

Self Defense Against Sexual Sin

Selected Scriptures

GTY82

Thank you, Blake. Good morning to all of you. I have some good news for you, this morning, that I think you'll appreciate before we get started in looking together at the Word of God. The latest edition of US News and World Reports, America's best colleges has just come out, in fact it's out today officially and they rank colleges with absolutely no regard for their spiritual character or their biblical fidelity, they're not interested in that at all. They purely rank them on an academic basis. But in the 2003 edition which comes out today, The Master's College is ranked fifth, actually tied for fifth in the west in the category of best comprehensive colleges. Ranking is based on a wide range of data supplied by colleges and universities all across the United States. Within each category the institutions which involved, 324 comprehensive colleges comprising the north, south, Midwest and west are compared with one another, peer assessment based on academic reputation, graduation, retention rates, faculty resources, students electivity, financial resources and alumni giving. In the 2001 edition the college was ranked fourteenth, in the 2002 edition the college was ranked seventh. This year we're ranked fifth, so I think that's pretty exciting. We're moving in the right direction. And in the category of best values we rank twelfth in the west, fourth in the highest graduation rates and sixth in most international students. So we are to congratulate our college administration and faculty. Let's say thanks for their hard work in that. (Applause)

And when you add the spiritual component, this is the only college in America to go, that's serious about the Word of God and the things of Christ. And that dimension alone would be enough reason to go here without all the rest of that stuff.

Well I know you've had a good week from what Blake said and from what I've heard from some folks who have shared with me what's gone on this week with Dr. Halstead and soon to be Dr. Rick Holland. Talking about holiness, talking about purity of life is, of course, absolutely critical. It is the desire of the Lord that we be conformed to the image of His Son. It is the Word of Scripture that if you say you abide in Christ, you ought to walk the way He walked. And, of course, He walked without sin. That is, of course, the whole point of sanctification. And dealing with this is really critical, particularly in your youth, although I'll never forget being in the hospital room, a man was 78 years old, he was dying of heart failure, and I stood and leaned over his bed and I said, "Are you ready to go to heaven?" And he was weeping and I was a little bit concerned about his condition, I had known him for a number of years.

He said, "Well my trust is in Jesus Christ," 78 years old, "but," he said, "I just never got victory over pornography." Seventy-eight years old.

I was fairly well shocked by that because he hadn't even lived in this generation. He didn't even have a computer. Nor was the film industry anything like it is, or television today when in the years he cultivated habits. Apparently it was access to that kind of stuff for him and here he was 78 years old

and that was the deep wound, in a sense, that he was carrying in to meeting the Lord in heaven.

If you're going to win that battle, I'm going to tell you today where you have to win it. I'm going to get right down to the nitty-gritty of where the battle has to be won. And I want to start with an illustration of a man named Job. You remember Job, I'm sure, Job...you don't need to turn to it, for a minute, I'll turn you there a little bit later...Job was by God's own attesting a righteous man. In fact, in the first chapter of Job, the first part of the first chapter he's identified as one of the most righteous, if not the most righteous man on earth. The purest man, holiest man. That...that's against the grain of what you might expect because that's way back before the revelation of Scripture was even written down. He would have lived in the patriarchal period in the time of Genesis. So he wouldn't have had any scripture to read, certainly wouldn't have had all of the nuances of New Testament sanctification to lean on. And yet he knew what it was to love his Lord with all his heart and soul and it impacted his life to the point that God commends him as the most righteous man.

And then everything went south in his life. His children, his family all went over to have dinner at one of the son's houses and Sabean came and raided the place and slaughtered his entire family, all of his children. And then it went from there to his crops and his animals and then his own physical health and he got these terrible boils all over him. I mean, talk about disaster, one disaster after another and the question, of course, that arises in your mind is, if this is what happens to the most righteous man in the world, what does blessing mean? If being righteous is supposed to produce blessing, how does this work?

But anyway, Job is in a dire situation. The only person left in his life in the immediate family is his wife, and she's frankly a pain. She says to him, "Curse God and die," which is pretty terrible advice. And his friends, of course, know about this horrifying disaster and so they come to comfort him. And his friends sit for seven days and never say anything. They were dead silent for seven days. It took them seven days of just flat-out mourning in silence to reach a point where they thought they could say anything. That's how profound the suffering was. All they could do was just agonize with him. And at the end of seven days they gave speeches.

