

LEAD! B.10 From Lust to Purity

In Which Our Desires Are Tamed As Our Hearts Are Purified

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." -- [Matthew 5:8](#)

Though sometimes a synonym for sexual desire, or conversely any kind of consuming passion, we will define lust as the *idolatrous pursuit of sexual/romantic excitement or fulfillment*. In other words, trusting "[eros](#)" instead of God to validate who we are (our "name").

Though far from the deadliest sin, lust is certainly one of the most popular, and (except for pride) the most difficult to defend against -- especially, though not only, for men.

The opposite state from lust is purity, having a heart wholly focused on God. The pure heart is one that recognizes we can only find true wholeness by submitting to God's [name](#) --- which is essential if we are ever to see His face.

Assigned Reading

1. [Peter Kreeft: *Back to Virtue*](#)
 - 12. Pure of Heart vs. Lustful of Heart
2. Dick Hockett: *Foundations of Wisdom*
 - 3.7 (Wise) Example: Proverbs about the Tongue

Admonition

Read [Proverbs 7](#). How does lust make us simple, and lead to destruction?

Bible

[James 4](#)

As usual, James gets right to the point:

[4:1](#) Where do [wars](#) and [fights](#) come from among you? Do they not come from your [desires for pleasure](#) that [war](#) in your [members](#)?

He knows that we live in a world full of senseless, destructive conflict -- and places the blame for that on our desire for carnal pleasures:

[2](#) You [lust](#) and do not have. You [murder](#) and [covet](#) and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not [ask](#).

Significantly, he does **not** say that we should **not** have those things. Rather, tragedy arises when we seek to those things in our **own** strength, instead of asking God.

Not that He will necessarily give us what we ask [C.1]:

³You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Ouch. We cannot simply hand God a wish list and expect two-day shipping; we must ask in accordance with God's purpose for us (His "name", cf. [John 16:26](#)) -- which does not include feeding our flesh!

James goes so far as to equate that behavior with adultery -- seeking carnal fulfillment outside our covenant bond with God:

⁴[Adulterers](#) and [adulteresses](#)! Do you not know that [friendship](#) with the [world](#) is [enmity](#) with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns [jealously](#)"?

God is a jealous lover. He desires to husband us into the fullness of joy, by bringing our whole person into alignment with His whole character. To willfully hold back any part of ourselves is to taint the whole relationship. [C.2]

Yet though He hates our faithless behavior, He is nonetheless gracious towards our weakness -- if we humble ourselves before Him: .

⁶But He gives more [grace](#). Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the [humble](#)."

And by submitting to Him rather than the world, we neutralize not just the flesh but the devil:

⁷Therefore [submit](#) to God. [Resist](#) the [devil](#) and he will flee from you.

But it is not enough to simply acknowledge God as Lord. We must take active steps to cultivate a relationship with Him, and turn away from anything that hinders:

⁸[Draw near](#) to God and He will draw near to you. [Cleanse](#) [your] hands, [you] [sinners](#); and [purify](#) [your] hearts, [you] [double-minded](#).

James agrees with the Beatitude that we must purify our hearts in order to see God. But how do we do that?

⁹Lament and [mourn](#) and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and [your] joy to gloom.

The first step is to give up senseless pleasure and embrace the pain of our sinful condition. Many addictive behaviors -- especially sexual ones -- are attempts to drown out the heartache of loneliness, inadequacy, and rejection; though, perversely, they only heighten our suffering, leading to a vicious cycle of [folly](#).

That is why fasting, silence, and isolation are powerful tools for forcing ourselves to

confront the cries of our soul -- and thus lift them to God [C.3]:

¹⁰Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

This is the second step in purification: admitting our inability to save ourselves, or even know what we *should* desire. It is only when we release our insistence on pursuing on our self-driven terms than He can give us His authentic happiness [C.4].

As hard as that is, though, there is even more required of us:

¹¹Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

Fallen humans that we are, once we are delivered from a particular habit we tend to become self-righteous and judge those who seem less pure than us. This is perhaps the most dangerous sin of all, since condemning others opens us up to condemnation!

This is in sharp contrast to both Christ (who did not come to condemn the world, cf. John 3:17) and the Spirit, who came to convict the world (producing repentance, cf. John 16:8) rather than condemn it (leading to shame).

In fact, this may well be one reason so many Christian leaders have fallen into sexual immorality. They grew complacent in their spirituality, and began trusting in their own righteousness. Sometimes God in His severe mercy allows us to succumb to the lesser (though devastating) sin of lust to rescue us from the much deadlier (though more subtle) sin of pride. [C.5]

Which is why we need to have a healthy skepticism of our own abilities and understanding:

¹³Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴whereas you do not know what [will happen] tomorrow. For what [is] your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

And walk in humility before God:

¹⁵Instead you [ought] to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

Rather than swaggering in self-confidence:

¹⁶But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

The road of purity is one of denying our own glory and giving up our feeble attempts to control our own destiny. It is recognizing that even our deepest desires are utterly

tainted by sin, and that following them will only lead to our own destruction. [C.6]

The only way out is to walk in humility before God and man, showing compassion and grace to others as God shows it to us. Only then can we see God clearly enough to know what will truly bring us joy.

Though once we see it, woe to us if we do not do it:

¹⁷Therefore, to him who [knows](#) to do [good](#) and does not do [it], to him it is [sin](#).

That is why God often appears slow to judge the world for their sins, since they really don't know any better. We who do, however, are judged far more swiftly. Not because God is our enemy, but because He jealously loves us, and will stop at nothing to present us to Himself fully purified, "without any kind of stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (cf. [Ephesians 5:27](#)).

Conversation.

1. Share about a time you are grateful God did **not** give you what you asked.
2. Compare and contrast God's jealousy with human jealousy?
3. What pleasures and habits do you use to distract yourself from pain?
4. When have you chosen to miserable on your own terms instead of happy on God's terms?
5. Has lust ever destroyed a ministry you followed? How? Any idea why?
6. Do your deepest desires need to be purified? Why or why not?

Decision

- Repentance: How can you purify your heart?
- Action: What is the good you know you ought to do, but haven't yet?
- Worship: When can you spend time alone and silent in God's presence?.

Explore More

- [Lust – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Every Man's Battle: There is hope for those struggling with porn addiction](#)
- [The New Man Report: Why Men Really Cheat](#)
- [What is sexual immorality?](#)
- [YouTube – Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord](#)

For Next Week

For next week, read [Colossians 2–3](#). What is the benefit of self-control? What are the risks?

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[James 4](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–

2009. 14 Jan 2009. < [http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?
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2. [New King James Version](#) (NKJV) Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

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