

## Guarding the Marriage Bed, Part 2 (Hebrews 13:4)

Will you please turn now to Hebrews 13? During the course of the message today we're going to be in two passages, Hebrews 13 to begin with, and then Ephesians 4. So if you want to make it easier for you later on, you could find Ephesians 4 and place your finger there, but we're going to be reading a few verses here out of Hebrews 13 before we pray.

1 Let love of the brethren continue.

2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

6 so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Heb. 13:1–6 NASB)

I did not anticipate spending four Sundays on Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." I had originally planned the first couple of months of this year to spend one Sunday, maybe possibly two on that verse, but as we jumped into it and kind of worked our way through it, the importance of applying what is written here and understanding the significance of this required, at least in my own heart, that we give more time and attention to this and substantial consideration to this command and what applying this looks like in our lives. So we've spent two Sundays now talking about the reasons that we honor marriage, why marriage is honorable, what that looks like, what are the implications of that for how we relate to our spouse, how we view our spouses, how we approach marriage itself.

And then last week we turned our attention to the command to keep the marriage bed undefiled, and we considered what such a command means for our view of marriage

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and how we honor marriage by maintaining the purity of the marriage bed. And the fact that the marriage bed can be pure in the eyes of God, and holy, tells us something of its nature and its purpose and God's intention for that in marriage. And this purity and holiness is something that we are to guard. We have to work diligently at it because the corrupting influences of the world in thought and in our hearts and in our minds—those corrupting and polluting influences seep themselves in and find ways into our relationships and into our hearts. And so maintaining purity is something that must be diligently pursued and aggressively thought about and maintained lest we fall into corruption and the marriage bed be defiled.

We looked last week at the things that threatened to defile the marriage bed. These are easily and subtly creeping into lives and relationships all around us. I gave you four of them. It was not a comprehensive list, but I would just, by way of reminder, remind you of what those were.

- Selfishness in the marriage bed. Selfishness.
- Abusing it, using it as a weapon against our covenant partner.
- Third, sexual immorality in both thought and in deed.
- And then fourth, emotional unfaithfulness.

And today we're going to look a bit closer at an aspect of guarding the marriage bed, specifically, how we fight the fight against the inner corruption that we all have to battle. We didn't deal with that last week other than just very briefly at the end of the message, but I don't think that that is sufficient. So today is kind of the application of what we looked at last week. We're going to deal with how and when we fight these threats because we face threats to our marriage covenant and our marriage bed. We face those threats, and those enemies are foreign and domestic. I like to refer to it that way because we can understand that. There are things outside of our marriage—people outside, things outside in the world—that are not necessarily within the four walls of our home. They're not necessarily inside of our own heart. Those things threaten our purity and our sanctification. And then there is the domestic threat, the internal threat, the enemy within, the terrorist within the gate, my own heart, my own mind, my own corruption, my own depravity that wars against me constantly that we have to be on guard against. So how and when do we fight those threats?

And then second, we're going to consider the reason that we fight so aggressively, namely because of that last phrase in verse 4: “fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” That is a sobering warning.

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And then third, I want to end by reminding us of the promise of the gospel for fornicators and adulterers because in thought, in word, or in deed, nearly everybody except the little kids who are talking right now, nearly everybody in here is a fornicator and an adulterer in thought, word, or deed. So I want to end with the gospel hope for fornicators and adulterers. And then, Lord willing, we'll move on to verse 5 next week.

So how do we fight this? Now, I realize that some of you are new here today. Maybe you haven't been here last week or the last two weeks or whatever. I have to assume for the sake of time that you're going to be up to speed on what we mean when we talk about honoring marriage and honoring the marriage bed, what the marriage bed is, how it can be pure, why it is pure, why it needs to be guarded, and all of that. I'm going to assume that you've been with us for the last three weeks. If you haven't been, then go back and listen to those. But for the sake of time and everybody else who is here who doesn't want to tread that ground again, we're going to move on to how it is and when it is that we fight.