Now during those seven days they were infinitely wise because they said nothing stupid. As soon as they opened their mouths, all wisdom left and they gave these ridiculous speeches. And the bottom line was, "Well, this is evidence that you are a sinful man. This is proof positive, Job, that there's something really rotten in your life and obviously we don't know about it."

Now remember, none of them knew about the conversation that God was having with Satan that brought it about. None of them knew God's assessment of Job because that was in the secret councils of heaven. So they gave the standard deal that most people give, if you're having that kind of problem in life, you must be a bad person. And so they give their silly speeches.

And Job listens to them dutifully and then he answers them in the thirty-first chapter of Job. By doing a little bit of inventory, he says, "Well, I made a covenant with my eyes so I haven't been gazing at virgins. I have walked...if I have walked with falsehood and my foot has hastened after deceit, then let God show me that because I look at my situation and I have integrity. If my heart has been enticed by a woman or I have lurked at my neighbor's doorway," you know, that's a peeping tom, "may my wife grind for another," may my wife leave me and cook for somebody else, "for that would be a lustful crime. If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves when they filed a complaint against me, if I haven't treated my employees right, then...then let God show me. If I've

kept the poor from their desire or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, you know dropping her head in despair because you wouldn't meet the widow's need, if I've put my confidence in gold, if I've rejoiced at the death of my enemy." He's going down the litany of all the possible things he could have done wrong, and at the end of it he says, "I just don't see any of this." And so chapter 32 verse 1, so wonderful, "Then these three men ceased answering Job." Listen to this, "Because he was righteous in his own eyes."

Boy, that is...underline that...mark that. That's really critical. Job 32:1, "He was righteous in his own eyes." It wasn't a matter of what people thought about him, they were dead wrong. They hadn't seen any of these sins. He said, "If I've done any of this, tell me." They just assumed it because things weren't going very well. But at the end of the day he takes his stand not on what God knows, because he doesn't know what God knows. Not on what they think because they don't think right. At the end of all it, he is righteous in his own eyes. He has done an assessment of his own heart and has been exonerated. That is critical.

Let me put it to you simply. If you're going to be a holy person, if you're going to be a righteous person, it's going to have to take place in your own heart. That's where the battle has to be fought. You have to be able to say what Job said, "I'm righteous, I've looked at myself, I've examined myself, I've looked at my motives, I've looked at my heart and I don't buy your accusations." Because if it's anything less than that, it's going to blow up. I promise you. If you didn't win the battle on the inside, sooner or later it will show up on the outside. You can't keep the lid on it. It's impossible. You're not that clever and you're not that alert. You're not that disciplined. If you're losing the battle on the inside when nobody knows, where nobody sees, and you know you're not righteous there, it will show up. Be sure your sins will...what?...find you out.

Let me take you to another man in the New Testament. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Second Corinthians chapter 1 and, you know, this is one of my favorite books, I'm in the process of writing a commentary on this and I was talking to the publishers that do my books and they said, "You know, we want you to do book on spiritual leadership, a book on principles of leadership, spiritual leadership." And I said, "That's easy. Second Corinthians, that's it." So I'm figuring out how I can take the commentary on 2 Corinthians and just take the material in that incredible book on leadership and distill it down into a book on leadership written by, in my judgment, the greatest leader that ever lived humanly, the apostle Paul cause he's...the model of his leadership is in this epistle.

In 2 Corinthians you get a better look at the heart of Paul than you do anywhere, anywhere in the New Testament. And the reason you do is because he's under attack. It's the same thing with Job, he's under attack. Only this time it's not his friends, it's his enemies. With Job it was his friends who were attacking his credibility and his integrity. And Job stood the test by saying, "I've examined my life, and I'm telling you, I'm righteous."

Well Paul is being attacked by enemies. They...they, false teachers, a combination of, you know, Greek philosophy and Greek oratories sort of wed together with Judaizing elements of Judaism invading the church. The false teachers came into the Corinthian church, they wanted to teach lies as false teachers always do, they're agents of Satan and they bring doctrines of demons and, you know, they're like the clock that doesn't run, they're right twice a day and that gives them some credibility. And they came into Corinth and they knew that if they were going to teach their lies and upset the gospel and tear up the church and destroy evangelism, they were going to have to get rid of the confidence people had in Paul. So they decided to attack Paul. If they could discredit Paul, if

they could totally undermine Paul, it happens all the time, people do it to their pastors, you know, somebody who decides they want to bring some new teaching into the church or some new power structure into the church, do everything they can to undermine the pastor, destroy the pastor. It happens not just in churches, it happens in any environment. And that's what happened. So they started attacking Paul.

