

## **Idols of the Heart Part 6**

### **The idol of lust.**

- Matthew 5:28; 2 Samuel 13:2; 1 Samuel 13:15

**Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its  
object and disregards God.**

*"Love is substance; lust, illusion. Only the surge of passion  
do they mingle in confusion." (John Miller)*

### **Love**

- John 3:16, 15:13-14, 13:34; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Philipians 4:8;  
James 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19

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West Valley Church  
July 27, 2025  
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## **Idols of the Heart: Relation to others: Lust and Love<sup>1</sup>**

Today we continue in our summer series called “Idols of the Heart.” In the Bible, idolatry is the number one issue, making its way into every book, and it’s as significant a problem today as it was then – and just as deadly to us. If you haven’t been with us, I’d strongly encourage you to go to our webpage and watch the previous sermons – especially the first two – so you have the basis for what we are doing in this series. Since then we’ve looked at general areas of idol worship – we spent two Sundays looking at idols in relation to the self, and then last week we began by addressing predominant idols in relation to others. Today we continue that.

For those of you who have been with us, remember we’ve been saying all along that idols are really Satan’s substitutes; that Satan has taken every good thing that God has for us, and convinced us to worship a lesser, sinful version of that good thing.

So for today, I want to start with a picture on the screen, and then I want to ask how many know what the story behind it is, okay? Okay here it is:

Show of hands – how many know what the story behind this is? Okay, here’s what we’re going to do: We haven’t done a meet and greet today, so we’re going to do that now – and during that time, if you don’t know what this is about, ask the person next to you. Let’s stand and greet each other.



Okay, let’s go ahead and get back to our seats.

If you weren’t aware, hopefully you are now. The story behind that photo is this: the man was the founder and CEO of a company called “Astronomer” – a software company specializing in data and workflow management. The woman he is with is his company’s new HR manager. Both of these people are married with children, but not to each other.

They were attending a concert of a band called Coldplay. During the concert, they had a big screen jumbotron that showed people in the audience, and it showed them – and they looked shocked, the woman covered her face, and the guy ducked out of sight.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: *God’s at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*, Kyle Idleman, Zondervan, 2013 (much of the first two sermons uses material from this source. Direct quotations are cited)  
*The Baal Conspiracy: An Expose of Everyday Idolatry*, Al Truesdale, Beacon Hill Press, 2010  
*New Beacon Bible Commentary: Exodus*, H. Junia Pokrifka, Beacon Hill Press, 2018

He was the CEO, and she was the person in charge of HR – the two people who were supposed to be the conscience of the company. The company personnel manual would have said what they were caught doing was against the rules, yet here they were. They both have since resigned their jobs. No word on their marriages, but there has been no shortage of memes.

What in the world would cause a founder and CEO and the HR person to cheat on their spouses and risk their marriages, families, and careers? It is an idol as old as the fruit in the Garden of Eden itself: it's called...

## **The idol of lust.**

Just to make sure we are all clear, let's begin with a biblical definition of lust. Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God.<sup>2</sup> The idol of lust that we've created is far more sophisticated than our Old Testament counterparts. One of the ways you see this in the Old Testament is in the worship of Asherah poles. These were places to worship the Goddess Asherah, who was linked to fertility. The Asherah pole was a large pole stuck in the ground that was anywhere from a few feet to several feet tall, and was really a phallus and if you don't know what that is, ask your parents. They would worship by gathering under it and...well you can guess what they'd do together.

The idol of lust we've made today is far more expansive and technological than that. Ours is a media empire that calls us to worship it by lusting after others in all kinds of ways – and acting on it.

We spend well over four and a half billion hours watching porn on just *one* porn site. Humanity spent more time viewing porn in a year as it has spent existing on planet Earth. It all adds up to over 500 thousand years' worth of porn consumed in the span of 12 months.

I'm telling you this not because it's interesting trivia ... but because these figures are serious. More than serious: staggering, incomprehensible, unthinkable, apocalyptic. All the more so for Americans, because we watch more porn than anybody else on Earth.

One writer says, "Porn is obviously America's favorite pastime. According to surveys, almost 80% of American men between the ages of 18 and 30 admit to watching porn regularly. Nearly 70% of men between 31 and 49 admit to it. Half of men from 50 to senior citizen age also confess to regular porn viewing. 30% of younger men say they watch porn every day. Porn viewership is not quite as common among women, but it's far more common today than it was 10 years ago. Remember, too, this is just what people will *admit* to doing.

