

(Sex, Love & Marriage) 2. Dynamite - Handle With Care!

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-control and discipline in managing one's sexual passions and desires, and encourages Christians to view sex as a sacred and pure gift from God.

Topics: "Sexual Purity", "Marital Integrity"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the power and potential of sex, likening it to dynamite that can be used for good or evil. He emphasizes the importance of viewing sex as a sacred gift from God, meant for blessing but often perverted by misuse and abuse. Poonen addresses the prevalence of unclean thoughts, the dangers of masturbation, the seriousness of adultery, and the sinfulness of homosexuality, urging believers to exercise self-control, vigilance, and reliance on God for deliverance and victory over sexual temptations.

Transcript

The most powerful of created instincts, sex, is indeed like dynamite! What potential for blessing there is in this wonderful gift of God and yet what havoc has been wrought by its abuse.

In every man and woman there exist sex instincts and wants. These instincts may not be of the same strength in all, but they do constitute a powerful force in all normal human beings for at least thirty years after adolescence. Like dynamite, sex can be used for good and for evil - for the glory of God or for the service of the devil. There is nothing inherently sinful in dynamite, it all depends on how and for what purpose it is used: so with sex. If accepted as God's gift and used wisely under God's control, it can be the means of man's highest fulfilment. If misused, it can lead him down to the lowest depths of degradation. It is indeed, as one has said,

"a wonderful servant but a terrible master."

Sexual desire is as normal as the desire for food and for rest. But the God Who created these desires has also ordained the means for their legitimate satisfaction.

Perverted Views

Sex, as created by God, is sacred and pure. This is evident from the fact that it was created before man fell into sin and existed in a world which God Himself considered "Very Good". But ever since the Fall of man, his view of sex has been perverted and he himself has become a slave to sexual desire. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they became sex-conscious and ashamed of their nakedness and immediately sought to cover their bodies. We live in a world which is still reaping the sad effects of that Fall. As a result, sex which was meant to be a blessing to man has become a burden instead.

The word "sex" itself has an impure connotation in the minds of most people today because of man's repeated abuse of this God-given function. The cinema, the advertising world and much of the cheap literature sold on book-stalls today have all served to give a crooked and perverted conception of that which God intended to be pure, beautiful and holy.

There is abundant evidence to prove that our thoughts about sex are perverted. In 'Christian Behaviour', C.S. Lewis writes,

"You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act - that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the light went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, wouldn't you think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And wouldn't anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?"

A Christian is called to shine as a light for God in this perverted world. He must therefore stand against the world's low views of sex, which reduce it to a mere physiological phenomenon and a source of pleasure. He should allow the Spirit of God to so renew his mind that he begins to look at sex as God looks at it - not as something sinful to be ashamed of, but as something sacred and intrinsically beautiful.

Many religions and philosophies hold perverted views of sex either because they look upon the human body as something evil to be cast off at the earliest opportunity, or because they go to the other extreme and worship the body, fulfilling its every desire without question.

The Christian view is that the body is as much a part of God's good creation as the spirit and the soul - although of lesser importance than these latter. The body therefore has a definite purpose in God's plan. The Bible teaches that the Christian should glorify God in his body since it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). We are exhorted therefore to present our bodies in an act of worship as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1).

Martin Luther reminded those who felt that the body was the cause of sin, that the Lord Jesus had a body on earth, but was yet sinless, whereas the devil who has no body, is full of sin. The root of sin is to be found not in the body but in the human heart. Deliverance from sin comes not by eliminating the body and its desires but by the change of heart. We do not have to pray, as some do, that God will remove our sexual desires. That would mutilate our manhood and destroy a part of God's temple. God wants us to be complete men living in victory. The fire in the fire-place does not have to be extinguished. We have only to be careful that the house does not catch fire.

Even in the realm of sex, God permits us to be tempted with a purpose - the same purpose with which He permitted Adam to be tempted in the garden of Eden. Adam was innocent but God wanted him to be holy. Holiness is more than innocence. Adam could have become holy only as he made a moral choice and

overcame temptation: so it is with us.

Unclean Thoughts

Every young person is sooner or later tempted by unclean thoughts. The sexual urge being stronger and more aggressive in men than in women, the former face this problem much more than the latter do.

