

Oh Be Careful Little Eyes

Breaking up Stony Ground, Part 7

Selected Scripture

In a chapter entitled, the Discipline of the Mind, author Kent Hughes ruminates on the amazing complexity of the human brain. He writes, “The complex capacity of the human brain is the subject of ever-widening scientific wonder. Its twelve to fourteen billion cells are only a shadow of its complexity, for each cell sends out thousands of connecting [fibers] so that a single cell may be connected with 10,000 neighboring cells, each of which is constantly exchanging data impulses. Put another way, there is more electronic equivalent in one human brain than in all the radio and television stations of the entire world, put together.”¹

Amazing, isn't it?

The potential for communion with God and growth in His word and the development of pure and holy living; the ability to have our minds reformed by the renewing of our thinking according to godly wisdom is and always will be the greatest challenge in the Christian's life.

The fact that these billions of cells can actually be trained to fire off godly impulses that lead to godly actions is one of the greatest miracles of the grace of God.

Paul refers to it as *laying aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit (Ephesians 4:22)*,

Peter referred to it as *escaping the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Peter 1:4)*

John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress also wrote a lesser known book called "*The Holy War*". In the book he personifies the soul of the Christian as a city having 5 gates:

- the ear gate

- the eye gate
- the nose gate
- the feel gate
- the mouth gate

The enemy of Mansoul is Sin and, in this allegory, Sin comes on a daily basis to attack Mansoul at one of those gates.

Some days Sin will whisper through the ear gate some alluring message: other days Sin would paint some alluring portrait to the Eye Gate. It simply never let up.

In Bunyan's book, it's interesting to discover that Mansoul can never be toppled by outside attacks. The only way Sin can gain a victory is if one of the senses opened their gate and lets the enemy come in.

This is the idea of both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter. In fact, to the Roman believers, Paul just got in their face and said, “Stop presenting your members to sin.”

He actually uses a military term that was used in the transfer of arms. In other words, stop handing over your weapons to the enemy. Stop opening the gate and letting the enemy simply parade in and set up shop.

Any man who wants to battle impurity, but watches the average movie or television show which unapologetically depicts sexual content – has effectively handed his eyes over to the Enemy . . . as if to say, “Here, I'm swinging wide the Eye Gate . . . I'm handing you my eyes . . . use my eyes against me as I attempt to pursue purity.”

A woman who wants to be a holy woman for God but listens all day to music at her desk or on her iPod or in the house with lyrics that depict the

sensuality and selfish perspective of the world – what she is actually doing is handing her ears over to the Enemy as if to say, “I’m going to open this particular gate and you can come right on in . . . use my ears to help defeat me as I battle for purity and holiness.

Sociologists have estimated the average person in America, by the age of 21, has been exposed to more than 300,000 commercial messages – predominantly promoting the basic assumption that personal gratification is the dominant goal in life.

Kent Hughes summarized in his chapter on the Christian’s Mind, by warning us all – Christians cannot leave their 12 billion cells unguarded and unthinking and undisciplined.ⁱⁱ

Frankly, never before has the believer lived at a time where the mind is literally lured and pulled and invited by so many sources at the same time.

I’m not implying that the Christian hasn’t really had to battle sin until the 21st century. No, the battle is as old as the Devil and the fall of Man – the battle’s objective hasn’t changed – but the weapons against us have.

In fact, I find it interesting that in the very first temptation, Satan used the eye gate – where Eve saw that the fruit looked good to eat.

And that particular gate of Mansoul – the eye gate, is being assaulted like never before.

In a word – we call this assault – pornography.

The word pornography comes from the Greek word we referred to in our last session – porneia – which refers to any kind of sexual activity outside of the boundaries of marriage.

The English word, pornography, is really the perfect transliteration of porneia – because pornography has become an industry that effectively publishes and promotes sexual immorality like nothing else.