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, [\*Sermons from John Piper \(1980–1989\)\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

Today, porn grosses more in a year than Hollywood. It also brings in more money than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined.”<sup>3</sup> The idol of lust.

I was not raised as a Christian, and when I became a Christian at the end of my junior year of high school, I had a few of my Christian guy friends who all agreed that we needed to help hold each other accountable in this area of lust. So we decided on the eleven second rule: if we looked at a girl for longer than eleven seconds, we were lusting. I have no idea where we came up with that. But you know what? It kind of worked – if you wanted to look at someone lustfully and immediately began counting, you realized what you were doing so you just turned your eyes away. Of course, it’s not just our eyes that are the problem.

There is a story of two Buddhist monks walking in a drenching thunderstorm. They came to a stream, and it was swollen out of its banks. A beautiful young Japanese woman in a kimono stood there wanting to get to the other side but was afraid of the currents. In characteristic Buddhist compassion, one of the monks said, "Can I help you?"

The woman said, "I need to cross this stream."

The monk picked her up, put her on his shoulder, carried her through the water, and put her down on the other side. He and his companion then went on to the monastery.

That night his companion said to him, "I’m upset with you. As Buddhist monks, we have taken vows not to look on a woman, much less touch her body. Back there by the river you did both."

The first monk said, "My brother, I put that woman down on the other side of the river. You're still carrying her in your mind."<sup>4</sup>

This is a great example of what Jesus meant when he said this:

“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, niv)

(By the way, that truth applies to both men and women.) When lust is involved, you’ve entered the arena of idol worship. You aren’t worshiping the person; you are worshiping the lust. Remember our Bible definition?

**Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God.<sup>5</sup>**

You are not worshiping the person – you are actually dishonoring the person – you are treating that person as less than God has created her or him to be. And you are dishonoring God and his kingdom principle of honoring and respecting others as

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<sup>3</sup> Matt Walsh, "We're A Nation Of Porn Addicts. Why Are We Surprised By The Perverts In Our Midst?" *Daily Wire* (11-30-17)

<sup>4</sup> John Claypool, "The Future and Forgetting," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 109

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007)

someone made in the image of God. It doesn't matter if it's a real person in front of you or on your screen or on the screen of your mind.

There's a terrifying example of this in the Bible, and it's about King David's family. David kept with the practice of his day by having multiple wives. By the way, the Bible gives one example after another that this is a very bad idea. But Amnon is one of David's sons, and Tamar is one of his daughters. They have different moms, so they are half-siblings. This is a true story from 2 Samuel 13. It says in verse 2:

“Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill.”  
(2 Samuel 13:2, niv)

That word “obsessed” is a lust word. It is also an idolatry word. There was no eleven seconds here; Amnon was constantly thinking about her and what he wanted to do to her. He allowed this fantasy to fill his heart until he made himself sick with lust.

So he talked with one of his friends, and they came up with a plan. Amnon would call in sick to the palace that day. And his dad, David would be worried and would come check on him. Amnon would then tell his dad that the only thing that sounds good to him is if Tamar would come and bake some of her famous bread for him.

So that's what he did, and it worked. When Tamar came in to visit her sick brother and prepare some bread for him, Amnon dismissed all the other servants and told her what he intended to do. She begged him not to do this; to think about the disgrace it would bring their father and the palace, not to mention her and him. If nothing else, he should think about his own reputation. But he refused to listen. So I'm going to read to you what the Bible says in 2 Samuel 13:14. I'm not going to put it on the screen because it's so horrifying. It says:

“But (Amnon) refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.” (2 Samuel 13:14, niv)

The rest of the chapter, and the rest of David's family's story, tells of the repercussions of this heinous action.

So you're probably thinking, “That's a crazy story but that has nothing to do with me. I would never go down that path or do such a horrible thing.” But I'm sure that's exactly what Amnon said to himself before this wretched thing happened. The god of sex and lust specializes in taking you further than you ever intended to go.<sup>6</sup> And the next thing you know, you are caught canoodling at a Coldplay concert on a jumbotron that's gone viral.

