

## Fatal Attractions

Sterling UMC  
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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Since 9-11 our nation has been at war with terrorism. Experience gleaned from the last eight painful years has taught us that to be victorious we must use tactics that are different from those that were used in past wars. For example: We need better intelligence and we also need a smaller-more mobile-military. Plus we have had to be constantly vigilant-not just overseas but here in the U.S. as well because this war is fought, not just by soldiers but by airport luggage inspectors and security personnel-even by everyday Americans who keep their eyes open for suspicious activity. In fact, there is a very real sense in which ALL of us are combatants in this war. I thought about this as I prepared for today's message...because in this installment in our study of seven deadly sins-we are focusing on a WAR that ALL people wage-another war that requires unique tactics to win.

I'm referring to the battle we all wage with a sin known as LUST. Charles Swindoll refers to this common struggle by saying, "Lust is no respecter of persons. It never gives up; it never runs out of ideas. Bolt your front door, and it will rattle at the bedroom window, crawl into the living room through the TV screen, or wink at you out of a magazine in the den."

Now, any military tactician worth his uniform will tell you that, the first thing you need to do to WIN a war is KNOW your opponent.

So let's take a moment to understand our enemy in this deadly conflict. What exactly is LUST? Well, lust is basically a form of TEMPTATION-and like contemporary terrorism, the temptation to lust attacks on multiple fronts. It comes at us in several ways-but they each fall into one of three categories.

The first is MATERIAL temptation-or a lust for THINGS.

The THINGS we lust for may be as large as a house or as small as a ring-as bright and dazzling as a new sports car-or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Material temptation is a hunger for material wealth. Think of it as a form of the sin we talked about a couple weeks ago known as GREED.

And then second, there's PERSONAL temptation-or a lust for STATUS.

This is a longing for special recognition-that comes with things like fame, fortune, power, or authority. It's a desire to be noticed. It's wanting a title that will make heads turn, like "top executive" or "president" or "executive director" or even "dictator." Basically it's a form of another sin we studied a few weeks back-called PRIDE.

But the most COMMON form of this brand of temptation is SENSUAL or lust for another PERSON.

The dictionary defines lust as, "an intense or obsessive desire, especially one that is sexual." I came across some other definitions this week that help us better understand our opponent in this struggle. For example, Maxie Dunnam says, "Lust is a preoccupation with the object of our desire." Or "Lust is a sensual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God." Another writer said, "Lust is the athlete's foot of the mind." - an insatiable itch.

People argue that our sex drives are biological and as such they are normal. They say, "If we weren't supposed to act on these drives, why would we have them" (almost like saying, "it's all God's fault because He made us this way")? The Biblical answer is that there is nothing wrong with these desires as long as they are to be channeled in the proper context of marriage.

Fire is something basically good but it can also be destructive. When a fire is used for heat it is invaluable. When fire is used to refine and purify it does a tremendous job. However, when fire goes wild it destroys and kills.

Nuclear power is wonderful when it is used for a source of energy. When it is used for bombs it is destructive. Water is necessary for life. Rain is needed for crops to grow. There are all kinds of delights that come from the water. However, when water becomes a hurricane or flood it quickly destroys everything in its path. In the same way, desires for sexual fulfillment are wonderful in their proper context. However, when our desires leave the proper parameters, what was once PRO-ductive now become DE-structive. That's lust.

Well, however you define it, I'm sure you'll agree that lust definitely deserves a spot at the top of the most destructive sins. And we need HELP in winning this unique war for two reasons.

#### 1. First, we live in a SEX-SATURATED SOCIETY.

One reason so many people in our culture struggle in this area is because society seems to go out of its way to encourage lust by presenting us with a perpetual stream of sexually tempting images. From television to magazines and the entertainment industry, we are constantly bombarded with sexual messages and innuendoes. This probably doesn't surprise you-but "SEX" is the most frequently used WORD on Internet search engines. It's used to guide people to over a million pornographic web sites. Sex is also the most popular "hook" used to attract viewers to mainline talk shows and films. In our society sex is used to sell everything from perfume to high performance vehicles to hamburgers. I mean, ours IS indeed a SEX-saturated culture. It's every where you look.

In fact, An American Family Association study found that in a typical hour of prime time television these days TV characters talk about or engage in sexual activity about 15 times. That's once every four minutes. So-before the average American turns eighteen, he or she has witnessed more than 70,000 sexual images or sexual innuendo.

2. And then a second reason we need help these days is because in the past, the CHURCH has done a poor job in EQUIPPING us to win this battle.

I mean, the sad truth is church leaders have been fairly silent on the topic of sexual lust for decades. A few years ago the chaplains at the University of Nebraska took a survey of incoming freshmen and asked them this question: "How much influence did your church play on your views of sexuality?" Of the freshmen surveyed, only 2 percent said that they church had ANYTHING to do with their views of sexuality....ONLY 2 PERCENT! I think these young adults replied in this way because down through the years pastors have said very little about this subject from their pulpits. In fact, in my 17 years in the ministry this is the first time I have ever tackled this subject from the pulpit.

So with that in mind I want us to look at five things that God has to say about this particular deadly sin. Think of them as battle tactics in this war we all fight or better yet, "FIVE MUSTS WHEN IT COMES TO BEATING LUSTS."

1. First, we MUST...MAKE an ADVANCE commitment to live according to God's standards.

No one remains morally pure automatically. It requires a personal commitment. We must commit ourselves to do in advance what the Bible says. Psalm 119:9 *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word."* Where do you get values -- your personal values? What's your authority for the values in your life? Popular opinion: Everybody's doing it. Latest best seller. Where do you get your values? Hollywood? Cosmo magazine?

I submit to you the best place and the safest place to get your values is to consult the creator and look at God's instruction manual, the Bible. It's stood the test of time. It's provided guidance for years and years. It won't lead you wrong.

