

Christ our Refuge: For the Tempted—Flee Lust

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Our final stop in our journey through the Scriptures finding Christ as our Refuge may be the most vital one of all. We have seen over the past few weeks that Christ is our refuge.

1. He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel uncleanness*;
2. He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel weariness*;
3. He is the Refuge for all of us who *feel homelessness and loneliness*;
4. He is the Refuge for all of us when our hearts darken and we *feel hopelessness and depression*; and
5. He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel helpless and weakness*;

This morning we find--He is the Refuge for all of us *when we struggle, and feel so weak when tempted*.

Over sixty years ago, a German pastor was awaiting execution on Hitler's death row. After this faithful pastor's death the following was found among his final words in his journal:

"In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames.

The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us.... It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.

It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world...

Joy in God is...extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil.

Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.... " ¹

Temptations around us all abound. Because temptation to sin is so powerful, we need help. This morning the best, and the only real help is Christ--the Refuge for the tempted.

Now before any of us check out because this message isn't for us, open with me to James 1.13-14.

*James 1:13-15 Let no one say **when he is tempted**, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, **when desire has conceived**, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. NKJV*

*James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted **when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. NAS*

Note that James, the very first New Testament pastor, of the first New Testament church, the first leader of the Church of Jerusalem, and our Lord's earthly brother—*doesn't say 'if' but he says 'when'*.

God's Word says temptation is inevitable, temptation is inescapable, temptation is going to follow us all through our earthly lives.

Temptation is inevitable. So listen up, this message is for ALL of us. But this message hinges on one word—lust.

Lust (*epithumia* 'super desires') is dreadful, dangerous, and deadly. Lust is surrounding us and in various forms, planted within us—and is either pursued for pleasure or fled from for righteousness. Listen carefully to Paul—

*2 Timothy 2:22 **Flee** [P A Impv. 'I command you to always flee'] also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. NKJV*

Note he doesn't merely say when you are a youth to flee. No, he says 'youthful lusts' the lusts that we nurture and feed as young people--are going to chase us through life. So we must all decide to flee lust, no matter what our age.

However large we grow those ravenous wolves of lust in our youth—that is how large they will be as they chase us through life. Why should we flee these lusts that tempt us

¹ Swindoll, Sensuality, p. 10.

to sin against God? Because they cost us far more than we could ever imagine. To help you know what I mean, listen to these three scenarios.

- Scenario #1: If I were to tell you, as you were buying a home, that you were in the Tar Creek watershed and that there was such a toxic runoff that in a few years you would start having terrible sickness in your family, your children would be crippled for life, your home would end up becoming worthless, and you would have such lifelong headaches you would be unable to work or even think—would you keep on in the purchase of that house?
- Scenario #2: How about if you were applying for a job at a manufacturing plant and I told you that everyone up to this day who had run that machine had either mangled or crushed their arm in the press and were maimed for the rest of their life? Would you pause and reconsider that job offer? Even if you always wanted that job, the pay is great, the plant is convenient, the hours are perfect, and everyone else works there—would you take the job?
- Scenario #3: How about moving to a home with your family of small children, that sat to close a busy highway crowded with cars and trucks? Would you take the home if you knew that each of the preceding families had lost a child to a traffic accident as they played in the front yard and a car or truck lost control and plowed into the yard? Of course not. You would never think that you could beat the odds and escape such a loss.

What do each of these scenarios have in common? A looming potential loss, so that making the choice is clearly foolish. Most of us when we hear such things, stop and reconsider the cost of such a choice of a job or home and decide against it. Our life, our home, our children, our job, our health—all are too vital to be risked for something that is not worth that much.

But do you look on temptation and lust as carefully? We should. God wants us to flee all forms of lust by counting what it will really cost us. God warns us over and over in His Word of the exorbitant price of lust. So what happens if we do not flee?

The consequence engines of life, inexorable and unavoidable though they may be--do not usually bring immediate consequences in response to our actions when we feed our lusts little by little.

Because we often do not see the negative consequences of our bad choices right away, we are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. Because God's judgments are usually long delayed in time, we think we escaped the consequence of that poor choice. But sin **always** pays us back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, not to speak of--loss of rewards.