Don't misunderstand me – sex is good. In God's own words, it is *very* good. God created it and ordained it, it's not evil or unholy – sex is God's idea for you. One writer points out that sex, done God's way, is “a spiritual union between a man and a woman that is captured and reflected in the physical act of making love. One of the Hebrew words for sex, translated literally, is “a mingling of the souls,” and that

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<sup>6</sup> Kyle Idleman, *ibid*, pg 97-98

captures it perfectly – a beautiful gift from God.”<sup>7</sup> But like we’ve been saying all along, Satan has taken that good thing of God’s and seduces your sin nature with a substitute. As a result, there’s also something called the pleasure paradox. When something good becomes a god, the pleasure it brings dies in the process. That’s exactly what happened to Amnon. After he gave in to his lust, it didn’t satisfy him the way he thought it would. In fact, it did the opposite. The act lasted only minutes, but when it was over he looked at her with contempt – even with “intense hatred.” According to the Bible:

“He hated her more than he had loved her.” (1 Samuel 13:15, niv)

Why would he do that? Because the idol of lust delivers the exact opposite of what it promises. And, like any other idol, you are then compelled to push the envelope further. This is the idol perversion of the good gift that comes from God.

I want you to hear what one writer says: “When the gift replaces the giver as the object of worship, something surprising happens. When we begin to worship this god of pleasure instead of the God who gave it to us, we discover that the pleasure is lost. We discover the devastating paradox that when we pursue pleasure as a god, pleasure disappears.”<sup>8</sup> The idol of lust never satisfies.

Calvin Miller was a pastor and writer, and he wrote some of my favorite books called “The Singer Trilogy.” They are beautiful prose and poetry. I started reading it in high school and have read it several times since. The three books are “The Singer,” “The Song,” and “The Finale.” The Singer is Jesus, so it is an allegory of the Gospels. The Song is the Gospel spreading as an allegory of the book of Acts. The Finale is an allegory of the book of Revelation.

In his books he wrote something that I memorized as a high school Christian. It was this:

“Love is substance; lust, illusion. Only in the surge of passion do they mingle in confusion.” (Calvin Miller)

I think you can understand why I would have memorized it – as a new high school Christian, I needed to remember that. But he points out what the gift is that God is giving us that Satan has substituted with lust, and that is...

## **Love.**

Love is the answer. Love means respecting the other person as someone made in the image of God. That definitely means you won’t treat someone as an object, and you won’t pursue a sexual relationship with them outside of biblical marriage. It also means putting the needs of someone you love ahead of your own, while lust means you are consumed only with gratifying your own passions. Lust is all about satisfying your feelings. In the Bible, love is not primarily a feeling, but a selfless,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 95

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 100

sacrificial, and unconditional commitment to the well-being of others, and God is the one who leads the way on this kind of love. John 3:16 says:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, niv)

Jesus agreed with this when he said:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends...” (John 15:13-14, niv)

That’s how much he loves us. And what did he tell us?

“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34, niv).

There’s no room for the idol of lust when we are in Christ and motivated by love for others.

What then? Eleven second rules don’t ultimately work, so how do we get free from the worship of lust?

“The path to freedom from lust is not a one-time decision, but a daily, moment-by-moment choice to pursue righteousness. It starts with acknowledging our sin and our inability to overcome it on our own. We must understand that lust, like any other sin idol, separates us from God. But the good news is that God has made a way for us to be reconciled to Him through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior: When we do this we can submit to and receive the Holy Spirit who empowers us to resist temptation. The Holy Spirit also convicts us when we sin, leading us to repentance and helping us to change our ways. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, we begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which according to Galatians five includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These virtues replace the lust in our hearts.

The Bible encourages us to:

“Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18, nlt)

This means we need to avoid situations that may lead us into temptation. We should be careful about what we watch, read, and listen to, and we should seek to do what the Bible says: fill our minds with:

“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.” (Philippians 4:8, niv).

And the Bible tells us to be accountable to others:

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16, niv)

Having a trusted friend or mentor who can pray with us, encourage us, and hold us accountable can be a powerful tool in our fight against lust.

We're also told in the Bible:

"In this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before." (1 Thessalonians 4:6, niv)

So when it comes to our bodies, or someone else's, we need to remember this:

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6:19, niv)

Jesus bought us out of sin with his own life. We should honor God with our bodies by treating others with respect and living for His glory. This includes slaying the idol of lust.

