cage and sending a human captive on a mission. Most people who do his bidding aren't even aware that they are carrying out his will (just as the Sabeans and Chaldeans were ignorant of the fact that Satan was using them to afflict Job). But the reality is the same: Satan uses human pawns to tempt believers.

It Only Works by Faith

You are not strong enough to resist your fleshly sexual desires on your own, or wise enough to avoid Satan's schemes. As the psalmist said, "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

Given this unseen spiritual danger coupled with the weakness of your flesh, will you be self-dependent like Peter? Will you go to sleep tonight without asking God to guard you from Satan's devices and give you victory over your sinful passions? What about tomorrow morning before you go to work, and tomorrow evening before you go online to pay your bills, and the next day, and the next? Will you try to guard yourself against sexual sin by your own strength and wisdom, independent of God? If so, you will sin. The Christian life only works by faith.

The same Paul who spoke highly of the Christian's new self also spoke reverently of God's power and wisdom working in the Christian to bring about obedience to His will. God is the one "who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). It is "by the Spirit" that you are "putting to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13).

Paul described his own conscious dependence upon God by saying, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). Later in the same letter when he said to the Galatians, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (5:16), he meant essentially the same thing. To “walk by the Spirit” is to live in conscious dependence upon the Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9), to “walk by the Spirit” is yet another way of saying “live by faith in Christ.” If you will live in conscious dependence upon the Spirit of Christ rather than by mere effort, you will find yourself exercising the self-control that the Spirit produces in every Christian (Gal. 5:22), and “you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (5:16).

If you hope to avoid committing a Peter-like blunder the next time you face sexual temptation, you would do well to meditate on what Jesus said to His disciples before entering the garden that night, just hours before Peter’s infamous denial: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5).

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–13. What lessons should we learn about dependence on God from verse 11? How would you summarize the point of verse 12? Verse 13 says God will always provide “the way of escape” from temptation. What ways of escape are implied in this passage?
2. Name at least three ways in which other Christians can help you depend on God.
3. How do you intend to begin demonstrating your dependence on God? Please be specific. It would be profitable for you to write out your intentions and commitments, or even to share them with another Christian who will hold you accountable.

EXPERIENCE FREEDOM

The Allied invasion of Europe began on June 6, 1944, and culminated in the defeat of Nazi Germany in May of 1945. The overall effort involved four basic and interrelated elements of military strategy:

- Sufficient troops, ships, planes, vehicles, guns, ammunition, fuel, food, and medicine to launch and sustain the invasion
- A reliable way of getting those resources to the front lines
- The effective deployment of resources at the point of attack
- The desire to win

Similarly, four interrelated elements of the Christian life, strategically combined and deployed by the Spirit of God who is at work in you, are facilitating your experience of deliverance from sexual sin:

- An arsenal of biblical truth
- A reliable way of getting those resources to the front lines of the battle in your mind
- The effective deployment of truth at the point of attack
- The desire to win

twelve

The Weapon That Works

We are back in the park now, listening to the continuing conversation between Nick and John. Here's where we left them earlier:

NICK, *exasperated*. Why don't you just quit? Just tell yourself you won't ever do it again.

JOHN. You're right. I should quit, and I want to quit, but . . .

(Short pause. John sighs deeply.)

NICK. But *what*?

JOHN. This may sound strange, but I've tried and tried to quit, and I'm finally realizing that I don't know how.

Nick's question, "Why don't you just quit?" didn't produce what he hoped it would. He wanted to challenge John to muscle up his personal resolve to resist sexual temptation, but he failed to consider that John had undoubtedly tried this on his own, perhaps many times. Having failed repeatedly, John finally asked for help. But instead of encouraging him, Nick's "motivating" question

discouraged and humiliated him further. It implied that quitting should be a simple matter of making a decision.

Nevertheless, Nick's mistake accomplished something important. It exposed the real problem both men faced: ignorance. John was honest when he said he didn't know how to quit, and Nick discovered that he didn't know how to help him.

Now let's return to the same point in their conversation. This time Nick moves in a different direction, responding to John's confession with encouraging truth rather than mere motivation. He addresses John's plea for help by opening the door to an arsenal of biblical weapons against sexual sin.

NICK. Do you know why Jesus died for you?

JOHN. Yes, He died to pay for my sins and save me from going to hell. Why do you ask that?

NICK. Because His death accomplished more than just the forgiveness of your sins. He also saved you in another way.

JOHN. I'm not sure I understand.

NICK. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to "save His people from their sins,"³¹ not only from sin's penalty, but also from its power. He died "to redeem us from every lawless deed," which means forgiveness, *and* He died "to purify for Himself a people for His own possession."³² Do you believe Jesus accomplished both of these things when He died?

JOHN. Yes, I believe what the Bible says, but right now I don't feel purified.

NICK. I understand, but feelings are notoriously inaccurate. You won't make any real progress in your fight against sexual sin if you don't move forward on the basis of truth.

31. Matt. 1:21.

32. Titus 2:14.

JOHN. OK. What else can you tell me?

NICK. For starters, you are not the same person you were at this time last year, before you became a Christian. That man ceased to exist when you were born again, not merely in a manner of speaking, but *really*. The John who is sitting here talking to me today is not the same person as the John I knew then.³³

JOHN. But I feel like the same person, I look like the same person, and in all too many ways, I act like the same person. What's different about me?

NICK. Last year God gave you a new heart—a good heart. He made you a new person with a completely new identity. That is what it means to be born again.³⁴ The old John was hostile toward God and habitually opposed to doing His will,³⁵ but the new John has been made in the likeness of God. The Bible says you have been re-created in righteousness and holiness.³⁶ You are a new creation,³⁷ God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.³⁸ The real you is a partaker of the divine nature.³⁹

JOHN. Then why am I still so rotten?

NICK. That's just my point. You aren't rotten. You're a child of God and a member of a royal priesthood.⁴⁰ As an unbeliever you were a slave of sinful passions,⁴¹ but through Christ's victory over sin on the cross⁴² and the Spirit's work of regeneration, you have become obedient from the heart to God.⁴³ The

33. Rom. 6:5–7; Col. 3:1–3.

34. John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23.

35. Col. 1:21; Rom. 8:7–8.

36. Eph. 4:24.

37. 2 Cor. 5:17.

38. Eph. 2:10.

39. 2 Pet. 1:4.

40. 1 Pet. 2:9.

41. Titus 3:3.

42. 1 Cor. 15:56–57.

43. Rom. 6:17–18.

desires of your heart have changed from evil to righteous, and because of this change, you are no longer sin's slave.⁴⁴

JOHN. I've read those things in the Bible, but I thought they were sort of like wishful thinking—what Christians will become someday instead of what they are right now. Isn't that true?

NICK. No, it isn't. They are true of every Christian right now.

JOHN. But it sounds like you're saying Christians are perfect, and if that's the case, I must not be a Christian.

NICK. I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." That's true—Christians aren't perfect, and they are forgiven. But the words "*just* forgiven" give the impression that forgiveness is the only difference between a Christian and an unbeliever. As a Christian you are more than just forgiven. You are also a new creation.

JOHN. If I'm a new creation, then why do I still struggle in the area of sexual sin? That's not what a righteous life looks like, is it?

NICK. No, it isn't. People who claim to be Christians yet continue in patterns of sexual immorality may be deceived into thinking they are Christians when they have not truly been born again.⁴⁵ But the Bible also tells us that Christians can be temporarily overtaken by sin.⁴⁶

JOHN. So how can I be sure that I'm a true Christian when I have this problem with viewing pornography?

NICK. Repentance will confirm your faith in Christ.

JOHN. Haven't I already done that by feeling sorry for my sin and by confessing it to you? Wasn't that repentance?

44. Rom. 6:16–22.

45. See appendix A.

46. Gal. 6:1.

NICK. No, not necessarily. There is more to genuine repentance than sorrow and confession. Anyone can feel sorry that he has sinned, but sorrow is often just regret for having been caught, the pain of a disturbed conscience, or sadness about the fact that it's impossible to hold onto sin and have eternal life. This is worldly sorrow, and the Bible tells us that it leads to death.⁴⁷ The kind of sorrow I'm hoping to see in you is the kind *without* regret—the kind that is glad the sin has been exposed, happy to be rid of it, and eager to do everything necessary to stay away from it in the future.⁴⁸

JOHN. OK. I think I understand what you're saying, and it's encouraging to hear. But I'm still confused about one thing: if my heart is good, why do I even want to look at pornography?

NICK. Because part of you hasn't been redeemed.

JOHN. What part?

NICK. Your body—the mortal, physical, merely human part of you. The Bible calls it your flesh. Your new heart is pure, but your flesh still lusts after what God hates.

JOHN. Will I always desire sin because of the lusts of my flesh?

NICK. Yes, at least to some degree as long as you live. But your body is no longer in control. It is now your subject rather than your master. Through Christ you have been given the ability to please God by resisting your fleshly lusts.⁴⁹

JOHN. Will my sinful desires always be as strong as they have seemed lately?

NICK. No . . . at least they don't have to be. As a Christian, you are “being led by the Spirit of God,” and “by the Spirit you are

47. 2 Cor. 7:10.

48. 2 Cor. 7:9–11.

49. Rom. 6:8–13.

putting to death the deeds of the body.”⁵⁰ Your fleshly desires once ruled over you like a dictator, but now they are like the leaves on a tree that was recently chopped down: even though they still have the appearance of being alive, they are beginning to wither.⁵¹ Your sinful desires may seem to control you at times, but because Christ defeated sin on the cross⁵² they have no real authority. They will weaken over time as you do what God instructs you to do in fighting against sin.

JOHN. What does He want me to do?

Now that’s a good question, one which we will answer in the following chapters. What John gained from this conversation was the awareness of an arsenal of truth in the Bible—weapons which he must now treasure in his mind if he is to replace his former unbiblical patterns of thinking. From these resources the Holy Spirit can keep him supplied to do effective battle against sexual sin every day.