Now, when do we start protecting the marriage bed? When you say “I do”? Is that early enough? No, you do it before you say “I do.” In fact, you begin protecting your marriage bed from as early in your life as you are aware that a marriage bed exists. From that point on, you must aggressively protect your marriage bed. You start now. And I'm talking now to young and single people. Don't think that the things that I've said for the last three weeks don't apply to you because you're not married and you're not enjoying a marriage bed yet. You must begin to guard your future relationships now. You begin being committed to your future spouse now. You honor your future spouse now. You may have never met them. You may not know them. You may not know who they are. You may think that you know who that person is right now, but you may be entirely deceived. You might be entirely deceived about who your future spouse is until you stand there and say “I do.” Because that last minute—something could change at the last minute. So you may not know who your future spouse is, but even though you don't know that, you begin honoring them and respecting them and guarding what you will have with them long before you ever say “I do.” Long before you ever stand at the altar and pledge your vows to one another. In other words, while you are young, do not give your heart to lusts and immorality. Do not give your time, your attention, your affection, your eyes, your ears, your mind, your thoughts, your dreams, your daydreaming—do not turn it over to things that are immoral and impure. Follow the advice of Philippians 4:8: whatever is pure and lovely and of good repute, think and meditate on those things. Begin that while you are young.

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Don't be naive, because the habits that you form now will chase you for the rest of your life. You cannot give five or ten or fifteen years of your thought life to a certain pattern and a certain way of thinking and then expect that when you stand at the altar and say "I do" that those habits are all of a sudden going to change. They won't. Don't believe the lie that says that you can't resist temptation now but you will be able to resist temptation once you are married. Don't entertain the images and lavish your affections upon images and other people and thoughts that you are not able to control now or think you're not able to control now. Do not give your heart to those things. Instead, learn now while you are young to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. That's 1 Timothy 4:7. Learn now while you are young to discipline your mind and discipline your heart to resist temptation and to say no to fleshly desires which wage war against your soul. Learn it while you're young. Set those patterns while you're young. Discipline yourself from the first moment, from now, from this day forward.

1 Corinthians 6:18 says to "flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." There is a difference between lying and sexual sin. They are sins of a different nature. They affect us differently. They have different ramifications for your life. We are created as sexual beings with a sexuality and with a sex drive. All of that is true. And when you sin in that way, you are sinning against your own body and against your soul in a way that you are not sinning when you get mad at somebody who cuts you off in traffic. They are different kinds of sin. Different ramifications, different fruit from those kinds of sin.

2 Timothy 2:22 says to "flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." You run from something, youthful lust, and you run toward something, purity. You are fleeing something and running toward something. It's not enough to simply flee from something. You have to flee from one thing and have in your focus another goal, another destination, something else you are chasing and pursuing. Like Joseph. I can hardly read 2 Timothy 2:22, "flee from youthful lusts," without thinking of Joseph. He was a man who endured the berating of Potiphar's wife and the enticements of her, who probably could have convinced himself with a thousand lies that he could do this against his own soul and get away with it and that Potiphar would never find out and that he would be OK, but he didn't do that. Instead, he fled. He eventually had to get out of her presence, and he fled. And of course, he suffered the results of that. But he fled the youthful lusts and got out of her presence. And Joseph said, "I cannot sin against you, I cannot sin against my

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master Potiphar, and I cannot sin against my God.” That's the mentality you have to have.