And thanks to the Internet, with all its wonderful resources and benefits, pornography has been able to go stratospheric.

Just this week, the Christian Post reviewed a recent conference on Apologetics where one of the speakers whose ministry is to combat internet pornography in the lives of children, reported, The average age at which children first view pornography is 11, and 93% of boys and 91% of girls have viewed pornography before they turn 18. The speaker added, because of the technological advances of smartphones and devices the average

teenager carries the equivalent of X-rated theaters in their pockets.ⁱⁱⁱ

While that is tragically alarming, the more alarming news to me that came out of recent research, shared at this symposium, was the polling research that found that 68% of males – of all ages – who consider themselves Christians watch pornographic material regularly – 68%; and 36% of 18-30 year old men, view it daily.^{iv}

And the demographics are changing too. Vice president of the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals wrote, and I quote, “Where it used to be 40-50 year old men seeking counseling, now there are more females, adolescents, and senior citizens; grandfathers getting caught with pornography on their computers by their grandkids and grandkids sexting at the age of 12.”^v

In other words, this particular sinful medium is reaching all ages.

And it is readily available . . . privately . . . anonymously . . . even when you’re not looking for it?

I remember one Saturday afternoon . . . while I was sitting at my computer in my office at home – I have a large flat screen for my monitor. When I write or type, I enlarge the text to about 150% and I hardly need my glasses, but I don’t strain my eyes either. And since I spend nearly 30 hours writing every week, it is a blessing.

At any rate, one Saturday, after researching – which I do a lot of online – I was just typing away on my sermon notes when suddenly, a full screen picture showed up. I mean it went from margin to margin. It was a man and a woman – I won’t sully you with the details, but I’ll suffice it to say they were obviously on their honeymoon – no doubt recently married.

I mean I couldn’t believe it. I took my mouse and clicked the x box and it disappeared. I just sat there, with this image now in my mind, staring at my sermon notes . . . which were not nearly as interesting. I waged war then and there . . . and prayed, “Lord, I don’t know how, but please wipe that image off my mind.”

After a few moments, I reengaged and began typing on my sermon notes again. Suddenly, another picture – of another recently married couple – took over the screen.

I clicked the x button again.

It did that at least 4 times throughout that afternoon.

I had to leave my office at one point to run out and I called Marsha in and told her, “I have no idea what’s going on, but my computer has become demon possessed.” I explained it all to her – and then told her, keep an eye on my screen whenever you happen to walk by my study – and if it’s a picture, you’ll have to click the x box.

And sure enough, while I was away, she walked by my study and the entire screen was a pornographic picture.

Eventually our IT director came out and cleaned up some viruses that had downloaded through the internet shopping and research – he put on stronger filters and that took care of it.

Can I tell you something . . . that was the worst study day of my entire ministry; studying the Bible, to be interrupted by professionally posed and provocatively designed pictures.

Pictures that sent 12 billion brain cells to join in the attack at the eye gate of my own soul.

Clicking those x boxes became my battle that afternoon . . . a battle that wasn’t easy, but it was worth it.

Before we go too much further, let me deal quickly with one particular misconception.

Some data I’ve come across over the past several months, deals with the rise and sale of pornographic material – including novels and books dealing with erotic subjects.

Author, Helen Thorne in a book entitled, *Purity is Possible: How to Live Free of the Fantasy Trap*, deals with pornographic material now being consumed by young and older women alike.

She recorded in her book that that fantasy, erotica and pornography are becoming more and more a part of the battle for Christian women. She writes – and I quote – “There is a rumor going around that women don’t watch pornography online; there’s a school of thought that says that [women’s] fantasies are romantic rather than explicit. Some argue that we don’t think as visually as men, so pornography is rarely appealing. A few believe that we are, by nature, more pure and innocent. I wish these rumors were right. They’re not. (She goes on to add the findings of her research and personal counseling ministry.) She then included these words, “There’s another rumor going around that there is a way out. That, in Jesus Christ, God offers forgiveness and change. I’m so glad that rumor is true . . . purity is possible.”^{vi}

Beloved, pornography is probably one of the most dangerous creators of stony ground – a heart that becomes calloused and unresponsive to the Spirit of God.

