

What Is Lust ?



¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Where does lust come from ?

- 👁️ I Peter 2:11 – Flesh: From our own bodies
- 👁️ II Timothy 2:22 – Youth: Youth is the time we feel desires the strongest, but have the least experience in keeping them under control.

The three types of lust - I John 2:15-16:

- 👁️ Lust of the flesh - Normal bodily desires.
- 👁️ Lust of the eyes - Things that look good.
- 👁️ Pride of life - The desire to be admired and respected by others.

Why lust is wrong:

- 👁️ Matthew 5:27-28 - The desire for sin is equivalent to committing the sin.
- 👁️ Proverbs 23:7 - It is what is in the heart that defines who you truly are.
- 👁️ Mark 7:18-23 - The thoughts of the heart bring about sinful actions.
- 👁️ Matthew 6:22-23 - Where we focus our minds is the direction we will go.

Fr Antonious Kaldas has described the nature of lust:

- 👉 **It is Selfish:** - a self-centred sin, since its main aim is to satisfy oneself regardless of the effect on others. Selfishness is the diametric opposite of love. No human loves to be selfish. It is a self-destructing characteristic.
- 👉 **It is Pride:** - St John grouped these two together when he said, “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.” (I John 2:16).

- 👉 **It is Transient (Temporary):** - “Do not seek for the food that perishes” (John 6). Its transience is frustrating, it leaves the soul longing for more, i.e. it makes a person continually dissatisfied; feeling empty, hollow.
- 👉 **It Destroys Peace:** - Every fall leads to disappointment and depression. It is a battle that wages within, and by giving in to sin, I am strengthening the enemy! (like selling arms to Iraq).
- 👉 **It brings Condemnation!:** - “It is better for you to go through life with one eye rather than be cast into hell with a healthy body” this small, transient pleasure is the 30 pieces of silver for which I sell my Lord and my eternal life.
- 👉 **It Forms a Wall Between Me And God:** - sin is the dividing wall that separates me from You, O my loving Lord (Life of St Gregory). How horrible that I, who am dust and who need You so desperately, and often seeks You- how incredible that I should build a dividing wall with my own hands!
- 👉 **It is a Betrayal:** - You who loved me, took my nature, and died for me... how can I do the very thing which hurts our Lord? It is as though I stand at the foot of the Cross, and see you bleeding, suffering, suffocating- for my sake- then I turn my back on You and walk away with a hard heart to join those who crucified You. Give me, O Lord, a heart of flesh for this hard heart of stone!

There is always a way out of temptation - I Corinthians 10:13

- A. Gods promises to us..
 1. Satan is limited in what he can use for temptation. No one can say that a particular temptation is unique to him or that no one has ever faced a temptation like theirs.
 2. Since others have faced similar temptations, we know that some overcame and some have given in. Because some overcame that means no one is forced to sin.
 3. God limits Satan to never give you a temptation that God knows you can't handle. Every temptation is one that you could resist.
 4. God limits Satan so that there is always a way out. It probably will not be a desirable path, but a path will always exist. You will never face a situation where you could honestly say you had no choice but to sin.
- B. The example of Joseph - Genesis 39:7-12
 1. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own family.
 2. He was in a foreign country where no one would know what he did.
 3. He was alone with a woman who was asking for sex.
 4. She won't take “no” for an answer and being his master's wife, she could make his life miserable if he disobeyed.
 5. She was in the process of removing his clothes.
 6. What would you do?

7. Joseph ran off in his underwear. Would that be a desirable thing to do? Yet it was better than sinning.

Resist sin

- Proverbs 1:10 - Do not consent to sin
- Realize that as Christians, God dwells in us - I Corinthians 3:16-17
- Keep from sin - Colossians 3:1-5
- You cannot hold hot coals and not be burnt - Proverbs 6:25-28
- 👁️ Pornography
 - Arouses a desire for sex with someone you cannot have.
 - Repeated exposure wears down your resistance to sin
 - What happens if you are placed in a sexual situation?
- 👁️ Songs, television shows, and movies that show unmarried couples jumping into bed.
 - How long before you start thinking that this is normal behavior?
 - How long before fondling is thought of as expected behavior?
 - These repeated exposures wear down our resistance to sin.

Resist Dating until you are mature (physically, emotionally & spiritually):

Most people eventually date, but we must acknowledge the dangers present in dating.