And don't believe the lies, young person. The lies that said you can indulge this now and it won't affect your marriage later. It will affect your marriage later. Do not believe the lie that says you can inject poison into your mind and your soul and that it will all go away on your wedding day. It doesn't go away on your wedding day. I'm fifty-two years old and I can still call to my mind, vividly, in glossy color, images I saw when I was ten. Do not believe the lie that those things will go away. The images begin to fade, but every time you call them back, it is engraved again as with an iron stylus on the marble of your heart and even deeper. And there will come a time when you will wish to God that you had some tool, some device, that you could rip those things out of your soul and be rid of them forever. But you will not be able to because your flesh will never be sanctified, your flesh will never be improved, and those things are etched on your flesh. So don't feed your flesh now, thinking that when you get married it will have no effect on you. Because what you end up doing is taking all of the images, the ideas, the notions, the pictures, all of it, and the expectations, and you bring them into your marriage bed. And all you're doing now is harboring the enemy so that you can take it into your marriage bed later on. So don't believe the lie that says you can do this and it won't affect your marriage.

Don't believe the lie that you can look at porn now and meditate upon those things without dishonoring your future spouse. You can't. You dishonor your future spouse now by what you are doing with your mind and your heart now. And don't believe this lie, and this is a predominant one, that once you get married, resisting that temptation will be easier. It won't be easier. The temptation doesn't go away. It just takes new forms. It just comes up in different opportunities at different times, the most inopportune times. So don't think that I can indulge that temptation now and that this desire that I have now, eventually it will go away.

You may be thinking, now look, I've seen some of the old guys. They look like they can't get excited over anything, let alone a woman. And so eventually I'll just play footsie with this sin and sooner or later I'll outgrow the temptation. I'll outgrow the desire. Men, particularly—I don't care how old you are—those images, those ideas, those desires will be there until the day that you die, in one form or another. Don't believe that lie. Don't play games with your lust because it is not playing games with you. It seeks your ruin

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and destruction, and it seeks to keep you in bondage to your flesh, to your lusts, for the rest of your life.

Now you say, what if I don't ever plan to get married? This still applies to you because you can live a single life as a slave to your lust or you can live a single life as a master of your desires. Which one are you going to have? If you're going to live a single life, you're going to live it either as a slave to your lusts, and every woman that you see—every person—will not be your sister in the Lord; she will not be a noble, virtuous woman. To you, once you become enslaved to those lusts, every woman that you see will have one purpose and one purpose only in your mind, and you will fight to the death to get those things out of your mind. So discipline yourself now to not give your mind to it at all. Your passions will seek your ruin until the day you die, whether you are single or married. So if you are single, then this still applies, that fornicators, idolaters, and adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. So we still must obey and by faith lay hold of the promise that there will be a reward for holiness and purity on that day, and that God will reward the one who is faithful and obedient to Him and learns to master their desires.

Now, if we're going to fight this battle, that's when we fight it. We start fighting it now. We start fighting it when we are young. And listen, parents, teach your children to do this when they are young. I happen to be part of a generation where porn was not accessible to us when we were kids. You had to find some way to get to that. Now it is everywhere. We live in a culture that is utterly awash in depravity. In my generation, we had kids right at the time that cell phones and tablets and the internet had become available. And if I could go back and do it all over again, I wouldn't give my kid a phone until they had a driver's license. And even then, it would be a flip phone. And when they got married, then I would maybe consider letting them have something other than a flip phone. I would do it entirely differently. Why is that? Because the time in which we live, it's different for us who are older than it is for the kids coming up. So make it your objective to talk about these things with your kids and to shape them and mold them to think about these things in a biblical fashion.

Now, how do we fight this? We fight this by understanding what the source of our problem is. The source of your problem is not a demon of lust, not a spirit of adultery, not a spirit of fornication, not some indwelling foreign spirit that you need to have exorcised from you. The problem that you have is the same problem that I have. It is this unredeemed part of our nature, our flesh, which wages war against our soul. Galatians 5:16–21. I'm going to read you three passages and then I'll make a couple of

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observations. These three passages talk about the battle that we fight. It talks about what we are to mortify, what we're to put to death. First, Galatians 5:16:

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:16–21 NASB)

He does not say those who have *committed* these things will not inherit the kingdom of God, because that would be all of us, and all of us would be exempt. But he says those who *practice* these things. Those who impenitently continue in these sins demonstrate that they are not the heirs of the kingdom of God.

