

**Psalm 19.12-14**  
Two Sermons Written On the Heart  
Sermon #3 in a Series on Psalm 19

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on November 5, 2006.  
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***Main Idea: The Bible reveals our need for the expulsive powers of new affections which only Christ provides.***

***Introduction***

Please picture in your mind a pink elephant. It would probably help to close your eyes, so you can more clearly see it. Make it a large one, with four massive pink legs. And a long, pink trunk reaching out to grab peanuts from your hand. And two huge ears, giant, pink floppy, flapping folds of furrowed skin. What a pink elephant we are imagining! A pink elephant extraordinaire! And a tail, a pink serpent swishing and swatting back and forth. And, of course, the massive bill-board body—wide, tall, leathery—and pink!

OK, do you have it? Can you see the pink elephant?

Now suppose I ask you to remove the pink elephant from your mind's eye. Do not imagine anymore a pink elephant. Do not picture a pink elephant on the screen of your mind. See no pink elephant, hear no pink elephant, speak no pink elephant. As far as you are concerned, pink elephants cannot exist, even in the imagination. The words pink and elephant might as well be French, for all the meaning they have for you. Banish forever all pink elephants from your thoughts.

Some of you know the trick—thoughts cannot be removed from your mind by *thinking* about their leaving. The mind does not have an “OFF” button. The only way to remove an image is to install another. To clear away pink elephants requires a green donkey or yellow buffalo or handsome pastor—a more powerful, “expulsive” image.

The technique is useful for more than exterminate pink elephants. This very topic came up in session meeting as we discussed the spiritual challenges we all face. And I have seen the need in counseling. The godly wife desires to love her husband, but he has many failings and flaws. So she dedicates hours to prayer and meditation with one thought foremost: “My husband is not selfish and inconsiderate. My husband is not selfish and inconsiderate.” Over and again the mantra is repeated—but it is a vain antidote to the attitude which poisons the relationship. “My husband is not selfish and inconsiderate.” Then he leaves his dirty socks in the middle of the floor and the mind recalls the now vivid mage: selfish and inconsiderate.

The more we dwell on negatives, even hoping to expel them, the deeper ingrained may be the thought. Paul taught us this: **Philippians 4.8**: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” The Apostle Paul and Robert Schuller may not have much theology in common, but Paul definitely believed in the “power of positive thinking.”

Surely I am not the only parent who has made this blunder. “I will not fuss and be ill-tempered with my kids. I will not fuss and be ill-tempered with my kids. I will not fuss and be

ill-tempered with my kids.” Johnny grabs my pants, “Daddy, can I...” “What do you want? Can’t you see I’m busy overcoming an ill-tempered, agitated spirit?!”

Down we spiral, thinking of pink elephants in hopes of no longer seeing them. We need a different image to replace the negative one. In the early 1800s, Thomas Chalmers preached a sermon entitled, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.”

There are two ways in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of the world—either by a demonstration of the world’s vanity, so that the heart shall be prevailed upon simply to withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or, by setting forth another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment, so that the heart shall be prevailed upon, not to resign an old affection with nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old affection for a new one.... The former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual; the latter alone will suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it.... The best way of casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one; and by the love of what is good, to expel the love of what is evil.”

I needed this teaching this week. Our unchurched neighbor is selling his house and his list price would seem to be about \$20,000 more than the market could stand. Yet he already has a contract. So I envied the wicked; their wallets are fat and their bodies sleek. I knew it was wrong, so I dutifully combated the sin: “I will not envy my neighbor’s success. I will not envy my neighbor’s success. I will not envy my neighbor’s success.” By the time I was done with this spiritual exercise, I was filled with all kinds of envy and, given the chance, might have murdered him.

We must know the law, for “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3.20). But living in the “You shall nots” of the law will not free me from sin’s tyranny. Only the expulsive power of a new affection offers freedom. I must show my soul a greater good, a grander glory, a more gripping grace!

David found just such a vision in the Bible. The Word cut him to the heart, revealing that he was *far worse than he ever dared imagine*. At the same time, it cleansed his heart, for there he met a Redeemer who loved him *far more than he ever dared hope*. Do you know how to respond to these twin truths?

Today we “listen in” to David’s prayer in response to the two previous sermons. The first sermon was written in the stars (Psalm 19.1-6). He heard it while spending a night in rapturous meditation: “The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky above proclaims his handiwork!” Then, as the rising sun brought sweat to his brow, he realized that everyone heard this sermon—none escaped its heat.