And they basically said, and I'll show you the key here, it's over in chapter 4 and verse 2, he says, "We have renounced things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God." Here's what they were accusing him of. They were accusing him, and you have to kind of go through the whole book to put all the pieces of this together, they were accusing him of sexual sin. They were accusing him of material greed. They were accusing him of being in the ministry for money and favors from women. They were accusing him of falsifying his apostolic credentials. They were accusing him of overestimating his ministry impact and effectiveness. They were accusing him primarily of having a secret hidden life of shame.

In other words, he was a phony, he was a hypocrite. He came on as if he was the servant of God and the man of God but under the surface was this hidden, shameful, wretched, wicked life that he was walking in craftiness. That is, he was a deceiver, that he was not true to the Word of God, he was adulterating it. I mean, that's the sum of it. That's the worst that could be said. Underneath the surface of this apparently godly, faithful proclaimer of the gospel there was a secret, hidden life of shame. And he was nothing but a hypocrite.

You know, there are people in the ministry for whom that is true. They're in there preaching and teaching and under the surface there's a hidden life of shame. They just uncovered a pastor back in the midwest who preached in his church for over twenty years, that means that he had probably people who were in that church when they were born and they had grown into their twenties when he was there and gone through their life under his leadership. They found out that the church for all those 20 years had been giving him money and been giving him money because he had a desire to give money to poor families in the area as a witness for the church. And they gave him cash so he could give it to the poor families. They began to do a little bit of a study and they found out that the poor families never got that but the local prostitutes got it over a period of 20 years. Now that's a secret hidden life of shame. He was exposed. And, of course, then immediately people who have sat under his ministry for 20 years go retroactively go back and wonder what in the world has this 20 years been if this man without the power and influence of the Spirit of God has been my teacher? Horrific things like that happen from time to time. And there are those who have a hidden life of shame. You know that, you've experienced some things like that as well. Sometimes it's even your parents who, or somebody in your family who puts on a show for people in church, but underneath it's like the whited sepulchers, full of dead men's bones. So they said that of Paul.

I want you to see Paul's answer, chapter 1 verse 12, because I think this gets back to the core of what we're talking about here. Second Corinthians 1:12, this is the heart and soul of the issue. "Our proud confidence is this," now Paul says, "Look, I've got to answer these accusations." Now I want you to understand, Paul is a humble man, we know that very clearly. It comes through everything he writes. He's a selfless man. He's a Christ-exalting man. He wants to do nothing but exalt Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He...when they ask him for his apostolic credentials he says, "I was beaten more than you, I was shipwrecked," and all of that, "stoned and left for dead." He looked at his suffering as the true badge of his apostleship because in it was the essence of his humiliation for the

sake of the gospel. He was not a proud man.

But he was willing to defend himself against false accusations because he didn't want people to believe what was not true and therefore discredit his ministry and therefore shut themselves off from the truth which he preached. So reluctantly, he hates this, and you see that all the way through this epistle, he hates to have to defend himself but he will do it. He will do it. And how will he do it?

I was flying across America and one of the leading religious evangelical quote/unquote preachers, TV preachers sat down behind me on a jet, proceeded to drink too much and get to the point where he was inebriated. And he saw me and he knew who I was and he, for whatever reason, didn't like me. And so he decided in his lack of self-control to let me know that. And he just unloaded on me and I said to him, I said, "Well this is very interesting that you are sitting there talking to me because I am right now writing a review of your book for Moody Monthly magazine. So maybe I could ask you a few personal questions to make sure I get this right.]"

Well that was a pretty stunning providential meeting. Well then he launched into some furor and used some profane words at me. I went ahead and wrote the review and it was published. Later on, about two weeks after this incident on the plane, I received a thick envelope, about that thick, from him full of fifteen letters written by everybody on his staff that knew him, telling me what a wonderful person he was. "I work with this guy and he is a..." and it went on, I mean, paragraphs, fifteen pages...fifteen letters on different letterhead from all these different people in his organization. You know what? I didn't buy that, I didn't buy that. What is that? I saw what was in his heart. When he got under the influence, the real deal became manifest.