Second passage, Ephesians 5:1:

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;

4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

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5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

7 Therefore do not be partakers with them;

8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light. (Eph. 5:1–8 NASB)

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thess. 4:1–8 NASB)

Let me give you three observations from that. Number one, there is a clear expectation that believers walk in the light, and this is based on the fact of the truth of our salvation. You have been taken from death and put into life. You have been spiritually resurrected

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from the grave. You have been purchased out of the marketplace for sin, and you have been made a slave of Jesus Christ and then placed under His servitude, in His service. You are no longer dead but alive. You are no longer a child of wrath, but you are a child of God. You are no longer dead inside but spiritually alive. And not only that, if you're in Christ, the Spirit of God dwells within you. And therefore there is this expectation that a believer who has been taken out of darkness and put into light will live like a child of the light. The one who has been spiritually resurrected from spiritual death will live like one who is alive. One who has been removed from the wrath of God and made a son of righteousness will live and walk in righteousness. That is the expectation of the New Testament.

Second, sexual immorality is a work of the flesh. So as I said, you don't have a demon problem. You don't have an indwelling spirit. You don't need an exorcism. You don't need a deliverance ministry or a power encounter. You need to kill the sin that dwells within. That's what we need to do. Because these deeds—immorality, impurity, even sorcery—these are the works, these are the deeds of the flesh.

And third observation, the power to obey these commands is the possession of every single believer. Get that down. The power to obey these commands is with every single believer. There is no such thing as a person in Jesus Christ who is an unwilling slave to their lusts. That does not exist. If you are in Christ and you are a slave to your lust, it is because you have gone back to the taskmaster time and time again and you have put out your hands and you have said, “Shackle me. Put me into service. Make me your slave.” You didn't have to do that, but you did that. You did that willingly. Nobody forced you to do that. Nobody forces you to sin, ever, as a child of God.

So what do we do, then? We need to go to war with our sin because sin is at war with us. Get this down. We have to go to war with sin because sin is at war with us. It seeks to destroy you, to ruin your soul, to enslave you forever. It will destroy everything you have. It will take everything from you, material and immaterial. Sin is merciless; it is relentless. And it is the devil's tool to destroy you. Scripture warns us that our “adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). And he has an ally inside the gate, and it is our flesh. So we have an enemy outside, and then we have a traitor within. And that enemy outside works with the traitor within to undo us and to destroy us.

Your sin cannot be negotiated with. It cannot be appeased. You cannot be at peace with it. There is no state of détente with your sin. Remember that word from the eighties,

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those of you who grew up in the eighties? Détente—sort of the settling down of hostilities between two parties who were at war. There is no détente with sin because sin does not reduce its hostility against you. You cannot be at peace with it. You cannot negotiate or broker some sort of peace accord with it, a cessation of hostilities. You can't do that because sin is at war with you. And there is no such thing as a peace treaty. And there is no such thing as a ceasefire with sin. Your enemy is at war with you. You can deny it, you can ignore it, you can redefine it, you can be apathetic toward it, you can deceive yourself into thinking that it is no big deal, you can play footsie with your sin. But sin does not care; it will destroy you nonetheless. So we might as well wake up to that reality and realize that we are involved in a lifelong battle for our survival, whether we like it or not. Therefore, we are commanded to abstain from sexual immorality and from the lusts which wage war against our soul, because sin is at war with us. And the battlefield is the battlefield of the heart and of the mind, which is why Proverbs 4:23 says, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”

Romans 12:1–2 says we are to “present [our] bodies [as] a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This is where the battle is fought. The spiritual battle is not fought casting down Satan, doing exorcisms, praying hedges of thorns, canceling generational curses. Spiritual warfare, the battle for truth, is fought within the mind and within the heart of the believer. That is where the battle rages. Lay control of your heart. Seize control of your heart and your mind, your thought life and your deeds, or you will lose that battle for sure. This is why Paul says that we present our bodies a living sacrifice and we are conformed and transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may prove what the good and acceptable will of God is.