It's not an easy path, but it's a rewarding one that leads to true freedom and joy."<sup>9</sup>

When I was in college, I realized something about myself – whenever I was dating somebody, I was more excited about spending time with them than I was with Jesus. It's not that I was even lusting – it was just that I felt Jesus took a back seat to my relationships. Well, some of you know that I was in what we called the Covenant Group – a group of twelve guys and my major professor, Dr. Laird. We met weekly for about 3-4 hours, and we were deeply committed to each other and our spiritual growth. We took it seriously to hold each other accountable.

During that time (this would have been my sophomore year) I shared with the guys that I decided I needed to stop dating – I wanted to only focus on Jesus. And that worked pretty good for the first half of the year. Then over Christmas break, I went to Colorado with one of my buddies who was from there, and we were going to spend the week skiing – I'd never skied the Rockies yet. I was going to follow him in my car, spend the week there and then drive back home to Oregon for Christmas. So when school break came there was another student from Denver that needed a ride home. A girl. Her name was Shelly. Back then there were 55 mile an hour speed limits, so the trip from Nampa to Denver took about 11 hours. Most of that trip, Shelly rode in my car. This girl was really amazing. She was smart – way smarter than me – kind, funny, and fun. Not to mention beautiful. We even double dated to a movie with my friend and his girlfriend. And, while I was there, I needed to buy a gift for my parents because their anniversary was the next week, so Shelly went with me to the mall and helped me pick out a gift.

The drive home from Denver to Salem took about 24 hours and I didn't stop the whole way. Drove straight through. The whole way, I thought about Shelly – what a great person she is. This was a real problem – remember, I had sworn off dating while I focused on my relationship with Jesus. I kept thinking about Jesus' words in Matthew 10 when he said, 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.' (37). I didn't want to love anyone more than Jesus.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-lust-trap-pro-sermon-on-lust-30001100>



When we got back to school, we ended up with a class together, so we started studying together. But we didn't go on any dates because of my commitment.

Oh man, I was torn! I wanted to date her, but I wanted to make sure I loved Jesus first above all. But I liked this girl a lot!

I really wrestled with this. Of course, I wasn't even sure she would want to go out with me in the first place!

One night in the Covenant Group, I told the guys about my dilemma. I wanted to ask Shelly on a date, but I didn't want to change my vow to Jesus. And my covenant brothers said, "Why don't you learn to love Jesus first WHILE you are dating someone?" That was the answer I needed! So I asked her on a date and believe it or not she agreed! We started dating regularly, and we *did* keep Jesus first! She was really great about that and helped me. And I learned how to prioritize Jesus and Shelly. That meant I also learned to put her needs and interests ahead of my own. I'm still learning to do that! Of course, she's really good at it. Always has been.

By the way, that's not the end of the story, because I had a lot of issues to work through. Our senior year we broke up. We were not dating when we graduated. Then I went to Los Angeles to be a youth pastor, and she went to New York to be a nanny for a famous TV star and news producer. This was 1984 – no such thing as email or cell phones, and each long-distance phone call was about \$1.25/three minutes. That would be equal to \$3.10 today. So a 30-minute phone call would cost over \$30 today. Neither of us could afford that. So how did we end up getting together and engaged and married? That's a story for another time!

The moral of the story though is this: Keep Jesus first in all things – especially in our culture where the idol of lust has so saturated our worship. Submit and surrender everything in your life to Jesus. That's where you'll find real life, joy, and pleasure.

#### *Prayer*

Lord, we thank You for Your Word today. We ask that You help us to guard our hearts against the idol of lust. Give us the strength to resist temptation and the wisdom to recognize it for what it is. Help us to live lives that honor You, and to walk in the freedom You've provided as we submit to your Holy Spirit. We ask all these in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Just before Pastor Div comes to dismiss us, let me say this: this issue sometimes involves more than just confessing and repenting. Many times this is addiction – no different than to alcohol or drugs. So if you are struggling with this, get help. As I said, you can't do it alone, but that might mean more than an accountability partner – you might need more professional counseling. Let us know if we can help you, or at least help you get the help you need. We're here to help you get healthy and whole. That's what God wants for you and that's why we're here.

Pastor Div -

*Benediction*

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, niv)