50. Rom. 8:13–14, quoted in reverse order (Note that these two verses are not commands, warnings, or exhortations, but rather descriptions of God’s present and ongoing work in every true believer).

51. Charles Leiter, illustration given at a Christ Fellowship of Kansas City men’s retreat, June 2009, Kirksville, MO.

52. Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:56–57.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. At the end of the first chapter, I asked how you would have responded to John's confession differently than Nick did. How was Nick's response in this chapter similar to your answer to that question? How was it different?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8–11. Based on this passage, what would you say are the marks of genuine repentance?
3. When David wrote Psalm 32, he had committed an awful sexual sin (you probably know the story, found in 2 Samuel 11). Read Psalm 32 looking for answers to these two questions: 1) How did David describe the feelings he had before openly admitting his sin? 2) What positive statements did David make about himself as a believer (and all believers), even though he had committed a terrible sin? Discuss your findings and the implications for your present situation.

thirteen

Be Battle Ready

The Allied troops who carried out the actual fighting that led to the liberation of Europe and the collapse of Nazi Germany played what we commonly think of as the heroic part in that great war. They dodged the bullets. They suffered the artillery blasts. They faced the tanks and flamethrowers. They suffered the cold and the hunger and the fear. They did the necessary killing, and the necessary dying. And, appropriately, they took home (or were buried with) the combat medals they earned.

Those soldiers were indeed heroes, but there is an aspect of war that is sometimes overlooked, and without which there would have been no victory in Europe. I am referring to something called “logistics”—the science and labor of supplying the battlefield. In every war, this massive effort is the Hercules behind the heroes.

This chapter is about being spiritually battle ready, something that cannot happen unless the weapons for doing battle against sexual sin are stored, organized, and consistently supplied to the front lines. This will take work on your part, but without it you will remain unprepared for battle.

In the last chapter John asked Nick what God wants him to do in order to resist the temptation to view pornography, and even to

weaken his fleshly desire for sexual sin. Here is Nick's answer, and their continuing discussion:

NICK. He wants you to believe the truth.

JOHN. But I do believe the truth.

NICK. You believe the truth in a general sense, but you need to believe in a more active, effective way.

JOHN. What do you mean by that?

NICK. You hold a body of general biblical knowledge in your mind, and you believe all of it to be true. But truth stored in the back of your mind is like water in a well. It won't quench your thirst or clean your hands unless you draw it out and use it.

JOHN. I'm not sure I understand.

NICK. Do you know Jarrod, the police officer who goes to our church?

JOHN. Yes, I know him.

NICK. He's an award-winning marksman with his pistol. His shooting skill is obviously valuable in his line of work, but what would you say if you were to learn that he carried his pistol in the trunk of his police car while he was on duty?

JOHN. I'd say it wouldn't do him much good in the trunk.

NICK. Why not?

JOHN. Because he wouldn't have access to it when he needed it.

NICK. That's right. And that's why he carries it in a holster on his belt. I went on a ride-along with him a few months ago and I noticed something else. Several times he put his hand on the gun, wrapped his fingers around the grip, and unsnapped the

holster even though there was nothing going on. I asked him why he did this, and he told me it was his way of keeping himself prepared to use the weapon instantly. Then he said something I'll always remember: "If I *stay* ready, I won't have to *get* ready."

JOHN. That's good, but I'm still not sure how it applies to me.

NICK. OK, here's my point: Truth is your weapon against sexual sin, but the truth you believe hasn't been helping you resist the temptation to view pornography. Why not? Because you have been keeping it in the trunk.

JOHN. You mean in the back of my mind, right?

NICK. Yes, rather than in the forefront of your thinking. You have been storing what you know in a place where truth is not immediately accessible—like water deep down in a well.

JOHN. What do I need to do differently?

NICK. You need to stay ready for sexual temptation by keeping the truth where it is instantly usable, and I'll tell you why: At the moment of temptation your mind quickly devises lies to persuade you to give in to your fleshly desires. You might think, "This is what I really need," or, "No one is watching," or, "I'm not hurting anyone." You might tell yourself lies about who you really are. "I'm still a sinner by nature, and God knows I can't help myself." You might use one sexual sin as a way of justifying another sexual sin. "I did the same thing yesterday, so one more sin won't hurt." You might even appeal to your pattern of failure as proof that sexual sin is irresistible. "I always give in sooner or later, so it might as well be now."

JOHN. I *have* had thoughts like those when I've been tempted to look at pornography. Have you thought that way too?

NICK. Yes, I have. In fact, I still hear the lies, and the temptation is still strong at times. Satan is hard at work through our

corrupt culture, training our minds to lie continually about the supposed benefits of sexual sin. No Christian is immune to being tempted, and I wouldn't want you to think I'm sinless in terms of lust. But I learned very early in my Christian life how to resist sexual temptation consistently by overcoming the lie with the truth.

JOHN. What was the most important thing you learned?

NICK. Whether you sin or turn away from sin at the moment of temptation depends upon whether or not the truth is immediately accessible in the forefront of your thinking. In other words, what makes the difference is having the right *information* in the right *place* at the right *time*.

JOHN. That's easy to remember. When can I put it to use?

NICK. How about right now while we're sitting here?

JOHN. OK, I'm all ears. How do I do that?

NICK. Right now you have a strong conviction against viewing Internet pornography, but you have less resolve about lust in general.

JOHN. What makes you say that?

NICK. I've been noticing the movement of your eyes as attractive women have walked or jogged past us. Several times I watched your eyes move up and down as you examined their bodies.

JOHN, *obviously embarrassed*. You're right, and I'm sorry. It's just a bad habit.

NICK. I know, but it's more than a *bad* habit. It's a *sinful* habit. Jesus calls it adultery.⁵³

(*John nods his head in agreement as Nick continues.*)

53. Matt. 5:28.

My point was not to embarrass you. I fight against the same temptation myself, as do most Christian men. But if you will reject the lie in preference for the truth, you will find yourself resisting that same temptation rather than giving in to it, even the very next time an attractive woman comes by.

JOHN. What lie?

NICK. The one that says, “Studying her body will be very satisfying.” Or the one that says, “She’ll be gone in a few seconds, and you’ll regret it if you pass up this opportunity.”

JOHN. So what truth will keep me from lusting?

NICK. How about the fact that no one is ever better by sinning or worse by obeying?⁵⁴ You have a fleshly desire to sin, but lusting will not produce the genuine satisfaction the lie claimed it would. Instead it will leave you feeling guilty, sorrowful, and more vulnerable when the next sexual temptation comes. Obedience, on the other hand, will bring you true happiness and genuine satisfaction because obeying God is what now defines you. It is what you want to do more than anything else.

Rather than remembering these things *after* you sin, keep the truth ready in your mind for unexpected temptations. Keep the right *information* ready in the right *place* for use at the right *time*.

If you *stay* ready, you won’t have to *get* ready.

54. The statement “No one is ever better by sinning or worse by obeying” is from Jim Elliff, private conversation with the author, August 2009. Quoted by permission.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. The Bible says Eve sinned because she was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). Read Genesis 3:1–6 and name the lies Eve believed, leading to her disobedience. Name some of the lies that have persuaded you to give in to the temptation to view pornography. Take enough time to think about this carefully, and be specific in your answers.
2. What truth(s) from Scripture (either quoted or paraphrased) would have persuaded you to reject the lies at the moment of temptation? Again, think carefully and be specific.

fourteen

Prepare Your Mind for Action

Being battle ready takes work. If you want to experience victory at the moment of sexual temptation, you must work hard to keep your battlefield well-supplied. As Peter said, you must “prepare your [mind] for action”⁵⁵ (1 Pet. 1:13). Similarly, Paul wrote to Timothy, “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). An unprepared or undisciplined mind is a vulnerable battlefield.

Nick went on to explain to John that making truth more and more usable in his battle against sexual sin would involve increasing his diligence in three spiritual disciplines: learning, memorizing, and meditating.

Learning Is Acquiring the Right Information

Learning is what you have been doing by understanding the message of the Bible so far as it has been represented in this book.

Learning is what you do when you listen to recordings of the Bible or hear biblically sound sermons. It is what happens when you engage in Bible study with biblically minded men or study the Bible

55. Lit. “gird up the loins of your mind,” a spiritual illustration based on the practice of gathering or binding up loose clothing in preparation for running, travel, work, or battle (cf. Exod. 12:11; 1 Kings 18:46; Jer. 1:17–19; Luke 12:35).

on your own and understand its true meaning. Learning is simply acquiring the right information.

The righteous man is a learning man. He is never content with his current level of knowledge or satisfied with any ignorance of divine truth. “Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning” (Prov. 9:9). “Wise men store up knowledge” (Prov. 10:14). Consider this passage from Paul’s letter to the Colossians:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it [i.e., the Colossians’ faith in Christ and love for each other], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:9–10)

Paul was glad the Colossians understood the truth, but he wasn’t content for them to rest in what they already knew. He wanted them to know more.

Christians are learners by divine design. Jesus explained to His disciples that it had been granted to them to “know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” but then He promised that “whoever has [such knowledge], to him more [knowledge] shall be given” (Matt. 13:11–12).

Memorizing Is Putting the Right Information in the Right Place

Memorizing is locking information in your mind in such a way that you can recall it accurately. All Christians do this to some extent already. To the degree to which you can formulate biblically accurate thoughts or statements even when you are not reading your Bible or some other biblical literature, you have memorized truth.

Memorizing Scripture is not difficult. How much effort would it take, for example, to memorize 1 Corinthians 6:18—“Flee immorality”? How long would it take you to memorize the words “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22) or “Abstain from

fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11)?⁵⁶ These short biblical phrases are like hand grenades to blast away sexual temptation in the mind of the man who loves the truth and desires to live out the truth. You can do more of this than you have done to this point, and by starting small you will encourage yourself to memorize larger passages. Think of the value of memorizing a passage like Proverbs 7, in which a senseless young man is drawn away by sexual temptation. This would be an outstanding exercise for a young man who has entered puberty, perhaps followed by a special talk between the young man and his father or another Christian mentor.