In Mark 7:21, Jesus listed evil thoughts as the first things that proceed from the heart of men. The hearts of all unconverted men are equally wicked and so the description Jesus gave is true of all. Unclean thoughts plague the mind of the morally upright man as much as they do the mind of the adulterer - even though lack of opportunity and fear of society may have prevented the former from committing adultery in the flesh.

We need to distinguish however between temptation and sin. Even Jesus was tempted "in every respect as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). But He never once yielded to temptation (even in His mind) and so never sinned. We too shall be tempted till the last day of our life on earth. But we need not sin. We sin only when the evil desire is permitted to conceive in our minds (James 1:15), i.e., when we accept the lustful thought flashed into our minds. If we reject the suggestion at once, we do not sin. As the old Puritan said, "While I cannot prevent the birds from flying over my head, I can prevent them from making a nest in my hair". When an evil thought presents itself to us, if we cherish it even for a moment in our minds, we allow it to "make a nest" there and so sin.

Lustful thinking, once indulged in, will make a person more and more its slave. Deliverance becomes increasingly difficult with the passage of time. The sooner we seek for deliverance the easier it will be. Victory over evil thoughts (like victory over all other sin) comes through an honest confession of failure, a real longing for deliverance, an acceptance of the fact of our death with Christ, and an utter yieldedness of our bodies and minds to the Lord (Romans 6:1-14).

We must also "walk in the Spirit" and cooperate with Him in disciplining our lives, if we are to enjoy continuous victory (Galatians 5:16-19). If we fail to discipline our eyes and ears (cutting off all reading and seeing and hearing that is lustful), we shall not be able to discipline our thoughts either (this is the real implication of Matthew 5:28-30). Discipline of the body is essential for deliverance from lustful thoughts. The greatest of saints have confessed that they had to battle constantly with sexual temptations in their minds. They had to discipline their bodies severely in order to get victory.

Job, though a married man with ten children, recognized that if he was to be delivered from lustful thinking, he had to control his eyes. He said,

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a girl (Job 31:1 - TLB).

For men, the greatest temptations come through the eyes. If care is not exercised here and an unclean thought or picture is once allowed to enter our minds through the eye-gate, it becomes almost impossible to remove it from there.

Disciplining our lives includes our having a daily devotional time with God each morning as soon as we awake and every night before we go to bed. If on awaking in the morning, we continue to loll in bed instead, we shall be leaving the door wide open for evil thoughts to flood our minds. We must fill our minds daily with the Word of God - for saturating our minds thus with God's Word is one of the surest safeguards against evil thinking. David said,

I have thought much about Your words, and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin (Psalm 119:11 - TLB).

The Bible also says,

If you value the approval of God, fix your minds on the things which are holy and right and pure and beautiful and good" (Philippians 4:8 - JBP).

Henry Martyn, the great missionary to India, has said in his journal, that he found great help by obeying this Scriptural injunction when battling with unclean thoughts. Whenever a lustful thought connected with some girl presented itself to his mind, he would immediately pray for her that she might be pure in her heart and mind and that she might be a temple of the Holy Spirit consecrated to the service and glory of God. He dared not harbour an unclean thought about her after having prayed for her in this manner. This is indeed an excellent method for maintaining purity of thought.

Some may say that the prevailing standard of morals in the world around us is so low that it is difficult to be totally free from unclean thoughts. But this state of affairs is not peculiar to the twentieth century. Corinth in the first century was a centre of licentiousness and immorality, yet the Spirit of God urged the Christians there to lead their every thought captive into the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). He tells us to do the same today. The way to life may be narrow and difficult, but the Holy Spirit can strengthen us to walk that way.

To discipline our lives thus, does not mean that we should develop a repugnance for the opposite sex. Far from it! The fact that we find the opposite sex attractive is, in itself, not sinful. It is quite natural. It is not wrong for us to admire a pretty face as a part of God's beautiful creation. But being fallen creatures, if we are not careful, we shall soon begin to notice the beautiful form and then to lust. Thus the attractiveness of the opposite sex, though clean in itself, can become for us, an occasion for unclean thinking.

