

Victorian era London was not how we envision it in most movies. Mid-19th century London was on the brink of disaster. It was the largest city in the largest empire the world had ever seen. Its growth far outpaced infrastructure and technology. The vast throngs of humanity coupled with the introduction of the bathroom or the water closet, as they called it, dumped huge amounts of raw sewage into open cesspools that weren't built to handle the waste. These cesspools overflowed into the streets or back into houses causing disease and sickness. Members of parliament soaked their curtains in chemicals just to block out the horrific odor. Their solution was to funnel all the raw sewage to the Thames River.

This solution seemed to work well until 1878 when the pleasure steamer Princess Alice was struck by coal ship slicing her in half. In less than five minutes the Princess Alice's passengers, mostly women and children, were plunged into the foulest part of the Thames River. 650 people died, not from the collision, but from drowning in raw, toxic sewage.

Imagine our outrage if Marshfield's water treatment broke down, and our sewer systems overflowed up into our homes. Imagine the response of the EPA and environmental groups if there were streams of raw sewage flowing through Hidden Waters instead of freshwater springs. Yet the truth is we have pipelines of worse than raw sewage flowing into homes. It flows into our living rooms and kitchens. It flows into our bedrooms. It flows into our children's rooms.

It is the widespread availability of sexually explicit material. Never has it been so easy before. No longer do you have to go to nasty place where you don't want to touch the walls in the seediest part of town where you hope no one recognizes you or your car. No longer do you have to prove your age. Anything is now available at anytime, anywhere to anyone. The world is waking up to the fact that we have a problem of epidemic proportions unfolding. And yet those in positions of power and authority refuse to do anything to put any sort of effective controls in place. It's as if they want raw sewage pumped into our children's bedrooms.

But we are to blame as well, because if it was raw sewage, we would demand action. We would do something about it ourselves. But we happily pay hundreds of dollars to put this sewer pipe in our kid's pockets and do very little to monitor it, control it, or shut it off.

We continue our study of Samson this morning. Last week we saw that Samson was a man with high calling and supernatural endowment from God. He was set apart from before his conception to be used by God to deliver his people. God blessed him with supernatural physical strength. He was a real life superhero. He was never once defeated in a straight up fight.

We tend to think of Samson as a man brought down by a haircut. His lover, an unscrupulous seductress named Delilah, uses her feminine charms to try and get Samson to divulge the secret of his strength. The rulers of the five Philistine cities offer her 1,100 pieces of silver each to Delilah if she can deliver Samson into their hands. Three times she betrays him and hands him over to the Philistines, only for Samson to easily break free of their trap. She tries a fourth time, and with a combination of her berating, belittling and begging him, he finally gives in and tells her the secret to his success. He tells her he was dedicated to God from the womb and that no razor was ever to touch his head. And so while he sleeps on Delilah's lap, Samson gets his first haircut.

But what brought Samson down wasn't the haircut. Not really. He was defeated before the blade touched the first braid of hair. His problem was his inability to deal with sexual temptation. His heart was ruled by his lusts. Samson was physically strong, but morally weak. He could rip apart a lion with his bare hands and defeat a thousand Philistines, but he couldn't defeat his own passions. He couldn't say 'No' to Delilah, because he couldn't say 'No' to his desires.

But Samson is not alone. Countless men have been enslaved to their sexual desires. Countless men have been brought down because they couldn't say 'No' to their lust. And it's not only men. Plenty of women fall into this trap as well whether from porn, a racy romance novel, or the promise of some illicit fantasy in an internet chat room. There's an axiom that says boys look at porn; girls read it. There's a lot of truth to that. The struggle that consumed Samson 4,000 years ago is the same struggle that so many are fighting today. The problem today is that this age-old temptation has been supercharged by technology.

Last Sunday we began examining the process that worked in Samson's life. It's same downward spiral of addiction that lust works in lives today. The first step we saw was fantasy. Samson's heart was ruled by what his eyes saw. It fed his imagination and demanded gratification. Fantasy promises an escape, but makes you its prisoner in the end.

The second step in the process is ritualization. This is when you develop habits and patterns of behavior so that you can indulge in your fantasy, so that you can spend more time online clicking on videos, spend more time in the chatroom, spend more time reading erotica. You begin to orient your life around this obsessive compulsion. Samson had a pattern of trolling strange cities for forbidden women. Those caught in this pattern today likewise rearrange their schedules, go places, and do things so they can feed their habit.