The Holy Spirit purifies God’s people by means of biblical truth. As the psalmist asked, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word” (Ps. 119:9). But truth must be acquired and stored for it to be useful. The Spirit does not infuse truth into the mind apart from the believer’s personal effort. “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).

Meditating Is Keeping the Right Information in the Right Place at the Right Time

Meditation is focusing your mind on the message of the Bible in such a way that truth is not merely learned and stored, but used. It is taking the truth down from the shelf and examining it carefully. It is enjoying the truth, appreciating the truth, talking to yourself about the truth, and asking yourself questions about the truth. It is having regular discussions with yourself about the truth—the way Nick discussed truth with John.

The man who is meditating is not sitting cross-legged on the floor with his eyes closed, his forearms resting on his knees, and his thumbs touching his index fingers. He is sitting comfortably on his couch holding a cup of coffee, or riding his bike for exercise, or driving to work, or standing in line at the grocery store, or lying in bed preparing to go to sleep, or trying to go back to sleep at 3:00 a.m. after being awakened by a barking dog.

56. See chapter 15 for more on abstaining from sexual sin and fleeing from sexual temptation.

Meditation is something that happens anywhere and everywhere, at anytime and every time during the day. As author Jim Elliff says, “You are always meditating on something. Why not make it the truth?”⁵⁷

Bring the truth into any and every part of your daily life through meditation. In this way truth will be in the right place (i.e., the forefront of your thinking) at the time when it is actually needed—when lies begin to form in your mind in response to sexual temptation.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Name three times during your typical day when you could meditate on Scripture rather than on something else.
2. Name three times during your typical week when meditating on Scripture would help you resist sexual temptation.
3. I have heard men say, “I’m not much of a reader,” when explaining why they don’t know much about the Bible. What role would you say neglect, laziness, or distraction with other media has played in your own reluctance to study the Bible or read solid Christian literature? Name some of the spiritual advantages of developing good reading, listening, or comprehension skills. Name some of the spiritual disadvantages of having underdeveloped skills in these areas.

57. Jim Elliff, private conversation with the author, August, 2009, quoted by permission.

fifteen

Kill the Enemy

You are now familiar with the weapon that works against sexual sin (biblical truth), and you know how to supply truth to the front lines of the battle (learning, memory, and meditation). You also know that prayerful dependence upon God is critical. Now you need training in the practice of effective deployment. Holding a loaded rifle will do you no good when the enemy attacks unless you take aim and pull the trigger.

The Christian life is a dependent life, but not a passive life. Paul said Christians are putting to death the deeds of the body “by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:13), but the Spirit doesn’t work apart from the believer’s conscious involvement and effort. The Spirit is at work eradicating sin through your efforts to eradicate sin. If you wish to defeat the deeds of your body, you must actively engage them on the field of battle.

The Bible offers two primary principles for killing sexual sin. The first is abstinence, and the second is flight.

Abstinence: The “Never Again” Mindset

You might ask, “How do I put to death the deeds of my body, and how will I know when a particular deed of my body has been put to death?” Peter answers the first part of your question when he tells

Christians to “abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). You kill sexual sin by abstaining from sexual sin.

Abstinence means none, not at all, never again. You cannot obey Peter’s command by gradually weaning yourself from pornography, trying to cut back on viewing pornography, or viewing it only in moderation. You can only obey God by abstaining. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3).

Regarding the second part of your question, the more consistently you abstain from gratifying sexual lust, the closer it comes to death. Just as your craving for sugar feeds on sugar, your craving for sexual sin feeds on sexual sin. Abstaining from sugar will reduce your craving for sugar, and abstaining from sexual sin will reduce your craving for sexual sin. In this way you will (by the Spirit) progressively kill your lust and transform your behavior.

Please be careful here. The Bible tells us that if we resist the devil he will flee from us (James 4:7), but we also know that when Jesus resisted the devil, the devil “left Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). In other words, he planned to come back and try again. Paul once wrote, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Don’t be fooled into thinking you have put sexual lust to death the first time you resist the temptation to look at pornography or masturbate. You probably resisted these sins at times even as an unbeliever, and certainly you have resisted on most occasions as a Christian, but the lust has returned again and again to trouble you. Sin and Satan are tireless and deceitful enemies that will never stop seeking to control you.

Your fleshly desires for sin will harass you until you die even though they are defeated and passing. In some ways they are like the mythical multi-headed monster: chop off one head, and many others threaten. Heads that have been chopped off even seem to be able to grow back in the Christian who becomes careless or overconfident. For this reason you must remain vigilant and aggressive in recognizing and refusing to gratify your fleshly desires. Vigorously resist every hint of sexual temptation. Even the smallest crack in a dam may eventually lead to a catastrophic

collapse. Likewise, even your smallest lapse into sexual fantasy may eventually lead to a disastrous moral failure.

Abstinence Requires Discretion

Discretion might be defined as knowing the weakness of the flesh, understanding the power of sexual temptation, and making every effort to see that the two are never unnecessarily brought close to each other.

The man who is trying to conquer drunkenness would be a fool to walk into a bar. Like a bed of dying coals that glows brightly and flames when oxygen is forced into it, his former patterns of thinking and acting like a drunkard would be stimulated by the familiar sights, sounds, and smells. The same is true for the man who is abstaining from sexual sin. He would be a fool to go on watching movies containing sensuality, thumbing through magazines that are likely to contain even mildly provocative images, watching late night cable TV, or surfing the Internet unnecessarily, especially when alone. As Paul said, “Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

Flight: The Victory that Requires Retreat

Christian men are at war against sexual sin, but the biblical method for defeating sexual sin is not to charge toward the enemy, or even to stand and fight. The Bible yells, “Retreat!” “Flee immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18).

A handsome young Israelite named Joseph resisted and defeated sexual temptation by running away when his master’s wife tried to seduce him. Day after day she flattered him with sexual advances. Then one day she brazenly took hold of his clothing and said, “Lie with me” (Gen. 39:12).

Joseph might have chosen to pull her hands away from his clothing and say like a conquering hero, “Not me babe. I’m saving myself for marriage.” He might have tried to reason with her about the folly of her unfaithfulness—what I would call the evangelistic approach. Or he might have said politely and firmly, “Please leave me alone,” and then gone back to his household work. These all would have been “charge” or “stand and fight” responses to sexual temptation, but

none of them would have removed him from the presence of the enemy.

True resistance to sexual sin is running away—*fast*. Joseph knew his own weakness well enough to know that remaining near the source of this temptation would lead to disaster. “He left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside” (Gen. 39:12).

Joseph is not the only man who has defeated sexual temptation by running away. A friend of mine once ran to his car and drove away when a seductively dressed woman approached him and attempted to engage him in friendly conversation. He didn’t run away because she was repulsive or uninviting. He ran away because she was attractive and obviously available, and because he sensed his own physical attraction to her body. In obedience to Paul’s command to flee immorality, he sounded the “Retreat!” alarm in his mind and quickly removed himself from the presence of the enemy.

Whenever Possible, Run Away Before You See the Enemy

Fleeing sexual immorality involves making decisions in advance of temptation. Remove yourself from the temptation to commit sexual sin by establishing certain non-negotiable standards concerning what you will, or will not, do.

Run away by deciding ahead of time not to watch a particular TV show or channel. Run away by agreeing with your wife that you will never use the Internet after she has gone to bed. Run away by pre-planning a route in the grocery store that doesn’t take you down the magazine aisle. In other words, run away by never getting close. Another friend of mine demonstrated this mindset when he turned down a much-needed job delivering bottled water. He did so because one of his regular stops would have been an adult bookstore, and he had already run away from sexual temptation by deciding that he would never enter such a place.

Run Away from Past Sexual Sins

Another way to “flee immorality” is to avoid dwelling on past sexual sins. Once you have acknowledged your sin to God, to your

wife (if necessary),⁵⁸ or to another Christian who is holding you accountable, don't make yourself pay for the sin by replaying it in your mind. Rather than making yourself hate the sin more, you make your problem worse by establishing the event more firmly in your memory.

As an illustration of the way this works, picture in your mind a purple gorilla seated in a fancy, white-tablecloth restaurant eating steak and lobster with a knife and fork. I'm serious. Imagine the image in detail. Can you see him? OK, now stop thinking about him. Put the image out of your mind. . . . You can see the problem, can't you? The image wasn't difficult to get into your mind, but it is very difficult to get out. Your mind absorbs easily yet expels reluctantly. The same is true of sexual images from past sins.

Instead of dwelling on your sinful failures, replace your self-debasing thoughts about your sin with thoughts about Christ. You cannot add any benefit to Christ's death by punishing yourself, so think of the complete forgiveness you enjoy because of His death on the cross. Think also about who you are in Christ—a new creation, a partaker of the divine nature, a child of God. Train your mind to think as Paul instructed the Philippians: "If there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (4:8).

Remorse is a natural response to a sinful failure, and in the true Christian it leads to repentance. But after this unavoidable experience of sorrow, there is no benefit in meditating on past sexual sins.

Not Running Away Is Not Smart

No sensible man would stand and fight if he suddenly came upon a swarm of angry hornets. The wise man would run away *fast* (or dive into a pond). Standing and fighting would only energize the enemy and result in many painful wounds. The same is true of sexual temptation. Whether you drive away, run away, walk away, look away, log off, or divert your thoughts, you are no coward when you obey God's command to flee immorality. Only a fool would stand and fight with such a deadly foe.

