

Killing lust

For every adult Christian on planet earth, lust is a battle. It can be a particularly intense battle for some - and often very much a battle for many guys. It's made worse by several things. *Firstly*, we are now getting married a lot later so there are many more years with hormones raging but no wife. *Secondly*, the society in which we live promotes promiscuity and immorality. It's in our faces constantly. Images that 30 years ago would have been seen as pornographic and would have been censored, are now mainstream. Being sexually pure is seen as weird, enslaved and outdated. Church culture is being affected by that. Behaviour that would have been identified as sin years ago is now tolerated. *Thirdly*, the internet has basically taken the lid off any existing restraint. While many guys would have been too ashamed to buy a 'dirty magazine' or go to a sex shop, you can now look at what you like with a click of the mouse. No one will know and you don't have to be so worried about being publicly embarrassed. So, the big question for us as Christian men is how we can deal with the problem of lust in our lives? There's lots of great stuff written about this that goes into detail, but I just wanted to share some biblical thoughts and practical tips to help us.

Let's go to war!

The theme of war or battle goes all through the Bible. God is pictured as a warrior many times. God's people find themselves in many literal battles in the OT. In the NT, however, there is a big emphasis on *spiritual warfare*. So, for example, we get in 1 Pet 2:11 "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." The fight against lust is *war*. We find ourselves as Christians in the middle of a huge war and we are called to fight against sin and Satan in the name of Christ.

Let's just take a moment to think about how the Bible talks about our role in this war.

On the one hand, victory for God's people in the Bible is never dependent on their strength, skill or weapons. It's always dependent upon God's presence and power. In fact, God often likes to present his people with impossible odds just so that it becomes obvious that it really is all his victory. God is the one who fights for his people. God always gets the glory.

On the other hand, normally the people have to fight and get bloody for God's victory to come about. Sometimes God just wipes out the enemy with no involvement of the people, but the usual picture is that they have to strap on a sword and go to war. God fights through his people fighting. He's empowering them all the way but they have to put in %150 effort.

So, we get, on the one hand, a big emphasis upon *dependence on God* in everything. On the other hand, we get a big emphasis upon *effort* and struggle. War, in the Bible, is therefore always about *dependent fighting* or *faith-filled effort*.

Bible verses:

Nehemiah 4:1-23 - look at the contrast in v.9, 14, 20, 21-23

Eph 6:10-18 - look at the contrast in v.10 and 14-17

Col 2:11-12 and Col 3:5

Col 1:29

Deut 4:1

So, how do we apply this to our battle with lust?

We've gotta fight! War is obviously not fought in a relaxed, easygoing, fun-loving kind of a way. You shout, fight, attack, kill, lash out, struggle, defend. It's serious, painful, tiring, intense and difficult. It is bloody and you get wounded. We have to kill lust and maim it. We attack with all the weapons at our disposal. Remember that our war is desperate and the outcome is fatal for one of the sides fighting. Either we kill lust or lust will kill us. We put all our effort into the battle and take whatever measures we have to kill it. If we knew that someone was at this moment breaking into our house and going to rob us of all your possessions, what would we do? Open the door and let them in?! Go and watch telly? Make a cup of tea? No! We'd defend our home! We don't want anyone robbing us blind. So, let's not let lust rob us of our spiritual possessions and make us its slave. We must go to war! We must do whatever we can to fight it.

We've gotta depend on God. The results, however, don't belong to us and we can't win on our own. We're weak and unreliable. We give up. We're overwhelmed by the odds. We might manage outward restraint for a period of time but we certainly can't change our hearts! And heart change, not simply change in our behaviour, is what the Spirit of God wants. However, God is almighty and Jesus has bought us long term victory and freedom from our enemy. God's power overwhelms our enemy and we can trust him to give us all we need. We will win even though there will be mini-defeats along the way. We live in a desperate dependence upon God even as we fight. We must keep trusting God in the battle with lust. Our willpower and resolutions are very weak. Our strategies to fight sin are overcome very quickly by the devil. We are not strong and our desire for holiness can be very weak. Lust will suddenly rise up in us and we'll feel completely overwhelmed. Habits are ingrained in us and very difficult to break. We forget very quickly. Probably, in an hour's time what you've read here will seem a bit distant. So, we desperately need God's power. We must ask him. We must ask others to ask him for us. We must know that only the Spirit of God will change our desires. We must be like blind Bartimaeus who cried out to Jesus "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk 10:46-52). When everyone told him to quieten down, he just cried out even more - and he got the blessing. Even as we fight with all our strength, we must know that we can't overcome lust simply by resolving *not* to lust - we continually need God's saving power!