You are filled with the Word of God when you meditate upon and read and study and listen to Scripture being preached. You and I are filled with the Word of God. That sanctifying influence comes in and gives us the tools. It equips us and gives us the strength by which we may discipline our heart and discipline our mind for the purpose of godliness.

And as our thinking is transformed—and this does not happen overnight—but as our thinking is transformed and we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, that battle does get easier. You become a slave of the thing that you obey. That is the

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hope that we have. But in the meantime, we have to put to death our sin, and we have to mortify it, kill it, put it to death. Have nothing to do with it. Scripture describes this in different ways. It speaks of putting to death the deeds of the flesh. Putting to death the deeds of the body. I'm giving you the language that's being used, and I'm going to take you to a passage that uses some of these same phrases.

Scripture speaks of laying aside the deeds of darkness and taking up the deeds of righteousness, reckoning your members as dead to sin and reckoning your members as alive to righteousness, putting off the deeds of the flesh, putting on the deeds of righteousness, crucifying the flesh with its desires, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, yielding your members as instruments of sin or yielding your members as instruments of righteousness. That's the language that Scripture uses. Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians all use that language.

So what does it look like? I'm going to give you a practical step-by-step guide of how to do this from Ephesians 4 where the apostle tells us how this is done. Turn now to Ephesians 4. We're going to pick it up at verse 17. All this language that I just gave you, the putting to death, the deeds of the flesh, laying aside, reckoning, putting on, crucifying, not yielding—this is the language that you are going to see in the next few chapters and passages that I'm going to read to you. Ephesians 4, we'll pick it up in verse 17.

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind [notice the reference to the mind and the thinking and the understanding],

18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,

21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him just as truth is in Jesus,

22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

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23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:17–24 NASB)

They (that is, the pagans) had given themselves over to sensuality and immorality and greediness and impurity. And Paul says this is how you once walked when you walked amongst them, but now you walk differently. You walk as he describes in [Ephesians] 4:1, in a manner that is worthy of the calling with which you have been called. So you have a different calling. You've been taken out of that. Therefore, your walk is markedly different. You walk in a different way; you live in a different way. Why? Because once you were darkened in your understanding, ignorant of the life of God which is in Christ Jesus. Your mind was corrupted. You were darkened in your mind and the futility of your mind, but that is no longer the case. Now you understand the Word of God in the light of Christ, and the light of truth has shined onto your mind and onto your heart, and therefore you are walking now in light.

And what does that look like? [Ephesians] 4:25—the very next verse. Notice the language. “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” So what does he prescribe? Is your sin lying? Stop lying and speak truth. “Ah, but, Jim, I can't stop lying.” Well, then, you're not a believer. If you can't stop lying, it's because you're a slave to lying. And the only way that you're a slave to lying is if you're not a believer.

So you stop one activity and you pick up another activity. What is the opposite of it? You stop lying and you speak truth. Verse 26: “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need.” Is your sin stealing? Stop stealing. Stop taking from people and give to people. Stop not working and taking from others, and go to work so that you have something to give to others. You stop one activity and you do another activity. You cease the deed of darkness and you pick up the deed of light. You stop walking one way and you start walking another way.

Well, I make this sound easy, don't I? It's not easy. It's simple, but it's not easy. There's no magic formula. Do this, pray that prayer, do this, read that, go here. Do this for thirty

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days, forty days of this, whatever. It really is this simple: stop the one activity and start the other activity. Verse 29:

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear [stop speaking one way, start speaking another way].