58. Please read my caution in appendix F before confessing sexual sins to your wife.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How would you respond if someone told you that the only way to know for sure that your will to obey God is getting stronger is to stand firm in the presence of sexual temptation *without* running away?
2. Name a few specific ways in which you could begin to exercise discretion as a way of avoiding sexual temptation.
3. Read Proverbs 7 again. Discuss the order of the poor choices that led the young man to commit sexual sin.

sixteen

Follow Your Love Drive

No one perseveres in a difficult pursuit apart from desire. The man climbing Mount Everest will endure the pain and brave the danger only if he has a strong desire to get to the top. Likewise, victory over sexual sin doesn't "just happen" to men who are apathetic or indifferent. The true Christian experiences victory because He has a God-given desire to win.

We have already dealt with the necessary weapon (truth), the supply mechanism (learning, memory, and meditation), and methods for effective deployment of these weapons at the front lines (abstinence and flight). Now we need to talk about motivation—not the "just quit" kind of motivation Nick tried with John at first, but the kind that "has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

This chapter is about the love of God—not His love for us, but our love for Him. Our love for Him is never perfect, and many factors can cause it to decrease at times, but the believer's love for God is his most powerful incentive for pleasing God through sexual purity.

Here is John's next question, and the continuing discussion:

JOHN. I told you earlier that I didn't know how to stop viewing pornography, and you have helped me a lot already. But what is it that makes me *want* to quit?

NICK. Love.

JOHN. OK, . . . I was expecting a little more than that. I suppose this is a stupid question, but what difference does love make?"

NICK. Jesus once said to His disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."⁵⁹

JOHN. So does that mean that the person who doesn't obey Jesus doesn't really love Him?

NICK. Yes, that's one implication. In fact, just a few verses later Jesus said, "He who does not love Me does not keep My words."⁶⁰ The person whose life is characterized by sin rather than by obedience to Christ can't make a true claim of loving Him.

JOHN. That seems clear enough, but it doesn't really answer my question. What *difference* does loving Jesus make? Is it just another commandment on top of all the others, or is it related to obedience in some other way?

NICK. Love for God is what drives out sinful habits like viewing pornography. It's what produces obedience to Christ.

JOHN. How does that work?

NICK. When Jesus said what He said about obedience being connected with loving Him, do you think He was using a guilt tactic, like a spoiled child who tries to get his mother to buy him toys or candy by saying, "If you really loved me you would give me what I want"?

59. John 14:15.

60. John 14:24.

JOHN, *laughing*. No, not at all.

NICK. What about a wife who says to her husband, “If you love me you will give up your weekend softball tournaments”?

JOHN, *after a thoughtful pause*. That may be closer, but it’s still basically the same thing—a guilt tactic intended to get someone to change his behavior. That’s not what Jesus was saying.

NICK. So what was He saying?

JOHN. I think He was just stating a fact: the person who loves Him is the person who will obey His commandments.

NICK. And what does that say about the relationship between love and obedience?

JOHN. I suppose it implies that the main motivation for obedience to Christ is love, not guilt or obligation.

NICK. You’re right. Christians do have an obligation to obey Christ. Obedience is even motivated by a healthy fear of God.⁶¹ But neither obligation nor fear is the true Christian’s ultimate motivation for obeying Jesus. Love is.

JOHN. But that brings us back to my question: *how* does love produce obedience?

NICK. A Scottish preacher named Thomas Chalmers once explained it in a sermon entitled “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.”⁶² His Bible text for the sermon was 1 John 2:15—“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

JOHN. Another fact about true Christians, like John 14:15, right?

61. Prov. 3:7; 8:13; 16:6; Eccl. 12:13; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:17.

62. Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish church reformer and theologian (1780–1847). The text of his sermon is available from a number of online sources.

NICK. That's right. 1 John 2:15 tells us what cannot be true of the person whose predominant affections are for worldly things. He cannot love God.

JOHN. What kinds of worldly things?

NICK. *All* kinds. "The world" is a general reference to the sinful, God-rejecting, evil-approving system that fallen humanity adheres to, and "the things in the world" are the various lusts and pleasures within that system—things like pride, sexual sin, hunger for power or fame, and cravings for money or material things, just to name a few categories of worldliness. The person whose strongest affections are for any of these things does not love God. The two loves are mutually exclusive.

JOHN. You don't mean that a man who often experiences tempting desires for sexual sin doesn't love God, do you?

NICK. No, a man's affections are revealed by how he characteristically *responds* to temptation, not by the mere *presence* of temptation. But the Christian is no longer enslaved to the dictates of his body or helpless in the face of temptation. He has a new authority and power governing his life, and new desires for something much better. He now wants what he never truly wanted before because he sees what he couldn't see before.

JOHN. What couldn't he see before?

NICK. The glory of God in the face of Christ.⁶³ The unregenerate man simply cannot see Jesus as He really is. Satan has blinded his mind so that worldly ideals and pleasures seem better than Christ.⁶⁴ The Christian's God-given ability to see and appreciate Christ sets him free from his former love for the world and its pleasures. Seeing Christ with the eyes of faith, he loves Him above all things, and his new affection

63. 2 Cor. 4:4–6; 1 Cor. 2:14.

64. 2 Cor. 4:3.

motivates him to obey Christ consistently. Chalmers demonstrates this point convincingly from 1 John 2:15.

JOHN. How?

NICK. First he explains that it is in the nature of every person to pursue what he deems most valuable. Some people call this the human quest for significance or meaning. For some unregenerate men it is the desire for money or material things; for others, power or fame. For many it is sexual gratification.

JOHN. So what happens when a man is born again?

NICK. It's simple, and the title of Chalmers' sermon explains it. For one affection to be expelled, a stronger affection must take its place. The old affection is literally pushed out.

JOHN. So when a person truly sees Christ and begins to love Him, his love for the world and the things in the world is pushed out?

NICK. Yes. And you already know this to be true. The expulsive power of a new affection is something everyone is familiar with. For example, how could I persuade my dog to give up the old dry bone he's been happily chewing on for days?

JOHN. That's easy: show him a juicy steak.

NICK. That's the point of 1 John 2:15. If a person's strongest affections are for sexual sin, he hasn't seen God. If he had seen Him, his old affection would have been displaced by a much stronger affection. As Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other."⁶⁵

JOHN. Do all true Christians know the expulsive power of affection for Christ?

65. Matt. 6:24.

NICK. Yes. In one sense it is what defines them as Christians. They follow Jesus rather than obeying their fleshly lusts because they find the satisfaction of knowing Him to be better than the satisfaction they formerly gained from sinning. Even though they may not articulate it clearly, they know it by experience. Love for Jesus is the natural product of regeneration, and it *always* displaces the desire for sin as a man's strongest affection.

JOHN. You're talking about my deepest desires, right? This doesn't mean that a true Christian will never feel fleshly desires for sexual sin, does it?

NICK. No, it doesn't mean that. But your love for Christ is the desire that will affect your behavior the most. As Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Let me put all of this in a simple way: if you love Christ at all, which every Christian does, then you can love Him more. And the more you love Him, the less you will desire sexual sin.

(Short pause as John nods his head thoughtfully.)

JOHN. Thanks for all your time today. I think it's starting to make sense. When can we get together again?

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. List a few reasons why a married man who doesn't love his wife might remain sexually faithful to her. List a few reasons why a man who doesn't love Jesus might maintain an outwardly moral life. Read Matthew 15:1–9. What does this passage tell us about the importance of right motives?
2. Besides the time when you became a Christian, describe a time in your life when a new affection changed your behavior. Did other people notice the change? How does this experience illustrate the principle you learned in this chapter?
3. Before you were born again, how was it evident that you loved the world and the things in the world? In what ways is it evident now that your affection for Christ is pushing out your old affection for the world?

seventeen

Fight **With** the Church and **For** the Church

The most important truths about experiencing freedom from sexual sin have already been explained, so I won't retrace my steps in this chapter. But there are two additional principles related to the pursuit and importance of sexual purity:

- First, rather than fighting sexual sin alone, fight alongside others. You are not expected to do this all by yourself. God has given you the local church as a context for effective, sin-repelling fellowship.
- Second, rather than being self-focused in your battle against sexual sin, fight for a greater good. This isn't just about your own personal benefit. It's about establishing a legacy of freedom for those who will follow in your footsteps, and it's about the glory of Christ's kingdom until He returns.

Fight *With* the Church

There is something intangible about offending Jesus when you sin. You know your sin grieves Him because the Bible tells you it does.

But because you cannot see Him with your eyes and you have no observable contact with His expressions of grief, you may not *feel* the seriousness of your sin. You also know that God doesn't hold your sins against you if you are a true believer (Rom. 4:7–8). But because you cannot actually see His outstretched arms of love, you may not always *feel* forgiven.

God has provided a way for you not only to *know*, but also to *feel* both the seriousness of sinning against Christ and the joy of being forgiven. In other words, He has provided a way for you to see and feel the gospel.

The Christian who privately confesses sexual sin to a few brothers in Christ will undoubtedly feel a measure of sadness and shame simply because of the nature of human relationships. No one enjoys admitting an embarrassing failure, and no one wants to disappoint his friends. But a change in behavior that is based solely on these factors has little more virtue in it than a dog's response to obedience training. The Christian has a stronger motivation: when he sees the responses of other Christians to his sin, he comes face to face with Christ's own response to his sin.

True Christians are genuinely grieved when a brother commits immorality, and in their sorrow, perhaps even in their tears, he can see Christ's sorrow and grief. When they labor with him in prayer for true repentance and check back regularly to be sure the sin hasn't been repeated, he can sense Christ's active concern as the "Shepherd and Guardian" of his soul (1 Pet. 2:25). Further, when they forgive and restore him following his genuine repentance (Luke 17:3; Gal. 6:1), they remind him of the gospel of God's grace—the unshakable acceptance and peace with God that is his despite his sin because of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

The Christian who has sinned and who experiences the gospel in these ways will turn away from sexual immorality the way one would turn away from a pool of vomit or a rotting corpse. He will eagerly return to the life of obedience—the only life that satisfies those who truly love Jesus.