Keith Miller, in 'A Second Touch' says,

"I have found that becoming a deeply committed Christian does not keep one from being fully aware of beauty in the opposite sex. And I do not think this recognition is in any sense sin or is an indication that one needs a spiritual check-up. In fact, if you do not recognize physical beauty in the opposite sex, and if you are my age, you may need a physical check-up. And I am very serious. 'Recognition', in my opinion, is never sin. As a matter of fact, recognition of specific possibility for sinning is a prerequisite for the development of Christian character. For instance, a blind man would not be considered honest for not stealing gold on a table before him - only a man who saw the gold, and recognized fully his drive for it, but chose not to steal it.... It is what one does with that which is recognized, that causes the problems."

Our safety lies in instantly obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit within us, when He checks us and tells us to turn our eyes and our thoughts in another direction.

We should also frequently pray,

Lord, do not let me face temptation (in this realm) that I cannot overcome."

Many young men have found victory through sincerely praying such a prayer.

Masturbation

Looseness in thinking can lead to indisciplined indulgence of the body's sexual desires. A Christian can never afford to do this. The apostle Paul said,

Every competitor in athletic events goes into serious training. Athletes will take tremendous pains - for a fading crown of leaves. But our contest is for an eternal crown that will never fade. I run the race, then, with determination. I am no shadow-boxer, I really fight! I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:25-27 - JBP).

Again he said,

Everyone of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 5 - JBP).

C.G. Scorer in his book, 'The Bible and Sex Ethics Today', says,

"It is from these words (of the Apostle Paul) that advice may be found on another matter to which the Bible apparently makes no reference - that of secret and solitary indulgence, or masturbation. The New Testament does not attempt to analyse the secret aspect of a man's life. Modern psychology may try to do so; Christ and His apostles do not. But it is difficult to escape the conclusion that such self-gratification carries with it the wish to rebel against God's authority over our bodies. It consists in making sexual experience an end to be desired and sought after for its own sake. A man or woman becomes a servant to his or her own desires instead of master of them. It is a general principle that sexual thinking counteracts spiritual insight and power; if the impulses of the body rule our lives, the Spirit cannot. Psychologically, such sins often represent an immaturity of character or a self-consciousness and self-preoccupation which need to be overcome. Of course, it cannot be considered serious in the sense that fornication is, for it does not involve anyone else....[but] it puts a man out of sorts with himself for the very good reason that it represents an upsurge of an impulse over which he has to admit he has ineffective control. It humiliates him and hence it may well nullify his witness as a Christian, simply because of this confusion of his own self-esteem. The solution lies with the will and the adoption of the common sense attitude that sexual stimulation can always be successfully resisted if it is avoided at the outset".

Masturbation may not lead to any disease but it does lead to depression, a sense of guilt and a weakening of will-power - all of which finally rob a person of his fellowship with God and his spiritual effectiveness. If indulged in excessively, it can also cause problems in the sexual relationship after marriage. Masturbation is a sin because it is an abuse of God's gift of sex. It must be repented of and forsaken.

It is often because young people learn the facts of sex in perverted form from their worldly friends that they easily fall into the grip of this evil habit. Once this habit is indulged in, it grips the person so strongly that he is compelled to yield to it again and again. But Christ can set him free.

Many young people are taught by their friends that they must indulge in masturbation, lest their sexual organs be rendered useless through non-use, just as a muscle is rendered useless if unused for many years. This is however a totally wrong idea. Medical authorities are agreed on the fact that the non-use of sexual organs can never lead to a withering-up or an impairment of function. Control of the cravings of sex does not do any psychological harm either. In fact there is no danger whatsoever in keeping sexual desires under control. On the contrary, when a person does discipline himself thus, his will-power becomes stronger and his mind more alert. A man can live all his life without once using his sexual organs

and yet be perfectly strong and healthy in mind and body.

Some young men may be concerned about seminal emissions that they have when asleep. These are only part of the normal functioning of their bodies in the expulsion of excess matter. They are neither abnormal nor cause for concern.

Every man must learn to control his sexual passions before he gets married, for self-control will be greatly needed thereafter. There is a place for self-discipline in sexual relations even after marriage, for marriage does not grant license for unrestrained sexual intercourse. One who has not learnt self-control prior to marriage is unlikely to learn it afterwards.

Those who are already in the grip of this evil habit may perhaps be wondering how to find deliverance. The way of deliverance is by recognizing that through our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, sin's hold on us is broken. Victory can be a reality in our lives now as we present ourselves to the Lord to be filled with His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:2).