So what's Paul going to do to defend himself? Is he going to say, "Here's fifteen letters from my fifteen buddies? You say I have a hidden life of shame, no I don't and here's fifteen letters?" No. Look at verse 12, here's our confidence, "The testimony of our conscience."

Look, Paul says, "I'm telling you, I've looked inside and here's the testimony of my own conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God." In other words, this holiness and this godly sincerity comes by the grace of God not by the wisdom of my flesh. "But I am telling you, my conscience tells me that we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially towards you in a way that is holy and godly."

Let me tell you something, folks, if you can't say that, you've got a problem...you really have a problem because it's only a question of time before that gets manifest. If you're not able to say with Job, "I have done a full examination and I'm telling you, I am righteous as righteous as a man can be before God." If you can't say that, you have a serious problem because you're losing the battle on the inside and it will show up on the outside because as you think in your heart, so you are. And if they come at you and they say you've got a secret hidden life of shame, if somebody came to you and pinned you to the corner and said, "Are there secret things in your life, shameful things that only you know about that you're trying to cover," and so forth and so on, could you stand up with the apostle Paul and say, "Look, my proud confidence is this that my conscience tells me that I have conducted myself in the world, " that means in the world outside the church when nobody's looking, "and I have conducted myself in the church right with you in such a fashion that my conscience tells me I have conducted myself in holiness and godly sincerity, not by my own fleshly ability but by the grace of God at work in me?" That's the...that's the safest place you'll ever be and that's the highest earthly court. God is the highest heavenly court, the highest earthly court is conscience.

Sometimes people say to me, "Well you know, John, who are you accountable to? Who are you accountable to?" I have a huge list of people that I'm accountable to, you...I'm accountable to you. You expect a certain kind of conduct out of me, don't you? I'm accountable to you, believe me. You have expectations that I as a man of God, as a teacher of the Word of God, as the president of a college that bears the name of Jesus Christ, you have expectations of me that legitimately establish the fact that I should live a godly life, I should live in holiness and godly sincerity. You have that expectation of me. That expectation of me is a point of accountability. And if you have it and you're here for a time and gone, and the faculty are here all the time, they have it on an enduring basis. And then there are people around me, people that I work with here like Mark and Dick and Brad and Kevin and others, and they have expectations of me, so do the other people I work with in the various ministries. So do the elders of Grace Church and so does the congregation there. A lot of accountability there. My wife, she thinks that I should do everything I preach perfectly. I tell her, "Honey, I preach a better message than I can live, I mean, give me some slack, just a little." That's a lot of accountability. My children hold me accountable, do you think they have an expectation for me? Of course they do. My grandchildren hold me accountable, got another one coming into the world in a couple of weeks so I've got another little guy who's going to expect me to live a life that supports what I say I believe. And those people are, you know, varying levels around me, moving into very, very intimate levels where people that work very closely with me have seen me in every situation.

And I'm always amazed. I was on an elevator in a foreign country not long ago and I said to a person something like, you know, "Which floor is such-and-such?" And somebody spun around and said, "I know that voice, you're John MacArthur." Oh, I mean, that happens to me quite a bit. Walking down the street somewhere in some other part of the world and people will...you know, I have accountability. But let me tell you something, nobody on this planet knows what's in my heart...nobody and nobody can hold me accountable there. That is where the battle is won or lost. And if you're losing it there, you're going to lose it on the outside because you can't keep the lid on that.

Turn to James, and I..you know, I didn't know what I was going to say till I started saying it so we'll just keep going and see where we get. This will be like linked sausage, you know, we'll get to the end of something, whack it off, you know. James 1, it's kind of fun, you know, to go and hear yourself because you don't know what you're going to say. James 1...but I'm talking from the heart, so you understand passages jump into my mind. James 1 verse 14, "Each one is tempted when he's carried away and enticed by...what?...say it...his own lust." That's the problem. It's not about what's outside, it's about what's inside. Five people could see the same image and have five different reactions to that image. Five people could hear the same conversation and have five different responses. It's about what's on the inside, temptation takes place on the inside when you're carried away. You know, it just puts a hook in your nose and drags you off like a slave.

