

Christ the Refuge for the Tempted

Learning to Flee the Lust of the Eyes

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This morning I began to exhort you from God's Word to flee the lust of the eyes. We saw that the lust of the eyes is the struggle Lot seemed to have.

Think about what happened to him. Lot did not sit down one day and say—you know, I want to destroy my wife, my kids, my testimony, my legacy, and my friendship with God and Abraham.

No, Satan usually doesn't work that way. Lust is Satan's tool through the back door. He takes something that is already a part of our life and distorts it. Lot's problem started with his career. He was just trying to take care of his family. His business was grazing sheep and goats. The pastures were not large enough for both his flocks and his uncle Abraham's. So he is offered a choice of where to work, where to locate his business.

It is good to be in business. Profit is the correct result of being a good businessman. Watching out for your family is commanded by God. So all that he did was right—until his lust of the eyes clicked in. What is that lust again?

It is the temptation we all face to chase stuff, that is 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!

It is the care of stuff that Jesus said makes our hearts grow cold. It is when we are rich and increased with goods that we abandon the need to hold Christ's Hand—and we set off on our own.

So this evening we return to the lesson of Lot. Beware of the lust of the eyes!

One of the greatest heroes of the faith in all God's Word resides side-by-side with one of the saddest pictures of lost opportunity and squandered grace. Abraham the spiritual giant and Lot the spiritual dwarf. What a lesson about the power of lust to distract, divert, debilitate, defeat, and finally destroy a good life.

How many Abrahams and Lots walk through life side by side until the moment of truth, when one chooses to say no to lust and the other says yes. It is amazing how far apart those lives can end up that once were so close.

Abraham made little choices to be a pilgrim and stranger in this world (to the lust of flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life). But Lot made little choices to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

Abraham became the father of the covenant people of God, the father of the faithful, a hero of faith, and man who is revered by the three great monotheistic religions of the world—and most of all, he became the friend of God. But all that Lot spent his life doing, all that Lot lived for, all that Lot labored for--went up in smoke and was buried under ruins somewhere in the area around the Dead Sea.

Abraham is the chief example of faith in the New Testament. In spite of his struggles, lapses, and sins—he never stopped seeking the Lord and following Him. But Lot is a warning to all believers not to love the world, not to become friendly with the world, and not to be stained by the world (James 1:27), because the day of reckoning finally comes.

But what is the good news? Christ is a refuge, to Him we may flee at any time. Let's learn how as we open to 2 Peter and stand to read these precious promises.

2 Peter 2: 7-9 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

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

Matthew 26: 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Lot will forever be a lesson about what happens to those who don't flee for refuge to Christ.

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

If you want to learn to flee lust, experience anew and afresh the grace of God. One of the most graced men in all the Bible was Paul—he is forever the champion of grace. He is the one that wrote Titus 2. So how did he beat the constant temptations of his day? Let's find out.

Look at I Corinthians 9.24-27

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 **But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 **No, I beat my body and make it my slave** so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. NIV

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 **but I buffet my body and make it my slave**, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. NAS

Paul had a secret, he was regularly knocking himself out. The term 'discipline' is a Greek word that literally means "to hit under the eye". It is in the present active indicative form so it means "I am constantly hitting myself under the eye [i.e. knock out blow] and I am constantly enslaving my body ..." He knocked out the bodily impulses to keep them from preventing him from his mission that Christ bought and paid for him to do here on earth. The question each of us need to ask ourselves is—are we?

Sometimes it is the little 'acceptable sins' that enslave us!

This morning we saw that lust in our lives that is allowed to grow unchecked can rob anyone of finishing well and earning Christ's well done. There are three areas that should concern all of us who seek Christ's full rewards in Heaven. He says:

1. Beware of **the sins of old age**: At the time when we know most about the Lord, have the least to lose because our lives are nearly over, and when we have the most reason to seek Heaven above all else—we begin to lust for comfort and convenience, get greedy for recognition and grow in our covetousness for security. Don't waste your life—especially at the end! The sins of old age can erase Christ's well done. Remember Solomon.
2. Beware of **the problem of exceptionism**, which make me think my life is an exception to God's Word. Thus I can excuse myself from doing anything for Heaven because of my past, or my pain, or my poverty, or my poor self-image. The problem of exceptionism can erase Christ's well done. Remember Annanias and Saphira.
3. Beware of **the unmortified pockets of pride**. Allowing these pockets to grow and not be dealt with can make me proud of my intellect, or proud of my achievements, or proud of my giftedness, or even proud of my goodness. Pockets of pride in my life can erase Christ's well done. Remember Lot.

Now, please turn again 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.***

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.

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 marked and remembered God's promises in his life).
- Lot was a friend of world (James 4.4); conformed to world (Romans 12.2).

"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."¹

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.

It is the care of stuff that Jesus said makes our hearts grow cold. It is when we are rich

¹ John Phillips, Exploring Genesis, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 164.

and increased with goods that we abandon the need to hold Christ's Hand—and we set off on our own.

So this evening--beware of the lust of the eyes!

So is it possible to say no to lust? Yes. 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!

"There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than this. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No: He singles out one whose soul was lost for ever. He cries to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17.32). What doesn't God remember for us – intentionally

left out of the record.

1. Her name, her family, her upbringing, her hobbies, her looks, her talents, her accomplishments...
2. No record of her parents, we won't answer for our parents.
3. No record of where she was from, we won't answer for our heritage.
4. No record of even her name, we won't answer for what is remembered about us.
5. No record of her family, we won't answer for our brothers and sisters.
6. No record of her marriage to Lot, we won't answer for whether we had a happy or sad marriage.
7. No record of her schooling, we won't answer for our academics.
8. No record of her athletic or artistic achievements, we won't answer for our talents.

What do we remember about Lot's wife? Only what the Lord does – and that is in God's Word.

She was in love with this world, so much so that when God tried to drag her out of the world and away from destruction she wrestled her hand free and turned back and looked with longing upon the city of doom and was joined with its destruction.

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world: He is describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind, when He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the Person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy, and compassion: He is One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem, and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to give this solemn warning and remind us of lost souls. Even He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the persons to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples: He was not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees who hated him, but Peter, James, and John, and many others who loved Him: yet even to them He thinks good to address a caution. Even to them He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following-take heed of imitating-do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "Remember" He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife."²

² J. C. Ryle