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice [that's putting off one type of activity]

32 [Put on. . .] Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Eph. 4:29–32 NASB)

This is how we fight sin. This is how we wage war against sin. I do this; this is my besetting sin. Stop it. Stop doing it. Stop giving yourself to that. Stop yielding your members to that sin, that depravity and impurity, and start doing the other thing, the opposite of it. If your mind goes to a certain place, stop thinking that. Grab ahold of your mind and make it your slave. Make it think about things that are pure and righteous and holy and true. And a believer can do that. That's simple. It's not easy, but it's simple. And it may take years of you grabbing your mind and making it think a certain thing and making it think a certain way to break those habits. And if it takes years, it takes years. So what? We are all going to have to fight various sins. This is the pattern that we are to apply, no matter what our sin is. Laziness, lying, stealing, drunkenness, anger, gluttony, gossip, bitterness, selfishness, idolatry, adultery, fornication, lust. No matter what the sin, the pattern is the same. As a child of the light, you stop doing one thing and you start doing another thing.

Romans 13. You don't have to turn there, but I'm going to read to you from Romans 13 and Colossians 3, two passages that describe the exact same thing. It's almost as if Paul was just giving the same information to multiple churches. Yeah, people came out of paganism, they struggle with this sin. OK, Paul says, here it is. He phrases it a different way, gives some different illustrations, but it's the same pattern. It's the same counsel. Romans 13:11:

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11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

12 The night is almost gone, and the day is near [in other words, time is short]. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light [you put off one thing, you take up something else].

13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy [in other words, stop doing those things].

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Rom. 13:11–14 NASB)

In other words, you provide nothing for your sin. You don't provide it a mind to linger in, you don't provide it a heart to flourish in, you don't feed it with your thoughts, you don't give it the images that it craves. You starve your sin, you quench it, you kill it, you mortify it, you put it to death by not doing the things that your sinfulness wants to do. And by the way, don't give your sin excuses and rationalizations and justifications either. Don't give your sin blame. You can't blame your spouse for your sin, you can't blame your kids for your sin, you can't blame your coworkers for your sin. There's nobody that you can blame for your sin but you, because nobody can make you sin. Only you can sin—only you can commit your sin. Colossians 3:5:

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. (Col. 3:5–10 NASB)

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So Paul says you lay aside the old self and the deeds that were corrupted; you put on—take up—the new self, created in righteousness. You stop doing one thing and you start doing the polar opposite.

Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” And this, by the way, is what it means to walk in the power of the Spirit. Paul talks about being led by the Spirit in Galatians 5 and in Romans 8. And when Paul talks about being led by the Spirit, he is not talking about downloading private and secret messages directly from God about where you eat lunch or what shirt you should buy or what you should watch on TV or where you go on vacation. He's not talking about any of that. When he's talking about being led by the Spirit, he is talking about those who put to death the deeds of the flesh. That's Romans 8 and Galatians 5. In both places the meaning is the same. Romans 8:12–14: “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

What is the mark of the child of God? They put to death the deeds of the flesh. How do you know the difference between a child of God and one who is not a child of God? The one who is not a child of God lives in the flesh, practices these things, dwells in that immorality, thinks nothing of it, is impenitent. But the one who puts to death the deeds of the flesh, resists that temptation, and mortifies their sin, that is the one who is being led by the Spirit of God.

The leading of the Spirit—what does the Spirit lead us to do? To know who to talk to, to know who to share the gospel with, to know what city to move to? No, the Spirit leads the children of God to put to death the deeds of the flesh. You want to walk in the Spirit? It's not some mystical, gnostic thing that happens. It is you going to war with your sin *every single day*. That is what it means to walk in the Spirit. Titus 2:11–12 says, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.” Put off ungodliness and worldly desires, and you take up sensible, righteous, and godly, being zealous for good deeds.

Peter says, 1 Peter 2:11—I've quoted it, but here's the reference. “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” Your fleshly lusts wage war against your soul. Memorize that verse. It wages war against your soul. Night and day, your fleshly lusts are waging war against your soul. So now the

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question is, are you giving aid and comfort to the enemy? It's waging war against you. Are you feeding it and giving medical treatment to its wounded and giving it supplies and ammunition that it needs to fight its fight against you? It's waging war against your soul.