It’s little wonder to me that pornography has become the epidemic that it is . . . it’s got to be one of Satan’s favorite tools in attacking Mansoul – the heart of the Christian who wants to walk in purity and holiness before the Lord.

It isn’t really a new battle. The technology changes, but the temptation doesn’t.

In fact, let’s take a look at what Jesus Christ said about the subject of lust – which is at the core of pornography.

Turn in your New Testament to *the Gospel by Matthew* – and *chapter 5*. Jesus is preaching His classic Sermon on the Hillside and I want to actually back up to *verse 21*. ***In Matthew 5:21, Jesus says, ‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.***

In other words, Jesus is ratcheting up the bar of holy living – he’s defining purity as a matter of the heart.

The Pharisee would say, “My hands are clean and my resume is spotless” and Jesus was effectively saying, “Sin is equally sinful even if it’s hidden in the heart.”

Now notice *verse 27*. ***You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

Here’s the shocking news to His culture and to ours: fantasy immorality is as sinful as physical immorality. The consequences might be different, but they’re both sinful.

In other words, sins of the heart and sins of the hands are both sinful.

In fact, they both spiral downward – they both enslave – they both deceive – they both destroy – they both represent a myth – make-believe – and they both demand repentance!

And a person who says, “I don’t need to repent of fantasy or mental lust . . . or seething anger that wishes that other person was dead – hey, there’s nothing wrong with it as long as it stays in my heart – is a person who may very well be deceived about their salvation and actually be heading for hell.”

That truth is reinforced throughout the New Testament; one of the defining characteristics that distinguishes believers from unbelievers is unbelievers long to sin where believers long to be holy; unbeliever wish they had more money or more friends or more time to sin even more; believers wish they weren't so sinful . . . and can't wait 'til that day they no longer have even a passing thought that's sinful or selfish or corrupt.

Back to the main point here: Jesus now moves on to give us two ways to think about lust – where nobody sees, but God.

1. First, **we should view lust with uncompromising reality**

Notice just the first phrase of verse 29. If your right eye causes you to sin – stop there – in other words, if you are looking at someone to lust after them – you need to know that your eye is causing you to – what? – *sin!*

Skip down to verse 30. And if your right hand causes you to . . . there it is again . . . sin.

Lust isn't some sinless fantasy . . . it's wrong; it isn't just admiring the beauty of the way God created women – I've actually heard that one before. But did you notice that Jesus, the Creator, just called it sin!

It isn't a rite of passage – it isn't “boys will be boys” – it isn't a need to be fulfilled, it is a sin to avoid.

I can remember being told by a man that I had a far too black and white perspective on pornography. In fact, he told me – in my office – that the reason I had such a narrow view of pornography was because I spent too much time in my study and not enough time out there in the real world.

He should have seen the pictures on my computer screen. My study isn't safe either.

But is that it? Is that the real world?

That might be the real world, but there is a better world – and we are following that one.

So, Jesus says, first – treat lust with uncompromising reality . . . don't justify it, defend it, soften it, redefine it . . . it's sin.

2. Secondly, **We should treat lust with uncompromising severity**

Notice *verse 29 again; If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is*

better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Now let me clear up some potential misunderstandings here – I don't want anybody reaching for a chain saw.

First, Jesus is not saying that people who've committed lustful or even physically immoral acts are destined for hell.

What he is saying is that the evidence you belong to God will be seen in your willingness call it sin and at some point deal severely with sin rather than justify and defend and continue in it with no desire whatsoever for repentance.

Secondly, Jesus is not suggesting that you get out a literal knife and perform some kind of amputation.

Watch this now – if the problem is the heart, what good will it do to pluck out your right eye or cut off your right hand?