That forced him to Scripture and a second sermon (in Psalm 19.7-11). There he experienced God’s sharp and effective sword, slicing open the very attitudes and intentions of his heart. *It was not pretty!* But rather than spiral down into the darkness, David looks up to the light: “Deliver me from sin’s stranglehold!”

David pleads for God’s help because he sees in the Word the depth of his sin and he knows that only God can rescue his life and soul. From David’s prayer, then, notice, first...

## 1. We Must Have the Expulsive Power of God Because of the Extent of Sin (Psalm 19.12)

When David studied Scripture, he found that sin is not *primarily* bad acts. Instead, it is a condition of the heart—motives and desires bent toward fundamentally selfish attitudes and

actions. As Paul would later discover, David now knows that self-righteousness rises in the heart that does not know the true import of divine law. Thus he prays: “God, I cannot even know all my errors; will you forgive my hidden faults?”

At the Fourth Lateran Council, the Roman Church required: “All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist...; otherwise they shall be cut off from the Church (excommunicated) during life and deprived of Christian burial in death.”

How foolish is the Pope to suppose we can list all our sins as we list groceries to be purchased. Much more faithful to the Word is the teaching of John Calvin.

**John Calvin:** “Even the saints, by strictly examining themselves, can scarcely come to the knowledge of the hundredth part of their sins, and, therefore, with one voice unite with David in saying, ‘Who can understand his errors?’”

**Charles Spurgeon:** “If we could receive pardon for all our sins just by telling every sin we have committed in one hour, there is not one of us who would be able to enter heaven, since, besides the sins that are known to us and that we may be able to confess, there are a vast mass of sins, which are as truly sins as those which we do observe, but which are secret, and come not beneath our eye. Oh! If we had eyes like those of God, we should think differently of ourselves. The sins we see and confess are but like the farmer’s small samples which he brings to market, when he has left his granary full at home.... I doubt not it is true of all of us who are here, that in every hour of our existence in which we are active, we commit tens of thousands of unholinesses for which conscience has never reproved us, because we have never seen them to be wrong, seeing we have not studied God’s laws as we ought to have done.”

I assure you that have preached a hundred sermons, vainly imagining that I do so for the glory of God. But let one week come in which frowning faces and drooping eyes prove my failure to please you, and I find in my heart the desire to see itself honored in all I do.

In a fit of madness, Hercules killed his own children. To atone for his sins, he was assigned twelve “labors,” one of which was to kill the hydra, a nine-headed water-serpent. He lured it from its den and seized it, but the monster was not easily overcome. Winding one of its coils around Hercules’ foot, the hydra made it impossible for the hero to escape. With his club, Hercules attacked the heads of the hydra, but as soon as he smashed one, two more sprung forth in its place!

**Thomas Adams** referenced this myth in his sermon on this verse: “The hairs of a man’s head may be told, but no arithmetic can number our sins. Before we can count a thousand, we commit ten thousand more; and so we rather multiply by addition than divide by subtraction—there is no possibility of numeration. Like Hydra’s head, while we are cutting off twenty by confession, we find a hundred more grown up.”

Here is a telling difference between the Pharisee (or pretender to religion) and a true believer: how do you hear God’s condemning unknown sins and hidden faults? Those who make a show of religion but do not desire the reality, respond poorly to the truth of sin’s extending to the hidden motives of the heart. Some may admit their lack of perfection and acknowledge they should be better: “Yes, I lost my temper and cursed the other day. I do not pray as much as I should. I ought to give more to the church.” But hidden sins never are considered or concerned over.

The true Christian, however, recognizes that a secret sin in the heart today may be a flagrant rebellion of the life tomorrow. Today it is a tiny coral, tomorrow a dangerous reef. A

pebble may be small and unseen, but in your shoe it gives a limp to the whole journey. The true Christian prays with David for God's expulsive power to extend to every hidden area of his heart.

## 2. We Must Have the Expulsive Power of God Because of the Power of Sin (Psalm 19.13)

"Let them not have dominion over me." Let them not rule or control me. The Word shows that sin has a power beyond our ability to resist and defeat. Unless another help, all will be lost. Like a wild stallion is the heart's lust for sin. Straining at the bit, pawing the ground, eager to rush headlong over the cliff to destruction.