Fight *For* the Church

There are many personal reasons for you to resist sexual temptation, but as a Christian you are fighting for a greater good than just your own personal benefit. You are one of many soldiers participating in a cosmic battle against evil—the struggle for the ultimate triumph of Christ’s heavenly kingdom. The battle has already been decided, having been won by Christ on the cross, and He is seated on the throne of ultimate power and authority (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:19–23). But the Bible also tells us that He must reign “until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25)—until the last pocket of rebel resistance is destroyed.

Believers are not fighting alone. They are fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with other soldiers for the advance of Christ’s glorious kingdom, clearing the spiritual battlefield for future waves of Christ-loving sin killers. Every generation will have difficulties to face, and all believers, whether famous or unknown, are called to participate in this ongoing mop-up operation. As it is in wars with bombs and bullets, so it is in this spiritual battle against the remnants of evil: what the individual soldier does (or fails to do) matters.

Paul described this ever-progressing and united effort in a different way. The church is not only a destroying army with Christ as its King and General, but also a growing and maturing body with Christ as its Head.

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:15–16)

Because you are one of the “individual parts” of the body of Christ, your life has a dramatic effect on the other parts and on the whole. Just as your physical body needs every part to function properly, the body of Christ needs “what every joint supplies.” It is “held together . . . according to the proper working of each individual part.” There are no unnecessary parts. When any single part

malfunctions, the whole body suffers. When a part works properly, the whole body prospers and grows.

Christians who are privately caught up in sexual sin are individual body parts that are *not* working properly. The man who is struggling with a habit of viewing pornography may maintain the outward appearance of spiritual health (through church attendance, public prayer, etc.), but his private sin has a deadening effect on his spiritual life. His malfunction may not be immediately noticed by others, but as he goes on gratifying the fleshly lusts that are waging war against his soul, he becomes weaker and weaker. Like a diseased organ in the human body that gradually surrenders its usefulness, the believer who is overcome by sexual sin loses his usefulness to the spiritual body called the church.

Consider the following ways in which your sexual sin will negatively affect other believers and the kingdom of Christ:

- The advance of Christ's kingdom requires prayer (Matt. 6:10), but you will likely enter less often into God's presence because of your disturbed conscience. Even when you do pray, you will be unbalanced in your focus, majoring on your own sin rather than the needs of others, the spread of the gospel, or the well-being of your local church.
- Christ's kingdom grows stronger through your growth in biblical knowledge, your ability to teach others, and your ability to refute false teaching (Eph. 4:11–15), but because every page in the Bible reminds you of your sin, you will likely read it less often.
- Christ's kingdom advances through fellowship and the strengthening of unity (John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:1–3), but you will likely fellowship with other believers less because in their presence you feel secretly ashamed.
- The kingdom of Christ requires perseverance and mutual encouragement (Heb. 3:12–14), but because you are privately discouraged you will encourage others less.

- The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of purity. Individual Christians must be concerned not only for their own righteous behavior, but also for the godly conduct of other believers (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5). Because of your own sin you will be less eager to be involved in this way in the lives of others.
- The kingdom of Christ grows through evangelism—calling sinners to repentance. But since you need to repent of your sin, you will most likely be less effective in exhorting unbelievers to repent of their sins.

Like the soldier who goes into battle drunk or high on marijuana, you will be distracted from effective participation in the advance of Christ's kingdom. Because of your sinful weakness, others are more likely to suffer and grow weak. On the other hand, your personal spiritual advances will help others to advance spiritually, and will benefit the kingdom of Christ in noticeable ways.

- Your testimony of changed thinking and consistent purity will encourage other men who are now where you were before. Your persistent influence may even result in the salvation of a few unconverted members in your church.
- Your purity will strengthen your assurance of salvation (1 John 3:4–10), which will increase your joy and make you a more effective leader in your home and church. People follow joyful people, but they avoid (or at best, tolerate) those who live in a cloud of discouragement and negativity.
- With an undisturbed conscience you will pray more fervently and effectively, and as James tells us, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16).
- Your increased joy and enthusiasm for Christ will infect your children. Imagine what God might do in the future through one child who, through watching his dad serve Christ with joy, is gripped with a passionate desire to dedicate his life in energetic service to Christ.

- Your uninhibited eagerness to learn from God’s word will encourage others to “[increase] in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). In other words, your enthusiasm for truth will serve to make other Christians more battle ready.
- The man who has experienced the joy of freedom from sexual sin will be eager to invite others to enjoy the same freedom. Pornography is perhaps *the* most noteworthy slave-master for millions of unconverted men, but through the zealous efforts of redeemed instruments like you, God can set many of them free.

Wars are never won by individuals, but they are also never won apart from the individual efforts of many people serving faithfully side by side.

Great Britain was nearly overcome by Adolf Hitler’s Germany near the beginning of World War II. The pilots of the Royal Air Force are often credited with saving their nation, and their heroic service should not go unnoticed, but it was the heroic service of the entire nation that led to victory. While the pilots fought bravely overhead, old men came out of retirement to work in factories, to fight fires, and to clear away debris. Women picked up hammers, drills, and rifles, and tended to the wounded and dying. Children collected scrap metal and donated metal toys to supply the factories producing bombs and bullets. Every man, woman, and child sacrificed, not only by working through the bombing raids and raging fires, but also by enduring the severe rationing of food, medicine, and other important commodities. Individual efforts varied, but every contribution was crucial to the overall war effort. *Together* they won the battle for their nation.

Your victory over sexual sin is a significant event. It may have generational effects by establishing a legacy of purity for your believing grandson—or perhaps for a great, great grandson whom you will never know. It could even affect the great, great grandson of another man in your church who today is feeling defeated by sexual sin.

Why are some families known for making a spiritual impact in this way, while others are not? At some point in their history, someone

turned his back on sin and zealously followed Christ without compromise, and a pattern of faithfulness was established. One man's obedience makes the obedience of those who follow him a more reasonable expectation. You may not be able to look back on such a man in your own family's history, but you ought to be that man for your family's future.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Have you ever belonged to a local church that was committed to the kind of fellowship described in this chapter? If so, how did that experience affect (or how is it still affecting) your ability to resist sexual temptation? If not, how do you think the lack of gospel fellowship is affecting your own sexual purity?
2. Read Hebrews 3:12–13 carefully. Based on this passage, what would you say to a professing Christian who says he wants to stop viewing pornography, but is unwilling to commit himself to the fellowship and accountability of a local church?
3. We began this book with a conversation between John and Nick. Please go back and re-read that conversation in chapter 1. Now that we have come to the end of the book, discuss how you are better prepared to respond to a man who says, “I’ve tried and tried to stop viewing pornography, and I’m finally realizing that I don’t know how.”

ADDITIONAL HELP

Please don't skip over the sections that follow just because they go by the name "appendix." They are not long or overly technical and I believe you will find them helpful. I have provided a brief summary of each one below. If you are doing a small group study, you may want to take additional time to study some (or all) of these together.

Appendix A, "The Danger of Being Deceived," is for the man who wonders if what he has read so far reveals that he may not be a true Christian.

Appendix B, "Is the Regenerate Heart Deceitful and Desperately Sick?" explains two different meanings of the word "heart" in the Bible, and deals with a few passages that some interpreters would say negate the main point of this book.

Appendix C, "Abusing the Body Language of the New Testament," answers a few questions about a Christian's relationship to his unredeemed body and the responsibility for the sins he commits.

Appendix D, "The Relationship Between Nature and Behavior," answers three important questions about how what we are by nature relates to what we do.

Appendix E, "Have Christians Laid Aside the Old Self or Not?" is a comparison of Paul's teaching on "the old self" and "the new self" in Colossians 3:9–10 and Ephesians 4:22–24.

Appendix F, "Before Telling Your Wife," is a caution to the married man. Please read this before confessing sexual sin to your wife.

Appendix G, "My Personal Story," is a brief testimony of the author's experience with sexual sin and deliverance.

Appendix A

The Danger of Being Deceived

I have used the term “true Christian” repeatedly in this book, and I have a good reason for doing so: true is the opposite of false, and not everyone who says he is a Christian really is one.

Are you a true Christian? Are you sure about that? If you are sure, are you sure you ought to be sure?

False professions of faith in Christ abound in our day, largely because of the widespread evangelistic practice of giving immediate assurance to new “converts” based solely on their physical, verbal, or emotional response when they hear the gospel. Many pastors and evangelists wrongly assume that converts can be known by their initial enthusiasm, their tears of apparent repentance, or the prayer they prayed to “ask Jesus into their hearts.” Jesus, however, plainly taught that these initial *supposed* evidences of conversion are often nothing more than the stirred emotions or temporary zeal of the unregenerate heart, and that a person’s conversion is only proved genuine through perseverance and fruitfulness (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23; Mark 4:3–9, 13–20; Luke 8:4–15).

Assurance Is Ultimately Grounded in God, Not You

The assurance that you belong to Christ is not based on a special prayer or an emotional trip to the front of an auditorium, but it also is not based on perfect moral performance. If it were, then no man could ever be fully assured that he is a true Christian because no man will ever be perfect in this life. Every sin would lead to fear and doubt, and this should not be the case. True Christians should enjoy the strong confidence that they belong to Christ forever, despite the fact that they have fleshly desires and still find themselves sinning at times.

The confidence that you are a true Christian is based first and foremost on the promises of God and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. His righteous life and sacrificial death fully accomplished the salvation of all who believe. Their sins are *all* forgiven, even the ones they commit as Christians (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12). The salvation enjoyed by all true Christians is by God's grace through faith alone, not through works.

But Assurance Without Regeneration Is Deception

Despite the fact that God's promises are the ground of assurance, the New Testament is filled with warnings to those who practice unrighteousness yet are *sure* they are Christians.

Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, . . . nor adulterers, . . . nor homosexuals, . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9–10)

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality [fornication], impurity, sensuality, idolatry, . . . and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19–21)

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral . . . person [fornicator] . . . has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Eph. 5:5)

Fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Heb. 13:4)

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:3–4)

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin [i.e., as a matter of practice], because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:9–10)

These warnings inform us that repentance from sin and a pattern of righteous behavior serve as necessary supports for the assurance that you belong to Christ. The man who thinks of himself as forgiven must look for evidence that he has been born again. Because of the Spirit’s transforming work (regeneration) in all those whom God forgives (justification), deliverance from the penalty for sin and from the power of sin are always found together. If you have not been set free from sin’s power, you have not been saved from its penalty.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some of whom were still engaging in “impurity, immorality [fornication] and sensuality” (2 Cor. 12:21), “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5). Clearly Paul thought that the Corinthians’ habitual sin gave him sufficient grounds to ask whether or not these professing Christians were true Christians.

Take This Seriously: Deception Ends in Hell

Many professing Christians seem to have the idea that God’s free grace permits them to live morally compromising lives. If they do not realize their error and repent, they will one day be reminded of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matt. 7:21). Though they expected to be welcomed into heaven, Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23).

Unrepentant fornicators and adulterers will spend eternity in “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). Many are already suffering in everlasting anguish. When you look at pornography, you are committing the very sin by which many of them were overcome—the sin they now wish they had never committed. Millions who were professing Christians are now suffering under the everlasting wrath of God. Will you continue practicing the same sexual sins that led them to hell, or will you seize the opportunity you now have to repent?

Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9–10)⁶⁶

66. *Wasted Faith* by Jim Elliff is an excellent tool for self-examination. This book (or audio book) may be ordered at www.CCWtoday.org. A helpful online study guide for *Wasted Faith* is also available at that address.

Appendix B

Is the Regenerate Heart Deceitful and Desperately Sick?

Once in the book of Jeremiah and again in Mark's gospel (with a parallel passage in Matthew), the human heart is described in negative terms. Many interpreters understand these passages to be descriptive of *every* human heart, including the regenerate heart of the Christian. I once held this understanding myself, but I am now convinced that only the natural (i.e., unregenerate) heart of man is in view in these places.

Before we discuss these passages, we should note that the word "heart" is used in at least two ways in the Bible.

In many places the word "heart" refers to a man's inner thoughts (or his mind) in contrast to his outward actions. When Jesus said that a man who lusts after a woman has already committed adultery with her "in his heart" (Matt. 5:28), He was simply saying that adultery can be committed secretly in the mind even when no physical contact occurs. When Mary heard the shepherds' account of the angels singing "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14), she pondered these things "in her heart" (Luke 2:19). This simply means she thought about what she had heard.

In other places, the word “heart” refers to man’s spiritual control center—the part of him that governs his mind and directs his thoughts. I referred to it earlier as a man’s “wanter.” This is what the word “heart” means in the Bible whenever regeneration is the subject, or when the nature of a man’s heart (whether good or evil) is being discussed.

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 36:26; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 9:25–26; Rom. 2:28–29)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
(Matt. 5:8)

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil. (Luke 6:45; cf. Matt. 12:34–35)

Now that we have seen how the Bible uses the word “heart,” we are prepared to discuss the meaning of two passages that affect our understanding of the nature of the regenerate heart.

Jeremiah 17:9–10

The heart is more deceitful than all else
And is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?
I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give to each man according to his ways,
According to the results of his deeds. (Jer. 17:9–10)

It is one thing to admit that a man who is “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8) might tell a lie in a moment of weakness. It is another thing altogether to say that his new heart is “deceitful.” The spiritual center of a person’s being cannot be “honest and good” (Luke 8:15) and “pure” (Matt. 5:8) and at the same time “more deceitful than all else” and “desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9). These terms contradict each other too strongly to be describing the same thing.

We should notice that Jeremiah 17:9 is found in a passage where a contrast has been drawn between the curses that will fall upon the man “whose heart turns away from the Lord” (i.e., the unbeliever; 17:5) and the blessing that comes to the man “whose trust is in the Lord” (i.e., the believer; 17:7). In other words, Jeremiah has described the heart of the unbeliever and that of the believer in opposing terms: the unbeliever’s heart is oriented away from God, but the believer trusts in the Lord. Verse 9 logically follows this contrast only if Jeremiah was referring to the human heart in its natural condition (i.e., unregenerate) when he described it as “more deceitful than all else” and “desperately sick.”

Jeremiah’s main point in verses 9–10 is that only the Lord can see and accurately evaluate man’s heart. Verse 10 even implies that He *will* see a difference between one person’s heart and another, and will judge each person on the basis of the behavior that flows from the heart. But the need for God to see and judge in this way becomes irrelevant if every human heart conforms to the negative portrayal of verse 9. If all hearts are the same, all will be judged the same. Clearly not all human hearts are alike, however, as Jeremiah has already specified in verses 5–8. God recognizes this difference and judges men accordingly.

In this way Jeremiah 17:9–10 is similar to 1 Samuel 16:6–7, where Samuel is preparing to anoint a new king from among the sons of a man named Jesse. Samuel first notices the son named Eliab and thinks, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him” (16:6). Apparently Eliab was impressive in his outward appearance and had what it took to be king, or so Samuel thought.

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (16:7)

The Lord directed Samuel to anoint David (16:12), Eliab’s younger brother whom God Himself described elsewhere as “a man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22; cf. 1 Sam. 13:14).

God rejected Eliab and chose David on the basis of what He saw in their hearts. David's heart reflected the Lord's character and was inclined to obey Him, so it cannot be proper to describe his heart (or the heart of any true believer) as "more deceitful than all else" and "desperately sick."

Mark 7:20–23

That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man. (Mark 7:20–23)

It is true that regenerate people are capable of committing any of these sins, but is the regenerate heart the source of sin in the believer just as the unregenerate heart is the source of sin in the unbeliever? In evaluating this question it will first be helpful to see the overall point Jesus was making.

Jesus' statement followed a question from some Pharisees and scribes who asked, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" (7:5). After rebuking the Pharisees for upholding their ritual purification traditions while disregarding God's commandments (7:6–13), Jesus explained to a crowd of listeners that "there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him, but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man" (7:15). Later, in private with his disciples, He made the statement recorded in verses 20–23. His purpose wasn't to say all that can be said about the heart or nature of men. He was simply exposing the fallacy of the notion that ritual cleanliness equates with genuine purity. What a man eats has no moral consequence because it does not affect his heart. It simply passes through his digestive system and is expelled (7:19). A man is defiled by the things that proceed out of his heart.

In this context Jesus could have been using the term "heart" in one of three ways:

1. He could have been referring to a man's mind or inner thoughts (as "heart" is used in places like Matthew 5:28 and Luke 2:19).
2. He could have been describing *every* person's spiritual control center (i.e., the heart whether unregenerate or regenerate).
3. He could have been describing man's spiritual control center in its natural condition (i.e., the unregenerate heart).

If the first option is correct, then nothing Jesus said here would conflict with statements He made elsewhere about the goodness and purity of the regenerate heart. Even a man with a regenerate heart can think and behave sinfully at times.

The second option is how many interpreters understand this passage—as a generic reference to man's spiritual control center whether regenerate or unregenerate. As I will explain below, this interpretation fails to account for contextual factors in Mark 7, and it is inconsistent with the way Jesus' distinguishes between unregenerate and regenerate hearts elsewhere.

I lean toward the third option because Jesus' intent was to expose the hypocrisy of the unregenerate Jewish leaders. They were the ones whose hearts were far from God (7:6; cf. Jeremiah 17:5) and whose worship was in vain (7:7). Rather than making themselves pure through external morality and cleansing rituals, they were defiled by what their corrupt hearts were producing (7:20–23).

Jesus' portrayal of the Pharisees' hearts in Mark 7:20–23 is much like His description of the same group of men in Matthew 23:27:

Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

It would be an obvious interpretive mistake to liken the regenerate man to a whitewashed tomb—beautiful on the outside but corrupt

on the inside. After all, Jesus' point in Matthew 23:27 was that the unregenerate Jews' outward display of morality was repulsive to God because it served as a mask to hide their inner corruption. As Jesus said to them elsewhere, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts" (Luke 16:15). Applying the "whitewashed tomb" metaphor or the words of Luke 16:15 to the regenerate man, however, would be no greater an error than including the regenerate heart in the meaning of Mark 7:20–23.

When Jesus said evil proceeds "out of the heart of men" (7:21), He was explaining the natural human condition by listing the natural product of the unregenerate heart. The Pharisees considered themselves better than all other men because of circumcision, possession of the Law of Moses, and ritual purity (Rom. 2:17–29; Luke 18:11–12). But because they were unregenerate, they were spiritually no different than the rest of fallen mankind as described in Genesis 6:5—"every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This ancient description of the natural man's heart is parallel with Jesus' description of what proceeds "out of the heart of men" (Mark 7:21). The point of both passages is to say that the natural human heart produces evil, not good.

We know that the regenerate man is not included in the otherwise universal description of mankind in Genesis 6:5 because a few verses later (6:9) Noah is described as "a righteous man, blameless in his time." Genesis 6:5 and 6:9 simply cannot describe the same man at the same time. In the same way, it is inconsistent with the rest of the New Testament to see Mark 7:20–23 (or the parallel passage in Matthew 15:18–20) as a description of the regenerate heart, which Jesus describes in positive terms elsewhere. A person's heart cannot be the source of "deceit" (Mark 7:22) while at the same time being "honest and good" (Luke 8:15). A man's heart cannot be the fountainhead of sins like adultery and murder (Mark 7:21) while at the same time being "pure" (Matt. 5:8). As James asks rhetorically, "Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?" (James 3:11). Even the simplest understanding of language tells us that two opposing descriptions of the human heart cannot describe the same person's heart. Take one last look at this important distinction in Jesus' teaching by directly comparing Mark 7:21–23 with Luke 6:45.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man. (Mark 7:21–23)

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure [of his heart] brings forth what is evil. (Luke 6:45)

Mark 7:21–23 is obviously parallel with the second part of Luke 6:45, but it cannot describe the same “heart” that is described in the first part of Luke 6:45. Jesus’ whole point in the first part of Luke 6:45 is to say that good on the inside is the source of good, not evil, on the outside.