In fact, won't the left eye still get you into trouble? And does this mean that blind people and people without hands don't have problems with lusting after sexual sin?

Listen, you can be blind, deaf, mute, paralyzed, on a deserted island and still lust in your heart.

So removing body parts isn't the solution.

Jesus is speaking figuratively here. In fact, one of the clues is His reference to the right eye and the right hand, did you notice that?

In the days of Christ, within the Jewish culture, the right hand was considered the powerful hand – it represented someone's authority.^{vii}

We're told that Jesus stands at the right hand of the Father (*1 Peter 3:22*). That means Jesus is standing in the place of divine power and authority.

Psalms 139:10, David was thrilled to write this about his security in God – he wrote – *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there . . . your right hand shall hold me.*

In other words, there's no need to fear . . . God is holding onto you by his divine power.

To the Jewish world, the right eye represented your best vision or plans – your goal in life.

Jesus is effectively saying, you need to give up whatever is necessary – even your most cherished

possession or goal – if that’s what it takes to keep you from the powerful grip of lust.^{viii}

In other words, treat lust with uncompromising severity.

Heath Lambert writes in his book, *Finally Free*, on this same text of scripture, “Jesus wants you to understand that you will need to get tough with your sin; you will need to employ [extreme] measures to limit your access and starve your temptation. If you want the life God offers, you will have to get serious about resisting your sin. You will have to be aggressive. You will have to get radical.

Amputation [even in this figurative sense], will not be easy.^{ix}

We have a couple in our church who are thriving in their spiritual walk and growth. They came to mind as I wrote this quote into my notes . . . I’ll never forget when they came up to me one Sunday and this husband said, “My wife and I decided to get serious about our Christian walk . . . we stayed up until 2 am one morning, throwing things away. Anything that contributed in any way to hindering our absolutely passionate pursuit of holy living for God’s glory we either poured out, or pulled down, or took out, or erased . . . we bagged it all up and threw it away.

That’s dealing with temptation severely.

It isn’t how much temptation we can manage . . . it’s how far we can stay away from anything that detracts or distracts or deceives or dilutes our fire for holiness and the glory of God.

But remember, throwing stuff away isn’t going to change a lustful heart into a pure heart. You’ll just be a better looking Pharisee.

So make sure it is an issue of the heart that is repentant before God – you’re going to get real and call it sin; and then, by means of the grace of God, whatever you throw away is coming out of a heart attitude that seeks to please and pursue the holiness of God.

By way of encouragement, last Lord’s day we looked at the text in *1 Thessalonians chapter 4* where Paul made that strong command, “Abstain from sexual immorality.”

Keep in mind that Paul began that paragraph by writing, “*Finally then brothers . . . brethren . . . literally, brothers and sisters . . .* he’s writing this to us.

This is for us!

So all of us need to start fresh today!

In *1 Thessalonians chapter 5* you find a wonderful balance . . . *chapter 4* tells us to make a choice not to be involved in sexually immoral activity things for the purpose of sanctification – that is, in order to grow in holiness;

And now *chapter 5 verse 23* says, ***Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

In chapter 4 we’re told to make choices that work toward our sanctification . . . to choose to abstain so that we grow in Christ.

But in chapter 5 we’re told that God will sanctify us entirely.

There’s the balance.

There is one sense that sanctification is the work of God on our behalf and we will most certainly be perfected in holiness when we see Jesus Christ and are glorified in holy perfection.

Then there is another sense where we as believers choose to abstain from sexual immorality – we choose to battle sin in general – so that we are conformed and renewed and reformed in holy living.

We present out bodies a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2)

As you make the right choices and battle sin at each of the gates of Mansoul –
the ear gate –
the eye gate –
the feel gate –
the nose gate and the
mouth gate – as you battle daily every temptation that wants to come through one of those gates, you are not to say, “I’m going to sit this one out . . . God, this one’s all up to You.”