Listen, the devil is all in on your total destruction. Your sin is all in on your total destruction. The world is all in on your total destruction. And your flesh is all in on your total destruction. And all the chips are on the table, and everything is at stake. And if the two cards you're holding in your hand are lust and excuses, you're toast. It will win that battle, and it will destroy you. So the sooner we come face-to-face with the reality that we are in a fight for our lives, in a fight to struggle for our own sanctification and for our own soul, the better off we will be. Because then at least we can know who the enemy is and what it plans to do. And we have to go to war with it and we have to destroy it.

Romans 6. Time is coming to an end. Romans 6. You know what? On a day like today, if I can take a little bit of extra time on a day like today, you can take a little bit of extra time as well. Romans 6:

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? (Rom. 6:12–16 NASB)

This is the choice that we as believers have to make. I can take the instruments of my body, these physical instruments, my hands, my brain, my mind, the immaterial part of me, my soul, and I can yield them to unrighteousness to commit sin and iniquity and immorality and give myself to them. And if I do that, then I become the slave of those things, because I become like a freed man who goes up and says to sin, “Shackle me,

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take me into bondage, make me your slave, and I will do your bidding.” And Paul says in Romans 6 that the more you do that, the more you become the slave of that iniquity. The more you sin in a certain way, the more in bondage to that sin you become.

So there is one answer to that. And this is what we've been talking about the whole time. Paul says it again here in Romans 6. Instead of giving your members as instruments of unrighteousness to do unrighteousness and thus becoming slaves of unrighteousness, instead you take your members—your mind, your heart, your eyes, your ears, your affections—and you give that as instruments to do righteousness. And in doing the righteousness, you will train yourself to become a slave to righteousness, so that eventually sin will call your name, it will beckon for you to do something, and you will, with not even having to think about it, say, “I don't even want anything to do with that.” Because you are training yourself to do what is righteous instead of training yourself to do what is unrighteous. You become the slave of the one you obey. So be careful who you obey. And the more you obey that one, the more you will become its slave. You have two masters who are calling your name, and you get to choose which one you're going to obey. You obey unrighteousness, you will become its slave. You obey Christ and righteousness, you will become a slave of righteousness.

I said earlier this is simple but it is not easy. And it is not easy, which is why Paul says, “I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27). It takes discipline; it takes hard work. And to start now and to continue in that path of righteousness, becoming a slave of righteousness, do not expect that that is going to happen overnight. In other words, don't come back here next Sunday and say, “Look, man, I fought the good fight Monday and Tuesday, but by Wednesday all that stuff you preached about being a slave to righteousness never materialized.” Especially if you have spent years injecting into your mind and your heart poison, don't expect that well to clean up right away. You're going to have to spend years undoing that damage. You're going to have to spend years getting out of those ruts of disobedience and iniquity. You're going to have to spend years renewing your mind and fighting against those passions. But I promise you—the promise of Scripture is that you will become the slave of the one you obey. So give it some time, be diligent, be persistent at it, be as relentless in your fight against sin as sin is in its fight against you.

We have formed bad habits over the years. We have put images into our hearts and our minds. We have injected poison into our souls that is not going to be undone in forty-

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eight hours; that is not going to be undone before this calendar year is up. But you have been enlisted to fight the good fight, and you will fight that fight until you finally hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Then you will know that you are done. And this is the beautiful part: when you hear those words, the fight will be over. The fight's not going to be easier. The fight's going to be *over*. There will be a time when we will stand face-to-face with other people and we will never have to worry about disciplining our hearts and our minds and our thoughts. That will be glorious. That will be so glorious. I will never have to worry if somebody else is thinking an ill thought toward me, and I will never have to check myself and say you shouldn't be thinking that about that person. Because the battle will not just be easier. It will be over. It will be nonexistent.