**John Calvin:** "Being regenerated by the Spirit of God, David groaned, it is true, under the burden of his sins; but he knew, on the other hand, how great is the rebellion of the flesh, and how much we are inclined to forgetfulness of God.... Let us learn to walk in fear and trembling, even though the unruliness of our wayward flesh has been already subdued by turning to Christ. For unless God restrain us, our hearts will violently boil with a proud and insolent contempt of God. By asking that sin might not have dominion, David expressly declares that unless God assist him, he will be unable to resist and will be wholly brought under the rule of the worst vices.... No doubt, David could have wished to feel in his heart no stirrings of corruption; but knowing that he would never be wholly free from the remains of sin, until at death he had put off this corrupt nature, he prays to be armed with the grace of the Holy Spirit for the combat, that iniquity might not reign victorious over him."

Here again shines the difference between true religion and pretense. The regenerate woman delights to be held back from sin and prays frequently and passionately for this expulsive power. The outwardly religious, however, consider it a curse to be restrained. When sin reaches out to grab the false disciple, she puts forth her hand to meet it; but when the true follower of Christ sees sin reaching for her, she puts her hand to heaven for grace and help in time of need. The Christian woman wants a heart tamed by God's power; the pretender finds God's bridling a vexation and curse.

Four applications...

*First*, please note that this is the prayer of the great saint, David, *the man after God's own heart*. If we are unaware of the power of sin, we may find it incredible that David would need to ask such a thing! *But all alike may sin presumptuously, so all must ask for help.* **Charles Spurgeon:** "The highest saint may sin the lowest sin unless upheld by divine grace." When we think we stand, we must especially take heed, lest we fall. Will we humble ourselves and ask for help?

*Second*, observe God's desire to help. David knows that when God works, he will be kept from great transgression. God is eager to rescue and tame the wild heart. Will we humble ourselves and ask for help?

*Third*, believe that you are not beyond the reach of grace. God's mercies are new this morning. Some of us here are so black, so ugly, so vile, so terrible, that we assume hope of victory must be abandoned. But God's hand is *not* shortened. Christ has come down to the lowest places to raise the most desperately guilty. Will we humble ourselves and ask for help?

*Fourth*, remember that the question is not "Will you sin?" but "Will you ask for help?" Recently a preacher observed that an atheist criticized his faith by saying, "Christianity is just a crutch." His response was: "Yes, it is. I am a lame and broken man. And I need a crutch." Will we humble ourselves and admit that we too need this crutch?

### 3. We Must Have the Expulsive Power of God Because of the Defilement of Sin (Psalm 19.14)

In verse 13 David focused on victory over great and outward transgressions. Now he looks inside, recognizing how difficult it is to “bridle the words and thoughts so that nothing passes through the heart or mouth which is contrary to the will of God.” And yet, this is the purity required of us by the law and the purity which delights our souls. If you are a Christian then you have the Holy Spirit and you want to be made holy! And therein lies our problem, is it not? Sin defiles everything. We need more than to be held back from great transgressions, we need even our thoughts and words purified from contamination.

In listening to the Bible, David has found how desperate is his need—the inner meditations of his heart are defiled. Yet he desires that everything in his life be acceptable to God. That is a worthy passion. But what will bridge the gap? The answer concludes Psalm 19: “O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

Martin Luther knew that the Roman Catholic Church promised forgiveness in exchange for yearly confession of all his sins. But in trying, he found that he had either to lower the standard of the law, or give up in despair. He was tormented by the extent of sin, by the power of sin, and by the defilement of sin. Until he met Christ, the Redeemer.

In Jesus he found one who perfectly obeyed the law and had no sin. Christ did what none other could do—he paid Martin Luther’s penalty. And even now Christ lives, standing at the right hand of God, sending the powerful spirit to restrain sin in our lives. Fear not that you cannot pray this prayer of David with a pure and perfect heart—Christ is praying it for you!

### 4. Conclusion

An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to get upstairs to rescue the boy, perished in the flames. The boy’s cries for help were answered by a man who climbed an iron drainpipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck.

Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town’s wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the lad’s eyes remained focused on the floor. Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hands from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw his arms around the man’s neck and held on for dear life. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue.

Your Redeemer stands with marred hands, offering the expulsive power you long for. Will we respond as David, recognizing our condition and asking for help?

For some of us, today may be the beginning of the journey with Christ. You must ask him to be your Redeemer, to save you from condemnation and to provide for you an eternal home and a final freedom from sin. For others, we need to renew our call to the Redeemer, for cleansing from past guilt and power for holiness tomorrow. Will you ask help from the Lord, our only strength, our ready redeemer?