Here’s the balance – we discipline ourselves for the sake of sanctification by making godly choices – and at the same time we depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

As you battle at each gate of Mansoul, let me provide in this last section of our study, several steps to take in the right direction.

Six steps in the right direction.

By the way, this doesn’t mean you’re not going to sin or fail ever again. But, as one person said it so well, it does mean that your toes are pointed in the right direction.

1. First, enlist the help of an honest friend

In a word, accountability.

Bring a mature friend into the battle – not tempting them, but trusting them to hold you accountable.

By the way, an accountability group is absolutely ineffective if you don't want to be accountable. You can actually be unaccountable in an accountability group. Listen, you can lie to a small group just as easily as you can lie to your own heart.

But for those who truly want to do battle and break habits, enlist the aid of a godly friend.

I think this is the proper context and understanding of *James 5 and verse 16, Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* This text isn't talking about physical healing as much as it is about spiritual and mental and emotional healing by breaking the bonds of sin.

Enlist the help of a godly friend who will battle with you and for you.

2. Secondly, rebuild the fences and bar the door

In other words, you need to fence yourself in as much as you possible can. What that means is that you need to eliminate – cut off – limit – your access to sinful temptation.

So get creative . . . and stay tough. Don't cut yourself any slack.

- Put your computer in your master bedroom with the screen facing the bed where your wife can see it – or husband;
- put stronger filters on your computer . . .
- Give access to your computer to a friend to remotely come on and check out your history . . .
- Put a GPS on your smart phone and have that friend be able to track your movements at any given moment.

Again, Heath Lambert writes, since our sin turns us into inventors of evil, you may end up finding more creative avenues for accessing pornography, especially as technological advances make it even more accessible. If so, be diligent to apply these principles to those sources as well.^x

Build fences – some call them hedges – and bar the door.

Listen, how serious is this issue to you? How serious are you to break up this stony ground and

allow the seed of God's word to bring growth again . . . and fresh life and fruit?

- Maybe you need to throw away your computer;
- or go back to an old flip phone without internet;
- get rid of cable;
- or get rid of television completely;
- stop going to the movies;
- stop staying up at night unless you're reading a book;
- take cold showers;
- sleep in the freezer if you need to.

Rebuild some fences and bar the door.

3. Third, restock the shelves of your mind

The Bible doesn't just tell us to stop sinning . . . to stop lusting . . . it commands not only prohibitions but positive actions.

We don't just *lay aside the old self which is corrupted with evil lusts . . . but put on the new self which is right and holy living (Ephesians 4:22).*

Don't just empty the shelves of your mind and heart of everything that's marginal or compromising or sinful – restock those shelves with good books . . . good music . . . good activities . . . good movies . . . good friends.

If I asked you, what book are you reading – having none in the hopper is not a good sign. Pick something by Spurgeon . . . purchase the Valley of Vision we've referenced already and begin to read.

4. Fourth, remember you're being watched

One of the dangers of pornography online is anonymity. You all alone . . . no one sees me!

Are you serious? Is our theology that poor?

Does not the host of heavenly angels swirl about us? Are not the demons around, watching those things that tempt us to stumble and fall?

Do we not think the demons are taking notes?

Is not God watching?

Do we really think there are no visible effects of sin?

I can remember, as a sixteen-year-old, getting my license. Do you remember that? Some of you have to think way back.

Sixteen years old and sweet freedom, man!

I can remember, when I was sixteen, my father had this huge Buick Le Sabre. The car was about

fifteen years old. That was when they made them really big. It didn't have an air conditioning, but neither did our house . . . we didn't think anything of it . . . we'd just roll all four windows down.

The summer after I got my license, my cousins arrived from Minnesota for vacation. My favorite cousin, Mark, and I decided we'd go for a ride. So I asked Dad for the keys. And Dad gave them to me with that look that my Dad often gave me.