And then, verse 15, "When lust has conceived it gives birth to...what?...sin." You know, you conceive it in your mind and it will be born in your life. And in the end it's deadly stuff. Verse 15 says, "It brings forth death," and that's why verse 16 says, "Don't be deceived, my beloved brethren, don't be deceived into thinking you can cultivate in your heart evil thoughts and things like that and not have it affect your life in manifest sin and perhaps even death."

So you have to win the battle inside. Let me just kind of...let me get a little more diagnostic, okay? Let's go inside and let me just give you some categories to think about. Through the years I've tried

to reduce this to something that we can kind of manage. Let me see if I can refine it a little bit today.

The first thing that's troublesome on the inside is past sin...past sin.

One of the blessings that God has given us is a good memory. Ha, you know there's many times I thank God for a bad memory. Can you understand that? There is so much stuff. In fact, most of the things that I've heard in my life and seen I would like to forget, wouldn't you? You know, we only want a good memory when somebody says nice things about us or when we have these really nice experiences or when we're having a test. But sins of the past are a big problem because you can sin by remembering the past.

I remember talking to a guy one time who had married a beautiful Christian girl and before he was...he lived a really wild life, full of immorality. And it was just soon after his honeymoon, and he had married this pure, beautiful Christian girl and I said, "Well, did you have a wonderful time on your honeymoon?" Just kind of off the cuff question making conversation. It turned out to be pretty profound.

He said, "No, no."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Because I just kept thinking of all the past sexual experiences and I couldn't...I just couldn't keep my mind pure."

With his own wife on his own honeymoon. It's recycling the past. Young people, at this point in your life, you're filling up your memory bank. And I'll promise you this, that if you stick stuff in there that's sinful, Satan is really good at recycling that stuff. It isn't just when you did it, it comes back, just like the images of those videos you shouldn't have seen, the images on the Internet you shouldn't have seen, the movies you shouldn't have seen, the lyrics to the songs you shouldn't have heard, the images that were vividly portrayed in your mind when you were reading something you shouldn't read. It doesn't go away. It makes vivid, vivid memories, particularly if you're sitting in a theater watching people doing things they ought not to be doing and they're 25 feet high in full color. Tough images to forget.

What happens is you cherish the memory of past sins. I can't tell you how many times I've talked with homosexuals who have come to know Christ and I've asked them how they're doing and inevitably...inevitably, and we've had a lot of them converted at Grace Church and you wouldn't even know this about them, numbers of them have married and gone on with life, but inevitably they tell me the same thing, they just can't get rid of those past experiences. They keep recycling. That's why David said this, David said to God in Psalm 25:7, "Do not remember the sins of my youth." What was he doing? He was saying, "God, would You please forget what I can't? I can't forget it." In Ezekiel 23 the Lord condemned Israel and the way He did was He compared Israel to a harlot, prostitute, named Oholibah. And this is what he said about the harlot that was analogous to Israel. Quote, Ezekiel 23:19, "She multiplied her harlotries," in other words she was just engaged in multiplied prostitution. How? How did she multiply her harlotry? Listen to this, "By remembering the days of her youth when she played the harlot."

In other words, He says Israel is like a harlot who gets old and all she's got is a lifetime of harlotry to remember. And that's Israel. Israel is plagued by the memory of all its youth and all the harlotry. Satan will take the garbage of your past, and you don't have much of a past yet, so protect...protect your past by protecting your present because you're going to always live with that past in the background potentially to be recycled. And some of you know exactly what I mean, you engaged in a sin at some point, you can actually have that sin come to mind, you can accept the temptation, move into the lust and savor again that lustful sinful experience by just recycling it in your mind. Certainly that's what Jesus had in His mind in part when He said, "If you look on a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart." And not just once, but every time you recycle that. So that's the past and you need to protect it.

And then there's the future. You know, your mind not only wants to sin in the past but it wants to sin in the future, too. It's really amazing, it not only wants to reach back and recycle all the garbage of the past, but it wants to invent sin for the future. Psalm 36 is so insightful, listen to what it says. "He plans wickedness in his bed." Whew! Huh. You're thinking about a person that you haven't done something with, but you're thinking about what would it be like if you did it? You're literally sinning on a future level, devising evil plans. You find that if you read through Psalm 64, Proverbs 14, let's see, Proverbs 15, Proverbs 24, there's a section in Proverbs 6, it talks about devising evil plans, planning to do evil. We would call it premeditated sin, wouldn't we?