All sin is forgivable but--all sin **also** has consequences. So since lust is what entices us to sin, what are these lusts that we are to fear and flee?

*1 John 2: 15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the **lust of the flesh**, the **lust of the eyes**, and the **pride of life**—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Temptations are enticements from our lusts. God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

- **We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures, this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* This is lust for another person. The desire to have and enjoy the body of an individual, either mentally or physically, even though such pleasure is illegal and/or immoral. We can feed these lusts by going to places where we see uncovered bodies, or watching TV and movies that have various states of immodesty, or by seeking out images in magazines and online that feed these evil desires.
- **We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff, this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!
- **We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptation.* This is selfishness because I'm most important. This is irritableness because life revolves around me. This is untruthfulness because I need to protect myself. This is laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition. Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn, like "top executive" or "president" or "executive director" or even "doctor". In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate.

But what happens to those who don't flee for refuge to Christ. What happens when we allow lust to dominate us? Abraham and Lot will give us a sobering lesson.

Please turn now to Genesis 13.10. Look at Lot's choices to feed his lusts. Lot never restrained his physical eyes from controlling his life. Lot was a believer, but lived with the consequences of his lust instead of the blessings of faith.

Lot was tempted and didn't resist. In the end that small choice, as it seemed then, cost Lot everything. The steps to Lot's fatal choices are clearly written down for us in God's Word.

In four short verses we see the pathway of tragic consequence that all started with the

lusts, the strong unbridled desires of the eyes.

*Genesis 13:10-13 And **Lot lifted his eyes** and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then **Lot chose for himself all** the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and **Lot dwelt** in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom **were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.***

First we see that **Lot lifted up 'his eyes'**, not his heart in prayer, not his soul to the Lord his Maker, just his eyes. He relied upon his flesh which would end up paying him back bitterly in the end.

Next we see God noting that **Lot 'chose for himself all'**. He took whatever was best for his agenda for life. Note that the Lord didn't even figure into that decision. No thought of the long term effect of that choice. No seeking what God might want him to do. No it was all based on what was best for himself. And with that choice he showed that Lot was living for Lot. Abraham, who lived for the Lord, as far as we know never built anything but altars, never bought any land except a plot to bury his beloved wife, and never lived in anything but a tent.

Finally we see that **Lot was comfortable with the evils of the world—'Lot dwelt'**. The Hebrew word for pitched his tent means laced it right up against, or right on the edge. Lot clearly placed himself by the world. Not just any manifestation of the world, he wasn't troubled at being surrounded by, living with, and sharing life with those who were 'exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord'. These aren't normal sinners that are lost, these were aggressive enemies of God. And Lot faced them, watched them, got comfortable with them, was drawn towards them, and finally moved in amongst them!

Thus the contrast—Lot lived for Lot, picked the best for himself, looked at life through the lens of what makes me happy and successful, amassed enough fortune to retire in the big city of wealth and entertainment, and grew cold and distant from God. Gradually any effect that living with Abraham, seeing Abraham's altars to God, hearing about Abraham's talks with God—all of that was gone. Lot's heart was in Sodom long before his body arrived there.

What was the result of that small choice Lot made? Just trace quickly Lot's steps after this point:

- He looked at Sodom from afar (Genesis 13.10-11).
- Then, he turned his tent towards Sodom (Genesis 13.12).
- And finally, he moved into Sodom (Genesis 14.12).

What did Lot's small choice to follow the lust of his eyes cost him?

- He lost **his fellowship, accountability, and friendship with Abraham** when he separated from Abraham and moved into Sodom (Genesis 13.14). That uncle who loved him, shared God with him—was now not as interesting as the glittering

lights on the horizon that marked the city of sin and fun.