III. Realization

The next step in this cycle of lust is realization. Sexual sin never stays in the fantasy or ritual stage. It demands gratification. Imagination is never enough. Sin, like cancer, grows and spreads. When sinful, sexual desire is fed long enough, it must be acted out. Therapists call this process realization, as the sex addict tries to make real what he imagines. Biblically, we would call this bearing fruit.

They can only keep their habit hidden and secret for so long, but like drugs, sexual addiction demands more and more to deliver the same level of pleasure. When people act out their addiction, they are essentially saying to their spouses, and to God, “You cannot satisfy my deepest longings, so I’ll do it on my own.” Sooner or later, fantasy is acted out.

It wasn't enough for Samson to just to look. He had to do it. In chapter 14 the process of fantasy to action took a period of time, and Samson was willing to jump through the hoops of getting married to legitimately get the object of his desire. But by chapter 16 he wants instant gratification. Look again at 16:1-2, “*One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.*” The line from seeing to doing is immediate. There was no waiting. There was no jumping through hoops to do it the right way. It was, “I want it and I want it now.” Fantasy wasn't enough. His imagination had to be realized.

IV. Paralysis

The fourth step in the cycle is paralysis. Repeated instances of realization or acting out lead to paralysis. The Biblical term is being enslaved to sin. The sinful behavior becomes so deeply engrained that the person caught in this cycle feels they no longer have a choice in their actions. Their life is controlled by their compulsive desire. Most people who are addicted to sexual sin have quit several times, if not dozens of times. They burn all their magazines. They throw away all their movies. They throw out all their books. They quit going to those clubs. They delete the hookup app off their phone. They wipe their hard drives. They cancel all their memberships. They stay clean a few days, even a few weeks, but then they plunge back in. They go on a binge. They are paralyzed and powerless over their sin.

This is where Samson is by the time he hooks up with Delilah. He doesn't bother to marry her. He doesn't try to keep it secret. As strong as he was, the allure of this woman was beyond his ability to withstand. A man that had superhuman strength was an absolute wimp when it came to women.

Three times Delilah tries to coax the secret of Samson's supernatural strength out of him and deliver him into the hands of the Philistines, yet did Samson ever learn his lesson? No. It didn't matter that this woman cared nothing for him. She would bind him and hand him over to his enemies and yet he kept going back to Delilah day after day. Vss. 15-16 of chapter 16 is very telling:

Judg 16:15-16

5 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." 16 With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

Samson was visiting Delilah daily. Despite her constant attempts at betrayal, he wanted sex so badly, he couldn't say "No." His willpower to do right was completely paralyzed.

Indulgence doesn't produce paralysis at first, but indulge enough times and the pattern becomes so deeply etched in your mind you no longer control it. It controls you. How many times have you quit, and failed? To what lengths have you gone to rid yourself of the problem, yet you are still ensnared? How many promises have you made, to yourself, to God, to loved ones, and you have broken them all? Get help. It is possible.

5 Desensitization

The final step is desensitization. Towards the end of the downward spiral, the addict becomes desensitized to the effects of sin. We don't care anymore. The Bible would say that we have seared our conscience. At this point, most people caught in sexual sin would rather change their career, their relationships, their commitments, and their beliefs to fit their addictions, than vice versa. They no longer care. They no longer try to escape the problem. They are thoroughly in its clutches. Those that reach this stage have given themselves completely over to their sinful obsession.

Samson exemplified this. He felt bulletproof, even though he was not. By the time he received his famous haircut, he was powerless-but completely unaware that the Spirit of God had left him. His conscience was seared.

Judg 16:19-21

19 Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. 20 Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. 21 Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison.

Samson thought he was immune to the consequences of sin. Having his hair cut wasn't the first time he'd violated his Nazirite vow. As a Nazirite he was forbidden to touch any dead thing. He had done this both with the lion's carcass and the jawbone of a donkey, however, God in his patience did not remove Samson's supernatural strength. He got away with it before. Now he thought he could do it every time. It is also somewhat ironic that a man whose life was ruled by what he "saw," had his eyes gouged out.

Samson's misdirected life was one of unrealized potential and wasted opportunity. He neglected his calling to pursue his own illicit desires, and he abused his supernatural gifts to his own ends. His unbridled sexual lusts paved the way to his own ruin without ever bringing any real help to his own people. Israel would experience no deliverance from the Philistines until a young shepherd boy by the name of David rose to prominence after his surprise victory against the giant Philistine warrior, Goliath.