So, you know, your mind is a...your mind is a frightening thing so you...you've got to grapple with the sins of the past to get recycled, then you've got all of the plans for the sins in the future that you allow yourself to indulge in. Those things both directions get stimulated by things you read, things you see, etc. Sometimes those thoughts aren't just about lust, sometimes those thoughts are about anger. You're sitting on your bed figuring how you're going to get back at your teacher that gave you a C. You're sitting on your bed thinking about how you're going to get back at the guy that undercut you in a certain situation. You're thinking about how you're going to fulfill your greed or your envy by stealing something and how you're going to elevate yourself in a certain environment, it's a sin of pride. And you haven't really done it but you're plotting it and the plotting itself is sin. So you have to deal with sins that are directed toward the past, and sins that are directed toward the future, as you devise them.

And then, of course, in the middle is the present sin in your mind and this is James 1, this is the fantasy world of the mind. The Bible calls this the imagination. In Genesis 6:5 it says that God looked down on the world and all He ever saw was that all the imagination of their heart was only evil continually. Sin is about the imagination, it's about fantasies. It's about looking and lusting. It's about, like Proverbs 24:9 says, "The thought...the thought of foolishness is sin." Just the thought of some disobedience, of some iniquity, just the thought is sin...just the thought. And that's why you go back to what I read you in James 1, sin is conceived in that fantasizing, in that imagining. So, I mean, we're still diagnosing the issue here and the battle has to be won inside in the mind, in the conscience, in the heart. That's why David said, "Create in me a clean...what?...heart." Create in me a clean heart, Lord, just do the work on the inside.

And it's not easy to do that because you would think. "Well you guys that are older, you don't have the same problem." Well sure, I mean, there's a certain spiritual maturing, there's a decreasing frequency of sin, there's an increasing love of righteousness, but the older you get the more you have a memory bank of sinful things and those can be recycled. That's why Paul said, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That's why Paul said, "For to me to

live is Christ and to die is...what?...to gain.” It wasn’t because he wanted to wear a crown, it was because he wanted to be delivered from past, future and present sin that beleaguered him. That’s what makes heaven attractive to me. I don’t care about gold streets, honestly. I mean, it doesn’t...it doesn’t move me that much. I’m sure I’ll appreciate it when I arrive, I can’t really comprehend what transparent gold looks like and I’ve never imagined one pearl being big enough to make a whole gate. Those are sort of interesting and novel things. But what interests me about heaven is the absence of sin. And that’s where David was, “Create in me a clean heart,” the work has to go down inside and be done there.

So, I’m just trying to give you the focus, young people, that’s where the battle has to be won. And if you’re losing it there, you know what you need to do. Let me give you some steps. Confess and forsake any sin that is secret sin. I’m talking practical on your face, on your knees, explicit, say the words to the Lord. If nobody’s around, say them out loud and confess and forsake any sin or pattern of sin that is inside that nobody knows about. Isaiah 55:7, “Let the wicked forsake his way, the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts.” Forsake those thoughts and you start by confessing. Hack Agag to pieces, don’t let him live. The Old Testament analogy from 1 Samuel 15, they let the king live that God said to kill, and so he came back and he came back and he came back and every time he came back he was destructive again. And God said, “Why didn’t you kill him when I told you to kill him?” Well when you find the sins that are there, hack Agag to pieces.

Second, do not expose yourself to evil attractions. Job 31:1, Job said, “I made a covenant with my eyes...I made a covenant with my eyes.” And he said, “You know what? I kept my covenant.” Guard what you see. I’m not talking about a glimpse or a glance, I’m talking about guard what you look at and absorb.

Another element is feed on the Word of God. David said, “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not...what?...sin.”

You know, it’s amazing when you’re...you’re saturated with the Word of God how fast that puts the brakes on things. That’s what the Bible means when it says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Which is the same as being filled with the Spirit exactly. You’re filled and controlled with the Holy Spirit when the Word of God dominates your thinking. Feed on the Word...Feed on the Word. I mean, I can tell you this just as simple as this, the output of your life is in direct proportion to the intake of Scripture truth. And I’m talking about the honest heart-felt intake.