But Didn’t Jesus Call Christians “Evil”?

In Matthew 7:7–11 Jesus compares man’s natural generosity with God’s divine goodness. He says to his listeners, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?” (7:11). Because Jesus delivered this sermon to His “disciples” (Matt. 5:1–2), some interpreters have concluded that He was calling His own true followers “evil.” Two considerations, however, argue against this assumption:

1. Many (if not most) of the people to whom Jesus was speaking were “disciples” only in the broadest sense of the word: they were “learners” but not necessarily committed followers. Jesus’ message in Matthew 5–7 is largely evangelistic. In 7:13–14, immediately following His comment about His listeners being “evil,” Jesus exhorts the crowd to choose the narrow way that leads to life and shun the broad way that leads to destruction. In 7:21–23 He warns them that not everyone who calls Him “Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. In 7:24–27 He cautions His hearers not to hear only, but also to act upon His words in order to avoid destruction. When Jesus asks in Matthew 7:9, “What man is there among you [who would not give his son good things]?” His point is that even a fallen man’s

natural inclination is to give good things, not cruel things, when one of his children asks for a gift. When Jesus refers to His listeners as “evil” in verse 11, He is contrasting the natural human condition (i.e., unregenerate and therefore evil) with the good nature and character of God. But He never implies that the regenerate man remains “evil” by nature in the same way that unbelievers are “evil” by nature.

2. In Matthew 12:34–35 Jesus addresses a group of Pharisees, and once again He calls His listeners “evil.” But this time He makes it clear that He is referring to the unregenerate person by contrasting the evil man with the good man.

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.

Just as there is a difference in nature between a good tree and a bad tree (Matt. 12:33; cf. 7:15–20; Luke 6:43–44), there is a difference in nature between a regenerate man and an unregenerate man (Matt. 12:34–35; Luke 6:45). Jesus only refers to one category of man as “evil,” while the other He calls “good.”

Appendix C

Abusing the Body Language of the New Testament

With what you now know about the sinful passions that remain in your unredeemed body, you might be tempted to conclude that your body is guilty of sinning while you remain blameless. Some have even drawn this conclusion from a faulty understanding of Romans 7:17—“So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

Your body is part of you. It is the physical instrument through which you experience everything you experience, and by which you do everything you do, whether good or evil. It is your point of contact with the physical world whether you are sinning or practicing righteousness.

It would be ridiculous for a man to say, “My body really enjoyed that meal,” as though his body were somehow distinct from the rest of him. Instead he says, “I really enjoyed that meal.” Likewise, there is no biblical basis for the Christian to say, “My body looked at pornography last night,” as though his body were somehow guilty while he remained blameless. What he should say is, “I gave in to the passions of my body. I looked at pornography last night. I sinned.”

Christians are “putting to death the deeds of the body,” but the Bible never tells us that the body commits sin on its own, that it has a will of its own, or that it is inherently evil. You are tempted to sin because of the passions that remain in your unredeemed body (along with Satan’s clever ways of appealing to your fleshly lusts). You commit sin by means of your body. But you are fully responsible for the sins you commit.

Here are four facts to remember about you, your body, and your sin:

1. You have a new heart that is pure and good—a new spiritual nature that is inclined toward righteousness rather than sin. This new creation is who you really are.
2. The sinful passions that remain in you are the passions and desires of your unredeemed body (i.e., your fleshly lusts). They do not find their source in your new heart.
3. Your heart loves righteousness and your body lusts for sin, but you are not a divided man. Your new heart and your unredeemed body are both parts of your one identity as a person.
4. Your unredeemed body is the source of your sinful desires, but you may not blame your body for your sin. You (as a whole person) sin when you fail to resist your fleshly lusts.

Appendix D

The Relationship Between Nature and Behavior

Three important questions often arise in discussions about the relationship between a person's nature and his behavior.

Question #1: Jesus said, “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit” (Matt. 7:18). If the “good tree” is the Christian, and the “bad fruit” is sin, why should we not conclude that Christians are incapable of sinning?

Answer: First we should note that Jesus used the “good tree/bad fruit” principle to refer specifically to false prophets (Matt. 7:15–20). But because the principle itself is unarguable and universal, it correctly illustrates the difference between *all* unbelievers and *all* believers. Jesus used the same illustration in Luke 6:43–45 without linking it specifically to false prophets.

Second, Jesus' illustration dealt with kind, not quality. He didn't contrast good grapes with bad grapes or good figs with bad figs. He contrasted grapes with thorns and figs with thistles—different kinds of fruit produced by different kinds of plants. As He explained in verses 16–17, “Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit

[i.e., grapes or figs], but the bad tree bears bad fruit [i.e., thorns or thistles].” The point of the illustration is simple: people, like trees, produce what accords with their nature. “You will know them by their fruits” (7:16, 20).

Third (and most important), this was a whole-harvest illustration, not a small-sample illustration. Jesus was describing the harvest of a crop, not the inspection of an individual piece of fruit (note the word “gathered” in verse 16). The illustration describes the kind of crop a farmer should expect to gather when he goes into a particular field at the time of the harvest. When he goes into a vineyard, he rightly expects to gather grapes. If he goes into a briar patch, he should expect to find thorns. The illustration does not picture a farmer scouring his vineyard to see if he can find a single bad grape—or even a thorn—growing on one of his vines.

Another clue that this is a whole-harvest illustration and not a small-sample illustration is found in the passage that follows (7:21–23):

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

Without explaining what “day” He is speaking of, Jesus says, “Many will say to Me on that day . . .” Given the harvest illustration that immediately precedes this passage, it is not difficult to discern that Jesus is speaking here about the final “harvest” of souls—the day of judgment. The clue that the overall passage was a whole-harvest illustration rather than a small-sample illustration appears when Jesus tells some to depart from Him because they “practice lawlessness” (i.e., sin as a matter of consistent practice). These are not righteous people whose behavior was imperfect. They are people who are known as sinners by the overall product of their lives.

To appeal to the good tree/bad fruit illustration as proof that a person with a good nature (i.e., a Christian) never sins would be stretching the illustration beyond its purpose. The simple point Jesus was making was that a person's nature can be known by the kind of behavior he typically exhibits—by the moral “harvest” of his life. The regenerate man may sin, but he will not be known for sinning. Instead, because he has a good nature he will be known for righteous living. This direct relationship between nature and patterns of behavior is spoken about elsewhere in the Bible:

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin [i.e., sin habitually, or as a matter of practice], because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:9-10)

John clearly is not saying that a Christian *never* sins. We know this because earlier in the same letter he admitted that a Christian *can* sin:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone [of you] sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 2:1–2a)

The Christian certainly can sin, but it is not consistent with his new nature to sin any more than it is consistent with the nature of a grape vine to produce thorns. Even when the Christian does sin, he is forgiven because of Christ's sacrifice.

Question #2: Since Christians sometimes sin, and since a person's behavior is a reflection of his nature, why should we not conclude that the Christian's new nature is at least partially corrupt, or that he has two natures, one good and one evil?

Answer: Behavior doesn't always reflect nature perfectly. Genesis 1:31 tells us that all God created was “very good,” but Adam still sinned. If behavior is always a perfect reflection of nature, we would be forced to conclude that the original creation was at least

partially corrupt (which everyone should agree was not the case). We learn from Adam's example that evil can come from something that is "very good" by nature. We also read in the Bible that King Nebuchadnezzar acted like a cow for seven years (Dan. 4:33), but we would be wrong to conclude that he had the nature of a cow during that time period (or that he was part cow and part human). His example simply demonstrates that a human being is capable of acting like an animal—in other words, below his nature.

Pigs never fly because they cannot fly. Flying is not in their nature. Eagles, on the other hand, were designed to soar above the earth, and that is what they typically do. It would not be impossible for an eagle to wallow in a mud puddle like a pig, but if you were to see an eagle doing this you would be wrong to conclude that the eagle had the same nature as the pig (or that he was part eagle and part pig). Wallowing in the mud is within the eagle's capabilities, but it is not normal or natural behavior. It is below his nature.

Likewise, the Christian is able to sin because his new nature exists in an unredeemed body, but sin is not what he was re-created to do. It is not what he does "by nature." The fact that he sins doesn't prove that his nature is evil, or partly evil, or that he has two natures, one evil and one good. When a Christian sins he is acting in a way that is *below* his new nature, in a manner that is uncharacteristic of his new identity.

Many Christians have been taught to describe "the flesh" as the Christian's sinful nature or "sin nature." According to this teaching, the good nature created by God in regeneration exists in conjunction with a second "nature"—the believer's unredeemed mortal body with its fleshly inclinations. The word "flesh" does refer to the unredeemed human body, but it is not helpful to describe this physical (or fleshly) aspect of the Christian as his second nature or his "sin nature."

The Bible never explicitly uses two-nature terminology with respect to the Christian. Even though this two-nature description of the regenerate man is the logical result of combining biblical realities (i.e., the good heart and the flesh, both of which do exist in him), it is more biblical to speak of the believer as having only one *good*

nature. In His good tree/bad tree illustrations (Matt. 7:15–20; 12:33–35; Luke 6:43–45), Jesus described men as either good by nature or evil by nature, never suggesting that the Christian possesses both natures at the same time.

I understand that there is a sense in which it is reasonable to describe the believer as having two natures. The debate as I have described it is over terminology more than theology. But as I said in chapter 10, terminology is important and influential. In the end, what better example could we look to when deciding what words to use to describe ourselves and other believers than the teaching of Christ Himself?

Question #3: If the regenerate person is capable of sinning even though his nature is good, doesn't that mean that the unregenerate person is capable of righteous behavior even though his nature is evil?