Winning this war with lust involves making a commitment when we are STRONG as to what we will do BEFORE we become WEAK and vulnerable to this powerful form of temptation. The 16th century French Theologian, Francois Fenelon, wrote this: "We are not masters of our own FEELINGS, but we are, by God's grace, masters of our CONSENT." In other words we CAN control our desires. We aren't dumb animals. We have the freedom of choice-and when it comes to lust the best time to make that choice is ahead of time.

Of course King David learned this lesson the hard way. His succumbing to Bathsheba's visual stimuli led him to write in Psalm 101:3, "[From now on] I will set no vile thing before my eyes." This same battle tactic is what Paul was referring to when he wrote to young Timothy and said, "Run from anything that gives you evil thoughts." Or as Erwin Lutzer paraphrases it, "Run from temptation without leaving a forwarding address." This is a very effective tactic in our struggle with lust because if we make this commitment ahead of time it will be easier for us to steer clear of things that fan the flame of our sinful desires.

2. This leads to a second thing we must do to win in this struggle is this. We must MAINTAIN our marriages.

You see, the truth is many husbands and wives yield to lust because they believe satisfaction is found elsewhere. They think, "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence..." Well, hear me on this! The grass is NEVER greener on the other side. It's

greener where you water it. You see, God designed MARRIAGE to meet our inborn needs for physical intimacy. That's the way we are wired, so the more you maintain your marriage-the less vulnerable you will be to sexual sin. As Proverbs 5:18-19 says to husbands, "Rejoice in your wife. Let her charms and tender embrace SATISFY you. Let her love ALONE fill you with delight."

3. And then a third-and very powerful weapon in our war with lust is this. To win you must... MANAGE your MIND.

You need to understand how temptation works. James 1:14-15 *"Temptation is the pull of our own evil thoughts and wishes. These thoughts lead to evil actions."* The battle starts in the mind. If the devil gets your attention then he gets your feelings. If he gets your feelings, then he gets your action. You don't believe me then watch a good salesman. First they get your attention, then they move from the mental stage to the feeling stage -- "Try the coat on. See how it feels." "Have a sample of rocky road ice cream", "Get in the car and take it for a test drive". If he gets your feelings you're a goner. Thoughts determine feelings and feelings determine actions and the key is to change your mental thoughts.

Again I use David as an example. He walked out one day and saw Bathsheba bathing on a roof. Simply seeing her there wasn't sin. The sin was that he went downstairs, thought about it, made a plan and brought her into his home. That was lust. Manage your mind.

4. ...and I think another tactic in this struggle is we must ...Minimize opportunities for temptation.

If you want to avoid a fatal attraction don't allow yourself in situations where it happens. Matthew 6:41 *"Keep watch, and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."* Jesus here gives us two preventative techniques - keep watch and pray.

"Keep watch" -- be alert, be wise. Know the situations that tempt you, that get you off base. Are you aware of the things that trip you up? Be wise. Be smart. Avoid those situations.

What do you do if you're caught off guard? Get a surprise attack by the devil? You pray. Right there on the spot. You say, "God, help me get out of this situation."

5. Then I think the most important tactic in this battle is we must Maximize the CONSEQUENCES of yielding.

You see lust is deceptive. It tries to cancel out tomorrow's consequences by emphasizing today's delights. And, the truth about lust is that the consequences of yielding to our sinful desires are always devastating. It always costs more than we would be willing to pay. People who embrace lust always lose because doing so always causes both us and our loved ones HORRIBLE pain. As Erwin Lutzer puts it, "Sexual sin promises like a god but pays like the devil." And I also like the way Frederick

Buechner puts it. He says, "Lust is the craving for salt by a man who is dying of thirst." These guys are all right-because lust always hurts!

Proverbs 7 says that an individual who gives into lust is like, "...an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life. [LUST] has brought many victims down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death."

Just think of the untold hurt and pain that lust has inflicted. Relationships ruined. Marriages destroyed. Families ripped apart. Careers wrecked. Credibility shattered. Respect ruined. Children traumatized.

But there is an even more dire consequence. Unless we repent and turn from it, lust can destroy our walk with GOD Himself.

You see, inside we all know yielding to lust is wrong. We know that embracing sexual sin is at the same time rejecting God's leading. So when we do yield, we naturally tend to shy away from talking with God in prayer. We shrink back from worshiping Him. We stop reading the Bible and interacting with Christian friends whose moral lifestyle only accentuates our own sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that when we give in to lust, "...joy in God is extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us....He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; satan does not fill us with hatred of God but rather with forgetfulness of God..."

And he's right. Lust eats away at our relationship with God until nothing is left. But the good news is that the opposite is also true. When we refuse to give in to the powers of lust and instead stand firm in God, our relationship with Him grows stronger. James 4:7-8 says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you."

Paul told the Philippians, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:8,9) The best way to fight off the immoral messages of the world is to develop a deep hunger for the things of God. Read the Bible. Get involved in classes and studies that will help you learn about God and allow you to experience the truth. Censor your television habits. Read better books. The first step to killing the monster of lust is to starve it!

I realize that your response to this morning's message may need to be private. We may need to simply bow our heads and ask God to forgive us...praying that He would help us renew our minds so that we look at our sexuality from the unchanging perspective of the Bible as we commit to live according to the guidelines of our Creator instead of our culture. Husbands and wives may need to respond by promising to make time to renew their covenant to each other-to make their marriage-including its physical aspect-all that God intended it to be.

You may have really messed up in this area-you may have given in to your lusts-but whatever your sin...don't let it separate you from your loving Heavenly Father. Confess it to Him and ask His forgiveness and cleansing. Cling to the promise of 1 John 1:9 where God's Word says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."