We must also plan a busy daily schedule for our lives. Our minds and especially our bodies should be kept occupied throughout the day in some activity or the other. It is the idle, unexercised body that falls an easy prey to sexual desire. The person who lives a hard life will find very little difficulty in this realm. God intends that man should work hard. Adam was to obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). Science however has now discovered so many time-saving devices for us, that the modern young man finds plenty of time hanging idly on his hands - which the devil is quick to use. I do not mean that we should therefore not use any time-saving devices. Use them by all means. But we should try and spend our spare moments profitably in some form of creative activity.

The energy of the body can be expended in four ways - in physical work, mental activity, emotional experiences or in sexual indulgence. If our bodily energy is not expended in the first three ways, the pressure will be very great to expend in the fourth way. But such sexual indulgence drains the body of its nervous and physical energy and vitality more than any of the other ways do.

Some men are under-sexed and do not feel the pressure within for sexual release as much as others do. Those who feel this pressure greatly because of excessive sexual desire need not feel that they are abnormal. It is an indication of surplus creative energy within them that can be sublimated or expended in very profitable ways. God does not want us to be perpetually fighting lust. He wants us to redirect our bodily energies (which are pressing for sexual indulgence in thought or deed) into paths that would glorify Him and help our fellowmen.

Let every Christian young man therefore keep his body exercised through daily physical activity. Let him also spend his spare moments in serious Bible Study and prayer (this will exercise his mind), instead of an idle talk. He will then find at the end of the day, not only that he has accomplished much, but also that he is so tired that he falls asleep almost as soon as he gets into bed. Instead of being plagued on his bed at night by lustful thoughts and the temptation to masturbate, he will find himself sinking into a blessed slumber. The Bible tells us that

the man who works hard sleeps well" (Ecclesiastes 5:12 - TLB).

The task of controlling our sexual passions can be made easier if we discipline ourselves in the simpler matters of eating and sleeping. Many are defeated in the realm of sex because they have never

disciplined themselves in these latter realms. There is a very real connection between over-eating and the stimulation of sexual desire. Sexual sins abounded in ancient Sodom because of over-abundance of food, prosperous ease and idleness (Ezekiel 16:49).

Let those who are mastered by their sexual passions discipline their eating habits and seek the Lord's face earnestly in prayer with fasting, and they will very soon find deliverance.

Above all, we should seek to practice the presence of the Lord at all times - i.e., being conscious of the fact that the Lord is always with us and watching us. We would obviously not indulge in masturbation if another believer were observing us. How much more should we fear God!

If, in spite of your best efforts, you are unable to shake off this temptation at any particular time, then the best thing to do is to seek the company of another person immediately - (preferably a believer). This will strengthen you for victory.

Adultery

The first sexual union between a man and a woman brings a mystical union between the two, and marriage is consummated right there. The Bible says,

Do you not know and realize that when a man joins himself to a prostitute he becomes one body with her? The two, it is written, shall become one flesh" (1 Corinthians 6:16).

In the Old Testament, sexual union between a man and a woman is spoken of as "knowing". Sexual intercourse is not an act that has merely physical effects. Neither can it be easily forgotten. It fuses the two involved into one in a mysterious way. This is why God has placed so many deterrents along the pathway of sexual irregularity - deadly diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea to name just two. The Bible says that

God Himself will judge those who traffic in the bodies of others (Hebrews 13:4 - JBP).

Young men usually look for privilege and enjoyment without attendant responsibilities. This is why they are tempted to seek for the pleasure of sexual indulgence without the responsibilities of married life. Men who degrade sex like that can expect nothing but the curse and judgment of God upon their lives.

Young men are sometimes challenged by their perverted worldly friends to prove their manhood by sexual intercourse. They are derided if they don't date a girl or if they cannot recount any sexual adventures. True manhood however is proved not by sexual license but by self-control.

The Bible gives us the example of David who "lost out" partially because of unbridled lust. Notice the circumstances that led to his fall. 2 Samuel 11:1 & 2 tell us that he had been staying lazily at home when he should have been out on the battlefield. He had neglected his duty and given way to sloth and ease. Then he saw Bathsheba. Instead of disciplining his eyes he continued to gaze at her and thus fell into sin.

We read in the Bible also of Samson who "lost out" completely as a result of his uncontrolled passions (Judges 14 & 16). When he saw a beautiful women, he forgot all about his calling as a servant of God - and thereby lost his ministry. Many others since, have fallen in exactly the same manner and lost their ministry too.