Answer: No, it doesn't mean that. When Jesus said, "The evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil" (Matt. 12:35; Luke 6:45), He was saying that *only* evil comes from the unregenerate heart. The regenerate man is good by nature but is sometimes dragged downward by the moral gravity of his fleshly lusts. The unregenerate man is evil by nature but he has nothing to pull him upward. Nothing within him can produce the ability to submit to God in obedience. Paul strongly affirmed this in Romans 8:7–8:

The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh [i.e., those who are unregenerate and under the control of their fleshly lusts] cannot please God.

Appendix E

Have Christians Laid Aside the Old Self or Not?

The “old self” (lit. “old man”) is mentioned three times in the New Testament: Romans 6:6, Colossians 3:9, and Ephesians 4:22–24. Two of these passages are the subject of an in-house debate among Christians. The debate centers around this question: have Christians already laid aside the old self and put on the new self, or is laying aside the old self and putting on the new self something they still need to do?

First it will be helpful to compare these two references to the “old self” and “new self” in their contexts. I have italicized the pertinent words and phrases for easier comparison.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him,

just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you *lay aside the old self*, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and *put on the new self*, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:17–24)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you *laid aside the old self* with its evil practices, and *have put on the new self* who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. (Col. 3:5–10)

The Anatomy of the Disagreement

In Colossians 3:9 Paul describes laying aside the old self and putting on the new self as something Christians have already done. In Ephesians 4:22–24 he seems to instruct Christians to lay aside the old self and put on the new self as though both still need to be done. I believe Paul is saying the same thing in both places, using two different approaches to remind his readers of their conversion.

Why a Parallel Interpretation Makes More Sense

Paul begins both passages by reminding his believing readers that they should no longer live like unconverted people—like they lived before they became Christians (Eph. 4:17–19; Col. 3:5–9a). His basis for exhorting the Colossians in this way is the fact that they “laid aside the old self” and “have put on the new self.”

Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians depends upon the same fact, but rather than simply referring to his readers’ conversion in the past tense (as he did in Colossians 3:9), he describes it from the perspective of a person who is being taught what it means to become a Christian in the first place. In other words, he reminds

them that part of the body of introductory Christian doctrine is the exhortation to “lay aside the old self” and “put on the new self.”

Contrasting the behavior he expects of Christians with the way unconverted people behave, Paul says, “But you did not learn Christ in this way” (4:20). His point is to say, “The basis I have for telling you not to go on living like unconverted people is the fact that you were taught differently from the very beginning. You did not ‘learn Christ’ in a manner that would permit you to go on living like the rest of the world.”

In verses 22–24 (the controversial part of the passage), Paul switches from his negative expression about “learning Christ” (i.e., “you did not learn Christ” in a way that permits corrupt living) to a positive description of what they were actually taught:

[At that time you were taught] that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (4:22–24)

The words I placed in brackets are not in the text, but they are implied, as the New English Translation’s rendition of verses 20–24 indicates:

But you did not learn about Christ like this, if indeed you heard about him and were taught in him, just as the truth is in Jesus. You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man who has been created in God’s image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.⁶⁷

As this translation reflects, Paul reminds his readers that *when they became Christians* they were taught to lay aside the old self and put

67. The NET Bible, New English Translation, 2nd Beta Edition (Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C., 1996–2003), 2147.

on the new self. Based on the implication that as true believers they had already done what they were taught to do, he exhorts them to continue behaving according to their new nature and identity.

Even if I am wrong—even if Paul was exhorting Christians to “lay aside the old self” and “put on the new self” in their present situation rather than reminding them that they did this when they became Christians—the Bible’s basic instruction to the Christian remains the same: be who you really are (your new self), not who you were (your old self).

Your old self is not a part of your new person. He does not need to be resisted, restrained, renounced, or put to death, because he is already dead, having been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14–15; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3). He no longer exists. To “lay aside the old self” is not to get rid of him, but rather to stop thinking and acting like he did when he was alive.

The flesh, on the other hand, will be an active presence in every Christian’s life until “the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). We know the flesh is active because the Bible tells us that it “sets its desire against the Spirit” and tempts believers to gratify its passions (Gal. 5:16–17; Rom. 8:11–12). It no longer enslaves us, but it still troubles us.⁶⁸

A man might go by two different names, but he cannot be two different people at the same time. Because of the ongoing influence of your flesh you undoubtedly think and act like your old self at times, but it is no more possible for your old self to exist alongside your new self than it is for you to be unregenerate and regenerate at the same time.

68. When Paul said, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24), he was not using the word “crucified” to signal the death of the flesh. He used “crucified” in Galatians 5:24 the way he used the same word in Galatians 6:14, to describe the severing of loyalty or allegiance.

Appendix F

Before Telling Your Wife

If you are married yet have been overcome by a habit of viewing pornography, it is possible that your wife knows little or nothing about your pattern of sexual sin. If this is the case, I would strongly suggest that you consult with a pastor before confessing your sin to her. A wise and experienced Christian can help you discern how best to address this matter with your wife, and in what degree of detail. It is usually best for confession in this area to be somewhat generalized, that is, you may wish to avoid many (if not most) of the details.

A truly repentant man will want to confess his sins, but he may cause further harm to his marriage by spewing out a detailed confession of his sordid behavior. Your wife may think she needs to know all of these details, but in the end she will not be helped by having a collage of images in her mind as a result of your vivid descriptions of repeated sinful acts. It is generally sufficient for her to know that you have sinned sexually, that you are repentant and seeking her forgiveness, that you are being held strictly accountable by godly men in your church, and that you have come to understand that sexual sin is inconsistent with who you really are in Christ.

A wise pastor will also be able to help your wife, through the counsel of a godly woman (or women) in the church, to deal with issues of forgiveness and reconciliation. You may be ashamed to know that other ladies in your church are aware of your sin, but your wife may not be able to bear this burden alone. Many wives need godly female companionship and counsel to help them through their pain.

If your sexual sin involved physical contact with another person, confession in greater detail is necessary. Your wife will likely request that you submit yourself to a medical examination to check for sexually transmitted diseases. Given all of the serious and even deadly diseases that are shared through illicit sex, you have a moral obligation to cooperate with this request—or better yet, to submit to an examination before she requests it.

Appendix G

My Personal Story

I know what it is like to be where many readers of this book are right now—practicing habitual sexual sin as an unbeliever or fighting a frustrating battle against the same enemy as a believer. But as a man who has been delivered by God’s grace from slavery to sexual sin, I also know what it is like to walk in freedom.

I was exposed to pornographic magazines when I was twelve years old. In the heart of a boy who thought he was a Christian because of a prayer he had prayed, yet who knew nothing of the reality of regeneration or the power of love for Christ, the floodgates of sexual sin were flung wide open. For the next twenty-five years, through most of my career as a deputy sheriff and the first fourteen years of my marriage, I lived as an unconverted church member and a slave to sexual sin. I was thirty-five years old when God opened my eyes to the gospel and give me a heart of love for His Son.

I never returned to viewing pornography, but for several years after my conversion my struggle with sexual temptation was fierce and depressing. I knew I was in Christ, but since I didn’t really know

who I was in Christ or the complete story of what happened when I was born again, I relied more on personal resolve than on the Spirit of God or the encouraging truth about regeneration and deliverance. Because of my ignorance, I rarely experienced the joy that should accompany freedom from sin. Those were difficult years, and in some ways, wasted years.

I don't claim to be immune to sexual temptation even now. I still have to think through the lies and work hard to refute them with truth. I still have to run away from sexual temptation in my thoughts and in my day-to-day living in order to avoid sinning. I must still depend on God to protect me from Satan's schemes. If I fail to live thoughtfully and dependently in these ways, I can commit sexual sin just as readily as the next Christian.

My experience won't be exactly the same as yours, but I hope you will avoid a similar (or even worse) experience than mine by understanding these encouraging truths better than I did, sooner than I did. God was gracious to reveal them to me over the past few years as I studied and taught through Paul's letter to the Romans, and as I read a few excellent books.⁶⁹ Since understanding these things, I have become better equipped to help other men, not just to resist temptation dutifully, but to enjoy their freedom from sexual sin.

69. Most notably, *Justification and Regeneration*, by Charles Leiter (Hannibal: Granted Ministries Press, 2009), and *Christian Take Heart*, by Tom Wells (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).



Please visit our web sites:

www.CCWtoday.org

This is our main site, with numerous articles, ministry tools, audio messages, and information about ordering our publications.

www.CCWblog.org

This blog showcases pertinent articles from all our sites on a weekly basis, and provides an opportunity for interaction with our writers.

www.BulletinInserts.org

This site provides timely and instructive bulletin inserts, handouts, and tracts. We offer free, downloadable inserts (also available in A4) for every Sunday of the year.

www.WaytoGod.org

This site contains articles and audio designed to guide interested people into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Here we also answer questions from inquirers.

DELIVERED ~~FROM~~ *by* DESIRE

Most men believe that accountability is the invincible weapon for fighting lust, but many of us have found that this method falls short. It helps for a while, granted, due to the repulsive power of embarrassment. But what's next? We need something more potent if we are to experience lasting victory.

Daryl Wingerd dug up and brushed off the Bible's core explosive device for defeating habitual sexual sin. You won't find this concept in most self-help books on the subject—even Christian ones. I'm convinced you will discover here the volatile material able to finally decimate lust as a pattern of life, in you and in those you help. Like others, you may say, "I've not read a book quite like this for clarifying the biblical way to succeed over this troubling issue."

Women may wish to read this book also. It will help them understand what their husbands and sons may face. Though writing from the man's perspective, the author is not unaware of how lust can become a woman's problem as well. In fact, believers in general may wish to read *Delivered by Desire* to discover how to overcome other habitual sins. The biblical principles will apply.

~ from the Preface by Jim Elliff, President,
Christian Communicators Worldwide

Daryl Wingerd was a Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff from 1987-2000 and is currently one of the pastors of Christ Fellowship of Kansas City. He also serves on staff with Christian Communicators Worldwide.



CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATORS
Worldwide

