

# Battling Lust

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing God and relying on His promises to combat lust and live a life of purity.*

**Duration:** 22:32

**Scripture:** Psalm 84:11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 4:19, James 1:17, 2 Peter 1:3

**Topics:** "Lust"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of building a strong foundation of knowledge and allegiance to God and Christ. He believes that by immersing oneself in the fullness of biblical revelation, individuals can overcome the dangers of lust and find true freedom. The preacher references 2 Peter 1:3, which states that God's divine power grants everything pertaining to life and godliness through true knowledge of Him. He also shares a powerful story of a man who had to amputate his own leg to save his life, highlighting the importance of perseverance and determination in the face of adversity. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to prioritize their relationship with God and seek His guidance in overcoming sinful desires.

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## Transcript

Some people think men are the issue here, that is, men struggle with this. I have had enough women approach me in their candor and talk about the issue that I don't make that assumption anymore. What did we read? I forget the percentage, 30% of Internet pornography is viewed by women? Maybe curiosity, you know, instead of men's kind of looking, but maybe not, maybe not.

Women's imaginations are different than men's imaginations. Harlequin romance novels are not the same as Playboy, but they function the same. It's just more relational, more contextual, more holistic.

Women's lusts are not as visceral and immediate and visual, but relational and situational and dream and hope oriented. We're pretty different folks, but sin in this lusting thing can defeat both kinds of human being. Here's my definition of lust, pursuing illicit thoughts or images, illicit, inappropriate, wrong, thoughts or images in the mind, so I mean women and men have your own ways of doing it, in the mind with a view to stimulating sexual pleasures or with or without external stimuli.

You can do it in here, you don't have to see or touch or be around anything, or you can be looking at a person or Internet or whatever. So that's my definition of lust, illicit thoughts or images in the mind with a

view to stimulating sexual pleasures with or without external stimuli. And the question is, how do you kill that? Because it's illicit, it's wrong.

How do you kill lust? And the answer is living by faith in future grace. So let's get specific here and analyze this a little bit. Lust grows out of suppressing the knowledge of God and His promises.

Most people in the world don't have a clue that that's the case, and some Christians don't believe that that's the case. But look at these texts, Ephesians 4.22, "...lay aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit." What does that mean, lusts of deceit? It means you are believing a lie when you lust. It means you're being deceived as you lust.

And deceive always implies the departure from truth, some truth. What would that be? 1 Peter 1.14, "...as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts, desires, so don't be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance." Ignorance. Peter seems to be tracing my vulnerability to former lusts to ignorance of something.

It says to me as a pastor, I need to rectify that. I need to constantly be rectifying this deceit and this ignorance because they really matter. Lust feels very much different from ideas in the head.

Feels very much like convictions of the soul. But it is not out of touch with these. My concern is not merely to provide some little short term, here's a way to stop that, here's a way to stop that, but rather to build a substructure of life into your mind and heart in relationship to what can be known about God and Christ and heaven and hell, that the whole substructure is like a rising tide in a harbor where all the boats are down in the mud of lust and instead of trying to get cranes, little cranes of tactics, lift that one out of the lust, lift that one out of the lust, the whole tide goes up and all the boats float out of the mud.

That's the way I want to preach and teach and live. I want to create such an awareness of, a deep knowledge of, an allegiance to the superior pleasures of God in Christ over against the dangers of hellish lust that men and women find their boats floating free and don't as often need to use the crane of technique. It's just kind of a growing, abiding victory.

1 Thessalonians 4 connects it with God. Each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God. What's he saying? He's saying if you yield to a life driven by lustful passion, you act like you don't know God.

If that's true, then knowing God is a good strategy for overcoming lust. It is. Knowing God.

I mean, really knowing Him. There are a lot of guys and gals who, when they fight the fight, they try to bring some theological or biblical thought to mind, and it doesn't work, and they say, blah, that doesn't work. They don't know God.

How much effort have they given to really go deep with God, know God, have their mind full of God and their heart full of God, and God's beauty and glory and perfection becomes their treasure. That's the kind of knowledge he's talking about here. If you want to play with God, then you'll be a sitting duck for every image that comes across the television and the Internet.

But if you stock your soul and mind with the fullness of biblical revelation about God, the boats will float. Here's a beautiful opening of how future grace, the promise of all that God is for us in Jesus, relates to lust. 2 Peter 1.3, His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

Through the true knowledge... Okay, now watch that. His power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Okay, that would be good.

I would like that. I would like that power to produce godliness in me. How does it come to me? He gives us some channels.

He comes through the true knowledge of Him. That's amazing. Isn't that amazing? Power for godliness comes through knowledge of Him, and now it specifies the knowledge a little bit, who called us by His own glory and excellence.

So there's some glory we know and some excellence we know. For by these... And I think that's referring back to these two, glory and excellence. He has granted to us His precious and very magnificent promises.

So there's another thing we know. So that by them... And now it's the promises. By them you may become partakers of the divine nature and having escaped from the corruption, the lust that is in the world by lust.

The corruption that is in the world by lust. So if you read backwards and say, Okay, I want to escape this. I'm so sick of this in my life.

I want out of this dominant power in my life. It comes by promises. Promises so that by them you may become partakers and escape.

By them you become partakers and escape. By the promises we escape. Lust.

This is future grace. All this glory and excellence, this knowledge of God that's going to be now and more in the future granted to us for our enjoyment is so superior that it severs the root of this lust. That's the way that text works.

So fight lust indirectly as well as directly. Give yourself to reading. Give yourself to study.

Give yourself to meditating. Give yourself to memorizing. Give yourself to savoring the beauties of God.