No problem, Dad, we're just going to circle the block . . . I didn't tell him we were going to break the sound barrier.

I probably went five miles an hour down our street as it led out of the neighborhood – Red Brook Road; pulled up to the stop sign and turned right and then a half-a-mile up the road I came to Military Highway – it was a main drag from one end of Norfolk to the other.

The light was red. As we sat there I looked over at my cousin and he looked at me; I know this will come as a total surprise to you, but when that light turned green, I floored the accelerator and we took off. After 15 minutes it got up 45 miles an hour.

All of a sudden, I looked in my rearview mirror and saw smoke billowing out behind me; just billowing out from underneath the car.

I am not a mechanic, but I knew that can't be good. I pulled off onto the shoulder of Military highway. We hiked across the service road to a dealership and called my dad. He and his brother, my Uncle Lowell, pulled up in a couple of minutes.

We didn't say anything . . . my uncle was driving his car; as we circled back toward the house, my father turned to his brother and said, "What would cause something like that happen." And without saying a word, my uncle floored the accelerator.

I've never forgiven my uncle for that.

Kid's often sneak around adults. We all think we can sneak around God. As if He'll never know.

Be sure your sins will find you out! Numbers 32:23

Sin has a way of showing up . . . listen, consider pornography as the smoke pouring out from an unconsecrated heart . . . it's a warning from the goodness of God that it's time to deal honestly and realistically and severely with sin.

5. Fifth, respond to every temptation with alarm

John Piper addressed this perspective when he wrote, we must not give selfish or lustful any other sinful images or impulses more than five seconds before we mount a violent counterattack with the mind. I mean that! Five seconds!

In the first 2 seconds shout to yourself, "No! Get out of my head!" Then the real battle begins. This is a mind war. The absolute necessity is to get the image and the impulse out of our mind. How?

Get a counter image into your mind. It must be an image that is so powerful that the other image cannot survive.

For example, have you ever in the first five seconds of temptation, focused on the scene of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Picture this. Men, you have just seen a woman dressed in a way that invites further looking . . . and fantasy. You have five seconds to get it out of your mind!"

Immediately, demand of your mind that you fix its gaze on Christ, dying for you on the cross. Use all your mental power to see his lacerated back. Thirty-nine lashes left little flesh intact. He heaves with his breath up and down against the rough vertical beam of the cross. Each breath puts splinters into the lacerated flesh.

He tries to pull away from the wood and the massive spikes through his wrist rip into the nerve endings and he screams with agony and pushes up with his feet to give some relief to his wrists. The bones and nerves in his pierced feet crush against each other with anguish and he cries out again.

There is no relief. His throat is raw with thirst. His voice reaches a high pitch of pain and sobs break over his pain-wracked body as every cry brings more and more pain.

Now, I am not thinking that sinful thought any more . . . I am at Calvary.^{xi}

*Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.*

*It was my sin that held him there
Until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life;
I know that it is finished.*

It was my sin that held Him there . . . beloved, deal with sin in light of what it cost your Savior.

6. Sixth, rehearse often your total weakness and need for the strength of Christ

Let me give you another hymn lyric worth remembering:

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,*

*Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He.
Lord Sabboth, his name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/9/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man (Crossway, 1991), p. 71

ii Ibid, p. 72

iii The Christian Post, Internet Porn Pandemic by Napp Nazworth, October 17, 2014

iv Ibid

v Chris Lee, The Sex Addiction Epidemic (The Daily Beast; 11/25/2011) www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/april/3041612.html

vi Posted on Challies.com

vii Grant R. Osborne, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew (Zondervan, 2010), p. 196

viii John MacArthur, Matthew 1-7 (Moody Bible Institute, 1985), p. 304

ix Adapted from Heath Lambert, Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace (Zondervan, 2013), p. 62

x Lambert, p. 66

xi 2003 Preaching Today.com; Citation: John Piper, from the sermon "A Passion for Purity"