A few practical tips for the battle

One of the big issues with lust is that as believers we can find large contradictions in our lives when it comes to sex. On one level, we might know a lot and have received a lot of teaching and yet our hearts/behaviour remain unchanged. Our problem is often not lack of knowledge or good theology. So, here I just want to focus on some practical tips for how we can fight lust in Christ's power.

1. *Let's do everything we can to cultivate a love for holiness generally in our lives.* We give into lust because we love it; and we give into lust because we generally love sin. So, let's get into the habit of thinking about holiness and what a great thing it is. Let's stir up within ourselves any desire we have for holiness. We can use Bible verses or sermons or encouraging truths to get our desire going for holiness. Spend time thinking about the value of holiness.

2. *Let's undo our habits.* A lot of addictive patterns are about habits that get ingrained in us. It sets tracks in us that easily repeat themselves. Recognize what those habits/patterns

are and do something to disturb those patterns e.g. lust comes quicker when we're tired, stressed or being lazy.

3. *Let's get into the habit of following the 3-second rule.* Lust takes hold of us very quickly and overcomes all resistance in us. We must kill a pattern of thought *very* quickly or it will take hold of us. Once it's taken hold, it's very hard to deal with. Let's develop practical habits of turning our mind/averting our eyes to other things straight away.

4. *Let's talk to trusted other men about it.* Sin breeds in the dark. We need to bring it out into the light and be honest about it with brothers in Christ who will love us and confront us. We need brothers who will pray for us in our weakness.

5. *Let's call 'sin' sin.* As well as loving holiness, let's cultivate a hatred of sin. We can talk about lust in a way that underplays how offensive it is. We can say "I've failed/messed up" when actually we should say "I've disobeyed". We can say "I'm struggling with this" when actually we should say "I'm getting addicted". We tend to underplay sin in our language and we shouldn't do that because it's offensive to God and brings his judgment (Matt 5:30).

6. *Let's be radical in our strategies to battle habits that open up for lust in our lives.* Jesus persuades us to 'gouge out our eye and chop off our hand' (Matt 5:27-30) rather than to welcome it into our lives. Don't be afraid to do 'crazy' things if lust has taken hold of your life through certain channels. Is it really more important to have access to the internet than to be pure? Is it more useful for me to have a smartphone with internet access than to have holiness? If my TV causes me to sin smash it up. Of course, this might sound crazy to some, but is it more crazy than what Jesus himself tells us to do (chop off your hand etc)? Of course, dealing with these outward things does not equal the heart change God wants, *but* they are useful and obedient and help significantly.

7. *Let's be prepared.* We live in a sexually depraved and immoral society so we should expect there to be regular temptation. I am never beyond it or out of its reach. I should always expect myself to be vulnerable and ready to fall into this at any point. Never be surprised when you get tempted.

8. *Let's get married!* In our society we tend to delay marriage but Paul simply says if you burn with lust, get married (1 Cor 7:9)! This sounds very strange to us, but it's full of practical wisdom. If we burn with lust, maybe that's a sign that we should think hard about finding a wife! Our society delays marriage more than any society in the history of the world and therefore we're left with raging hormones for much longer! Marriage doesn't get rid of lust but it will help.

9. *Let's get humble.* This sin can humble us for our good. Funnily enough lust can have a spiritually sobering effect on us. It makes it clear that we're nowhere near as spiritually mature as we thought we were! Maybe, we feel that we have many things 'sorted' as believers - and yet this area will reveal huge gaps and inconsistencies in us. We need to let this work humility in us and deflate our spiritual pride and correct our self-evaluation.

Lots more can and should be said about this (cf. Captured by a better vision by Tim Chester). These are just a few thoughts and I could say a lot more. However, I just wanted to get us thinking and praying. Let's get together as men in St John's to battle this sin together in Christ's power.