Despite his lust and disobedience, God was able to work through Samson. Through Samson God was able to give a reminder of His presence to both Israel and her enemies. Samson was an example to his own people, on the one hand, of the divine strength that was theirs to overcome their enemies through repentance and faith, and on the other hand, of the weakness to which they had sunk through unfaithfulness and compromise with pagan culture. It is a reminder and a warning to us as well. Are we listening?

Conclusion

So, how do we battle back against this beast of sexual sin and its addictive desire? Lust is one of the seven deadly sins for a reason. It's deadly to your relationships. It's deadly to your own sexual fulfillment. It's deadly to your spiritual growth in Christ.

John Piper defines lust this way, "Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God." I love this definition because it puts our sexual sin into proper perspective. It reminds us that lust is not a victimless sin. It hurts others, and it hurts the heart of our God and Savior.

Piper goes on to explain that the lusted-after woman or man in your head, or on the screen, or on the street, is dishonored — not treated as a sacred, precious, eternal person made in the image of God, whose eternal destiny is always paramount, and whose holiness we either long for or ignore. And the only way this dishonor can be so daringly carried out is by disregarding God while we are in the sway of our lust. So lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and

disregards God. Ponder with me for a few minutes the natural and the spiritual role of self-control in relation to lust. . .

Addiction is a relative term. I would stake my life on the assumption that no one in this room is absolutely addicted to pornography or any sexual sin. John Piper says, “If the stakes are high enough and sure enough, you will have all the self-control you need to resist any sexual temptation.”

For example, if tonight you are feeling totally in the sway of sexual desire — more blazing, more powerful than you have ever felt it in your life — and you believe that you cannot resist the temptation to look at some nudity online, and suddenly a black-hooded ISIS member drags your best friend or your spouse into the room with a knife at their throat, and says, “If you look at that website, I will slit their throat,” you will suddenly have the self-control you thought you didn’t have. You won’t click.

Or if a man walks into the room and says, “If you delete Tinder from your phone, and turn your phone off for the night, I will give you one million dollars cash, tax-free, tonight,” you will suddenly have the self-control you thought you did not have.

The fact is, 99% of those who give in to lust, whether it’s pornography, fornication or adultery, are not decisively controlled by sexual desire. They are decisively controlled by what they believe — what they believe will happen if they act on their lust or don’t.

The decisive issue is whether we believe the stakes are high enough and sure enough. If we are sure a friend will die a gruesome death, we will have self-control. If we are sure we’ll get the \$1,000,000, we will have self-control.

Now there is nothing distinctly Christian about that motivation. That is simply the way we’re wired as human beings. And yet the Apostle Paul lists self-control as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. So for those who believe the gospel of Christ, and are justified by faith in Him, the Holy Spirit becomes the decisive cause of “self-control.” God’s Holy Spirit produces self-control in the believer. Now your willing participation is vital and essential, but not decisive. The Spirit is decisive.

Paul says in Philippians 2:12–13, “*Work out your salvation...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*” What that means for sexual sin is this: “Control your lusts because the Spirit is controlling them through you.” Exert self-control, because the Spirit is working it in you. The blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant,

secures for us the working of the Holy Spirit. And when he works, we act. His working appears in our acting. He creates the miracle of self-control, and we act the miracle of self-control.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't produce the same self-control that's common to all humanity. John tells us in John 16:14 that the mission of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to glorify Jesus. That is the Spirit's goal is to make known the beauty and the majesty of Jesus.

Let me unpack this for you. The way the Spirit produces self-control in your life is by revealing the majesty of Christ to our souls as supremely beautiful and supremely satisfying, so that we see and savor the beauties of Christ for what they really are.

And what he shows us through his word is that the all-satisfying beauties of Christ can be lost forever, if in the bondage of lust we prove to really love sex more than we love Jesus. And he shows us that the day is coming when we will enjoy Christ with a fullness of joy that outweighs every possible pleasure of lust.

Which brings us back now to the ISIS member ready to slit the throat of our best friend, and the man with a million dollars. The Holy Spirit shows us that the stakes are much higher than either of those situations when we face the temptations of lust. The beauties of Jesus that the Holy Spirit reveals can be lost forever, or they can satisfy your soul for eternity. There are many other rewards for pursuing sexual purity, but none of them outweigh the glory and majesty of Jesus.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. He creates the miracle. We act the miracle. He creates it by opening our eyes to see the glorious beauties of Christ — that they can be lost forever in bondage to lust, or enjoyed forever by the pure in heart.