On the other hand, we read of Joseph who had neither the luxury and ease and position that David had, nor the high calling to the service of God that Samson had, and yet who triumphed completely over lust. Genesis 39 should be read and studied by every young man. We see there in verse 7, how the temptation came to Joseph suddenly one day, without any warning whatsoever. So will it come to us. If we are not prepared for it beforehand, we shall assuredly fall. If Joseph had been indulging in lustful thinking in his private life, he would have fallen easily. But Joseph had been practicing the presence of God and so when the temptation came, the presence of God was more real to him than the presence of anyone else. If Joseph's spirituality had been only something put on to impress others and not something deep and real, then he would undoubtedly have succumbed to such a strong temptation.

Notice too that it was the fear of God that held Joseph back from falling into sin and not the fear of being discovered or the fear of punishment (verse 9). Alas, it is only these latter fears that hold back many people from sins these days. But Joseph's relationship with God was far deeper than the superficial relationship that most folks have in our day.

We read that Joseph resisted repeated attempts made by Potiphar's wife to lead him into sin (verse 10). He said, "No" the first time and so it was easier for him to say "No" the second time and easier still the third time. As the hymn says,

"Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin;

Each victory will help you some other to win".

Verse 10 tells us that Joseph avoided the presence of Potiphar's wife altogether. This is always the safest course to follow - to avoid the scene of temptation totally when ever possible.

Joseph's example warns us that we will have to be careful in our relationships with the opposite sex. And if it is not only in the presence of attractive girls that caution has to be exercised, for temptation can come from unattractive girls too. Some of the latter, aware of their lack of beauty, may at times try to make up for it, by offering greater freedom to men to touch their bodies.

The Bible warns us,

Avoid sexual looseness like the plague! Every other sin that a man commits is done outside his own body, but this is an offense against his own body. Have you forgotten that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and is God's gift to you, and that you are not the owner of your own body? You have been bought, and at what a price! Therefore bring glory to God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - JBP).

And again,

Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have" (2 Timothy 2:22 - TLB).

That was what Joseph did. He did not mind being slandered or even imprisoned, but he refused to yield to lust. No wonder God honoured him. Perhaps failure in this realm may be the reason why God cannot honour many young men today!

Homosexuality

Homosexuality refers to sexual attraction between individuals of the same sex. It was one of the sins for which God judged Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot's time. It is condemned in no uncertain terms in Leviticus

18:22 and in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. The Bible warns those who indulge in homosexual practices that they will "receive in their own personalities the consequences of sexual perversity" (Romans 1:26-27 - JBP). The Old Testament law specified death without mercy for those who practiced sodomy (Leviticus 20:13).

A believer should not only have nothing whatsoever to do with homosexuality, he should also avoid having any unnatural affection towards someone of his own sex. He should likewise resist the subtle approaches of homosexual-minded people. If you are already in the grip of this evil habit, seek the Lord's face earnestly for deliverance and endeavour to have healthy, normal contact with the opposite sex. It may help too, if you seek the counsel and prayer-help of an older believer.

Overcoming the Enemy

Many are the temptations in the realm of sex that we face in our day. Satan is described in the Bible as a roaring lion seeking to devour, and as a subtle serpent seeking to deceive. He knows that sex is one of the easiest realms in which to trap young people and ruin their lives. Our safety lies in being self-controlled and vigilant always for even in this realm, it is true that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty".

The injunctions of God's Word are meant to save us from the snares of the Enemy. God has given us many warnings in His Word - especially in the book of Proverbs. Every young person should read that book frequently. Some believers have the excellent habit of reading through Proverbs once every month - a chapter a day. It warns us in advance of the enemy's lines of approach.

If we are determined to get victory, we shall undoubtedly face a battle. But we should not give in. If we have already fallen, then let us confess our sins to God. He is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us of all our past misdeeds and unclean thoughts. Some who have fallen deeply may have to live with the consequences of their sin, although forgiven. But if we have not fallen so far as that, then let us be watchful, for the Bible says that the one who thinks he will never fall, is the one most likely to do so (1 Corinthians 10:12).

God desires to lead us in triumph at all times (2 Corinthians 2:14). May we trust Him to do so in our lives.

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