- He lost **his testimony** (Genesis 19.9). The citizens of Sodom mocked him and said that he who lived among them couldn't comment on their lifestyle choices.
- He lost **half his family** who wouldn't leave and were destroyed with Sodom (Genesis 19.14). His own family mocked him when he warned them of God's pending destruction of the wickedness of Sodom.
- He lost **his ability to respond** to God when he was urged to flee and he lingered so long (Genesis 19.15-16) that the angels had to drag him by the hand out of the cauldron of destruction.
- He lost **his wife** when she wanted to stay in Sodom (Genesis 19.26) so God killed her and turned her into a pillar of salt. She had been so blessed by God. She was given the opportunity to live with a man (Lot) who knew God, travel with a man who was God's friend (Abraham) and undoubtedly hear and see the wonders of God through their lives, see angelic messengers, witness their power to push away the crowd at the door of her home, strike them with blindness, and finally to hold the hand of an angel and be pulled toward the plan of God. And all that was not enough. Her soul longed for the world, her desires were so strong she couldn't obey the only command they gave her—'don't look back'.
- He lost **the rest of his family** as his remaining daughters began to act like the people they lived around so long in Sodom (Genesis 19.30-35). They knew the tricks, they had watched the sinful ways of Sodom so long. They just did what they had learned and tricked their dad.
- He lost **his legacy** as his children were defiled and their children (Genesis 19.36-38) became the enemies of God.

"It would be difficult to decide whether or not Lot was a truly saved man by reading his story in the Old Testament. He made no positive contribution to the life of faith. He chose the lower, the carnal, the worldly path. He left the fellowship of the faith at the earliest possible moment and was never restored to that fellowship. He made no mark for God. His family ended in disaster. The last we see of him in the narrative he is drunk and dishonored."

"Indeed, were it not for a brief but remarkable statement of Peter written thousands of years later (2 Peter 2: 7-8) we would be justified in concluding that the root of the matter had never been in him at all. Such is the life of a backslider. May God deliver us from a life like that."²

Lot was tempted and never seems to have resisted. God allowed him to choose to go up the hill towards Abraham and he said NO, and went down the hill towards Sodom. Look how his life turned out.

- Lot was drawn toward the wrong things, the things that were against God, not the things that were for God.
- Lot looked at Sodom (temptation of the lust of the eyes); faced his tent toward Sodom 13.10-13; and lived/moved into Sodom 14.12.
- Lot seems to have never built an altar (altars seemed to be places where Abraham

² John Phillips, Exploring Genesis, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 164.

marked and remembered God's promises in his life).

- Lot was a friend of world (James 4.4); conformed to world (Romans 12.2).

Abraham was also faced with the same temptation. God had offered him everything if he would wait--and now the opportunity for a quick time of ease and pleasure was offered. Abraham said NO to the worldliness of Sodom. The only mark Abraham left of his life on earth were those altars!

- Abraham stayed a pilgrim for God in tents (Lot in Sodom);
- Abraham built altars every where he went (Lot built none);
- Abraham became a hero among all mankind (Lot ends ignominiously in incest);
- Abraham is called God's Friend 3 times (Lot fades out and his family all become God's enemies).

If we were to contrast Abraham and Lot it would sound like this:

Lot--	Abraham--
was a competitor and opportunist (13.8)	Was a peacemaker
took and grabbed (13.9)	Trusted God's Choice
lived by the lust o his eyes (13:10-11)	Contented
Settled in a gay community (13:12-13)	stayed a pilgrim and stranger for God
Lost His Kids (19:14)	Blessed His Children
Lost His Wife (19:26)	kept his wife who became a mother of God's people
Defiled his daughters (19:36)	blessed his children
Cursed His Descendents (19:38)	Blessed His Descendents
His descendents became God's enemies (19:37)	His descendents are God's chosen people
Lot's family line ended (19.38)	Abraham's family line will never end

Lot was conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). All that he lived for went up in smoke and was buried under ruins somewhere in the area around the Dead Sea. Lot is a warning to all believers not to love the world, become friendly with the world, or be stained by the world (James 1:27), because the day of reckoning finally comes.

But that is not how it has to be. Our lives do not have to be ruined, our families do not have to be ruined by our choices. God's grace is available.

*Titus 2: 11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us **to deny ungodliness and worldly desires** and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; NAS*

*Titus 2: 11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to **say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions**, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

NIV

*Titus 2: 11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, NKJV*

So it is possible to say no to lust. It is possible to have the force of temptations powers lessened as we mortify our flesh by starving our lusts. All of that comes by His grace.

Hymn #201 is a testimony that "Grace [is] Greater Than All Our Sin". I want you to think about these words as we read them together.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,
Brighter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see his face,
Will you this moment his grace receive?

Refrain:

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our (MY) sin!

Amen? God bless you.
Where sin abounded