But until that point, we're called to fight. The reason we fight is sobering. Hebrews 13:4, that final phrase: “for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” I want to tell you what this does not mean. This does not mean that if you have committed adultery or fornication in your life, that you are forever damned. “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here”—that is not what he is saying. He is talking about people who persist in these sins and demonstrate by their unrepentance and their unwillingness to forsake those sins—those are the people that will receive the judgment of God. That is bad news if you are an unrepentant adulterer or a fornicator. And as I said earlier, in thought and in word, all of us have violated the command against lust and adultery. Because we have all thought or done things that we should not have thought or done. That is true of all of us. So this is not a blanket damnation for everybody, but instead it is a blanket damnation upon those who by their deeds, by their lifestyle, by their habits, demonstrate that they are not children of God and therefore have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” That passage doesn't stop there. The very next verse says, “Such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11). Some of you *were* swindlers, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, covetous, drunkards, revilers, idolaters. “Such were some of you [Paul says]; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified [that is, declared righteous] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Such were some of you. There is mercy at the cross of Christ.

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So for those who are adulterers or fornicators, here is my promise to you upon what Scripture says: If you continue in that sin impenitent and unrepentant, then on the final day God will damn both you and your lust and all of your sin in eternal damnation away from His presence forever. And you will suffer the just wrath of God for your sin just as you deserve. Let that awaken you and sober you.

But to the believer I say this: If you are guilty of any of those sins and many, many more, there is righteousness at the foot of the cross. There is forgiveness at the foot of the cross. That one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross paid the full penalty and the full price for all of the sin, every last sin, for every person who will ever believe upon Him and be counted as righteous. There is infinite sufficiency in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if He paid your price, then your sins are forgiven and there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. None. You never have to worry about seeing the frown of God on His face over you and over your sin. But instead, you have complete and perfect forgiveness for your every sin.

And so we come to Christ—we come to His cross—in repentance, recognizing our unworthiness, our sin, and even the corruption that continually exists inside of our own hearts. And we confess that. We don't hide it, we don't excuse it, we don't make Him fake promises. And instead we come to Him with full face, understanding our iniquity, confessing our iniquity, owning our own sin, and pleading and praying for grace each and every day to fight the battle, for that forgiveness, for that grace, for that righteousness, for mercy from Him. We plead and we pray with Him every single day for that, understanding and knowing that those who are in His Son, who are in Jesus Christ, are secure both now and forever. We are righteous, we are forgiven, we are adopted. That is His promise. And because of that amazing righteousness, that amazing grace, that amazing adoption, you and I are free, and you and I are forgiven, and you and I are able to wage the war and fight the good fight against sin.

You see, my acceptance in the Beloved does not encourage me to sin. It makes me want to *not* sin. It is because I have been accepted in the Beloved, it's because we are in Him that motivates our fight against sin. Not taking it for granted. We do not want to remain slaves of sin and in bondage to our iniquity.

So, unbeliever, I say to you this day, and I want to speak to some who may be false converts in Christ, you think you're a Christian, but you live as a slave to your sin. If you cannot go a day without sinning, if you cannot go a day without diving into that iniquity and you are in bondage to that, you have every reason to examine yourself to see if you

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are even in the faith. You should question the reality of your salvation. Have you made a false profession of faith? Because if you have, then God will damn you, your lust, and your false profession of faith to Hell forever.

Have you been born again? Has your heart been changed? Have you been given new affections? If you have and you're in Christ, you are free. So I plead with you, stop living as if you have no control over your lust. Stop giving aid and comfort to the enemy of your soul. Stop giving yourself to the sin that you have been set free from.

And unbeliever, your only hope is to come to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. To turn from your sin, to forsake it, and to call out to the God whom you have deeply offended by your iniquity for mercy and grace, lest you stand before Him on judgment day and hear Him say, "You have been warned in Hebrews 13:4 that fornicators and adulterers God will judge." If you're an unbeliever and you don't turn from your sin, those words will echo in your ears on judgment day. I promise you that. Come to Christ today.

Believer, come to Christ today for the grace to fight the good fight.

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