And pray like crazy that the Lord would open your heart to see wonderful things that feel more wonderful than the surge of this masturbation. Or just looking. Or more illicit behavior.

Fornication. Adultery. Fooling around at some kinky bar.

It's a lie that losing sex is losing something essential. You wonder where's that coming from? Here's where that's coming from. I got a, let's see, get the context here.

About, oh I don't know, it was 15 years. Those of you who've been in the Twin Cities will remember this maybe. There was a big row in the Twin Cities, in the newspapers about public advertising for condoms on television.

And I wrote an article for the Tribune with two other pastors arguing that that would not be a good idea to put advertisements for condoms on the television. And so I got a call from the TV station. And they said, can we come over and do a little interview about that? They did, and I did.

Then the letters started to come, both from the TV and the Tribune. And I remember one letter so clear. A single man who said, and I responded, I wrote to him and tried to minister to him after this.

But he just said, I can't believe that you would tell me, as a single man, that I am not to experience the fullness of my humanity through sexual relations with my girlfriend without marriage. What if I have no partner? You're going to tell me I go through my whole life without sexual intercourse? That was absolutely unimaginable to him. I will not be human if I don't have sex.

And that really set me to thinking about what is human and how to think about that for single people. Because there are single people who, year after year, hope maybe that they might be married, a man or a woman, and it doesn't happen for whatever reason. And they begin to think, I may go to my grave and never have had sex.

It doesn't seem right. I can't remember all that I put in the letter to him. I think I might have it on file at home.

I forgot to get it. But here is an important verse from 8411. The Lord God is a sun and shield.

The Lord gives grace and glory. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Wow.

Do you believe that? No good thing does he withhold from those who walk chaste and uprightly. Which means that if you are not married, and you walk uprightly in chastity, the Lord withholds no good thing from you. It would be far better for you never to have sex in this life.

Just like Jesus. What I did say to this man, I said, I hear you saying that you want to be fully human. I affirm that.

I know one person who was fully human. Jesus Christ. He never had sex.

I think that is a very liberating thought to single people. It should be. Jesus Christ came into the world to model the infinite beauty and fullness of humanity.

And he never had sexual intercourse. Da Vinci Code notwithstanding. Therefore, you don't have to have it to be fully human.

And what God wants you to be. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. That is an unspeakable promise to see God.

I remember in my teenage days of much defeat in this area, what began to triumph, 18, 19, made that transition, was the thought of what I was missing as I gave myself away to lustful fantasies. What it did to me in blinding me from what I could see but couldn't see. In other words, if I gave myself away toward masturbation, of a fantasy, the thought of seeing God, or seeing people in their wholeness and their beauty and their uprightness, vanished.

And I was down like a dog in heat. It felt like I was losing the sunrises. I was losing poetry.

I was losing the possibility of someday having an upright and beautiful eyeball-to-eyeball personal relationship with a whole woman and not just a body. All that began to just grip me as what I was losing and what I was blinding myself to as I gave myself away to lust. That's the gift of grace, when you begin to cherish God more than those little blitz pleasures that are so fleeting and so unsatisfying in the end.

Unfought lust will destroy the soul. I skipped over the warnings on anxiety. I won't skip over this one.

Warnings are the flip side of promises. They are gracious. They make us scared.

But Jesus uses them. We should use them. Matthew 5, 28.

I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So what should you do? If your right eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it from you. For it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Have you ever thought that if you tear out your right eye, you can see her pretty clearly with your left eye? So it was no help to tear out your right eye. The reason that's an important observation is because Jesus didn't mean literally to tear out your right eye. Because it wouldn't help with your left eye.

He meant do whatever you must do to get this sight and temptation out of your head. So I put there See Future Grace, page 329. Here's what I want to read.

July 20, 1993. Donald Wyman was clearing land near Puxatawney, Pennsylvania as part of his work for a mining company. In the process, a tree rolled onto his shin causing a severe break and pinning Wyman to the ground.

He cried for help for an hour, but no one came. He concluded that the only way to save his life would be to cut off his leg. So he made a tourniquet out of his shoestrings and tied it with a wrench, tightened it with a wrench.

Then he took his pocket knife and cut through the skin, muscle, and bone just below the knee and freed himself from the tree. He crawled 30 yards to a bulldozer, drove a quarter of a mile to his truck, maneuvered the standard transmission with his good leg and a hand until he reached a farmer's house one and a half miles away with his leg bleeding profusely. Farmer John Huber Jr. helped him get to a hospital where his life was spared.

A man will cut off his leg to save his life. Will you cut off your leg and gouge out your eye to save your eternity? That's what Jesus says. Be thrown into hell.

We should fight this lust thing with hellish proportions. Hell and heaven. I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul.

They want to kill you. They want to take you down. Oh, how many pastors.

A statistic a few years ago was 10% in our denomination in Minnesota had come down over this. 10% had failed to gouge out their eye, cut off their leg and do whatever was necessary to find Christ a superior pleasure. They threw it away.

They threw their marriage away. They threw their ministry away for that kind of pleasure. Fleeting, hell-bound pleasure.

John Owen, bless his heart, the Calvin of England said, be killing sin or it will be killing you. We don't always succeed, but we better make war. The evidence of being born of God is that you make war on your sin.

You don't win every battle, but you make war. You can get that at DesiringGod.org That's my little acronym for how I fight in the moment of lust. But I think I've said enough about lust.

I'd like to move on. So Anthem, if you type in Anthem at DesiringGod.org you will get this acronym. I find it very helpful in the moment when the thought that you don't want in your head comes in your head and you're trying to figure out how to get it out.

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