So start on the negative, confess and forsake the sin, be specific. If there’s patterns of sin in your private secret life that nobody knows about, you bring those before the Lord, confess and forsake those things. And then avoid evil attractions, anything that incites sin. I mean, for some people, just don’t keep getting catalogs of stuff that you don’t need but that generates discontent. I mean, there’s a million ways you can approach that. Feed on the Word of God and then I think Philippians 4:8. Think on righteous things. I mean, that’s about as practical as it gets. Think on righteous things. “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good reputation, “ I mean, if there is such a thing as excellence and there is, if there is such a thing as being worthy of praise, then let your mind dwell on those things. Find praiseworthy things, spiritually excellent things, things that honor God.

One other practical thing, cultivate loving the Lord...cultivate loving the Lord. I would...I can't guess what God's doing in my life, but I would say just from my human viewpoint, the...the single greatest influence on my life through the years has been my study of Jesus Christ. Whether Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and I've spent...I've spent nearly nine years teaching Matthew and then when I did that I went back and wrote a commentary on it, then I went back again and wrote the notes in the study Bible on it, so I've been through Matthew...oh, I don't know, maybe ten or eleven years of Matthew. I spent several years going through the gospel of John. I'm now going through the gospel of Luke and I've been, I don't know, a couple of years doing that. I went through the book of Hebrews which exalts Jesus Christ in absolutely and overwhelming and magnificent ways. I've gone through the book of Colossians several times in my life and that too is an exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most glorious experiences I've had is twice to go through the book of Revelation, to teach it twice completely and then to write a two-volume commentary on the book of Revelation as well. I suppose if you added up the 35 years of ministry, maybe 25 of those years I have been dealing pretty directly with Jesus Christ. And in the rest of the epistles, like the book of Romans, you're dealing indirectly in Galatians, indirectly in Thessalonian epistles, and the other epistles as well.

But I really believe the single greatest contributor to the way my spiritual inner man functions is my love for Jesus Christ. Every passage, and I don't know if you can detect this, if you hear me preach on the gospels, I literally...I literally find myself thrilled at the process of learning more about Jesus Christ. Every passage in the gospels, now, of course, in Luke, every passage just unfolds His beauty and His majesty and His glory and I mean, it's taken me to a point where more than most people, by far, because, I mean, who does this, you know. Normal people don't spend their whole life studying all week long for decades, so they don't have the opportunity to go as deeply into the things of Christ as I do, but I will tell you this, that the most controlling feature of my life is the love that I have for Jesus Christ. And it's not some sentimental thing, it's not some schmaltzy kind of weepy thing induced by some emotion. It is this...this reality of who He is and the glory and the wonder of His person and what He's done and how He loved me enough to give His life for me and how He...I was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world that I may be made into His image, to dwell in His presence forever and ever and reflect that image. And all that goes in between, all the characteristics of Christ, the wonder of His meekness and gentleness and yet His strength, and the perfect combination of grace and glory and justice and tenderness. And you see it unfold on every page of the scriptures.

And to me that is the single greatest contributor to the victory inside, is that I have a hard time with the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ would be disappointed with me. I...I don't want you to be disappointed with me, I can kind of control that on the outside. I don't want my wife and kids to be disappointed with me, I can control that on the outside. I don't want Jesus to be disappointed with me, and He knows my heart. And I'm like Peter, I'm saying, "Lord, I love You, I'm telling You I love You, I know what it looks like, but I still love You." And then Peter finally says, you remember, "Lord, You know my heart, You know I love You," John 21. And Jesus responded by saying, "Feed My sheep, I know you love Me, Peter."

That to me when it's all said and done is where the battle is won. So get to know your Savior. Christian people sit in churches all over the world all their life and have only a superficial knowledge of Christ which takes away, from my standpoint, the most powerful, powerful motive for holiness.

Father, we are grateful again this morning that we've been given Your Word that we might know what it is You want of us, but that we might also know our glorious Savior. I pray for these folks that

are here, I being one like them, who has to fight all the same battles and has through all the years of my life. Help them, O God, to win on the inside and may there be a real breaking in many hearts and a real honest openness and may they find that secret place where they can unveil to You what You already know and trade in that deception for a true and pure love for You so that what they hide in the heart may not break loose like a broken sewer line some day, to dirty their whole life and all those around them. May they win the battle now on the inside day by day by day as they confess and forsake sin over and over again, as they feed on the Word, as they think on the things that are holy and pure, and mostly as they grow in their love for our dear Lord Jesus who gave Himself for us and whose name we pray. Amen.

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