- 👁️ Not everyone has the same standards towards sin that we try to uphold.
- 👁️ The number of Christians is generally few. Many find dates among non-Christians.
- 👁️ Psalms 1:1 - Don't associate with sinners. Pick people who will encourage you to be a better person, not worse.
- 👁️ I Corinthians 15:33 - Bad companions will corrupt good morals.

Temptation for girls to date older men

- 👁️ Boys develop in a different order and a different rate than girls.
 - Their growth starts two years after the typical girl.
 - Their growth takes longer than the typical girl (generally four years longer).
- 👁️ Hence, there is a period of time where girls look and act more mature than boys of their own age.
- 👁️ It is flattering to have a handsome, older man take notice of you
 - Easy to mistake the notice for a complement on your maturity.
 - Too often the attention is because the man believes a young, inexperienced girl is easier to manipulate.

Minimize temptation on a date by:

- 👁️ Dating in groups
- 👁️ Less pressure to be the entertainment
- 👁️ Able to become acquainted with several people at a time

- 👁️ Less likely to be pressured into doing something wrong (if the group is good in general).
- 👁️ Pick activities in public, well-lighted places
- 👁️ Picnic, volleyball, canoe, bowling
- 👁️ Go for pizza or ice cream
- 👁️ Inform your parents in advance where you plan to go and when you plan to return.
- 👁️ If you are uncomfortable telling you folks, then there may be a problem with your plans.

What Is Purity ?



Purity means regaining the territory God gave us, and the devil invaded and corrupted. The desire for physical intimacy is holy, intended for use within a whole-person loving, caring and giving relationship with one's spouse. The devil invaded this territory and corrupted the use of that desire. It is our role to fight, with the grace of God, to win back that territory and restore it to its rightful uses.

VICTORY COMES ONLY THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD.....

Purity comes not from my own strength and struggle, but through God's protection and aid. Prayer is integral to success in attaining the virtue of a pure heart and pure life. God forces no-one to accept His help and grace, but gives it only when sincerely invited.

Our Spiritual Weapons



- 👉 **True Repentance:** - This is essential – I must feel I am in the wrong and that I need God to change me. I must make a real, honest and sincere decision to become pure and holy. “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1). I must be firm in seeking my goal. At the very least, I must desire to be firm: “Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’ ” (Mark 9:24).

👍 **Humility:** - The devil cannot stand humility – it is like capsicum spray in his face! If I remember my many sins and feel how in spite of His great love for me, I have let God down, it makes it very hard to let Him down even more. And beware the sneaky trick the devil uses of convincing you that you are a saint whenever you succeed in this battle for a while. Don't listen to him! Remember all those sins!

👍 **Constant, Sincere Prayer:** - Prayer is the key that opens the door to God's help. Continual prayers keep the heart CLOSE to God, eg. the Jesus Prayer; reciting the Psalms; just talking to God at any time and about anything; remembering memorised verses or passages from the Bible; or even reminding myself that God is present with me. Prayers also prevent the devil from having any opportunity to tempt – even if he tempts, the heart is too occupied and happy with God to be distracted. The devil can only attack successfully when I lose the thread of continual prayer.

👍 **Prayer on the Spot:** - As soon as I am tempted – PRAY! A simple prayer of humility – “have mercy on me, My Lord – I am weak!” The devil flees! Yet this requires vigilance. Don't do it once then forget to do it 5 minutes later!

👍 **Metanias:** - (bowing in prayer) These are the heavy artillery. A constant barrage of sincere metanias cannot be withstood by the enemy for long! Their power lies in humility, confessing one's weakness, failure and double-mindedness with real sorrow and humbling myself before God.

👍 **Regular Confession:** - Humbling myself in obedience before my confession. Lust is one of those temptations that can lose its grip over me when I expose it to the light of day before another person.

👍 **Fasting:** - There are some sins that “cannot come out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). General fasts (Wednesday and Friday etc.) or special fasts directed by the confession father, and linked strongly to prayer. This is the guided missile in the Battle.

👍 **Liturgies and Name on Altar:** - The most powerful of all prayer – offered by the priest right before the Holy Body and Blood. This benefits in a number of ways – one receives the power of the altar; the prayer of a righteous man (James 5); a period of concentrated prayer for myself in the presence of God; beautiful memories with purity; inspiring words I can carry into the world with me; communion of unity with other Christians already living a pure Christian life; and most of all – the invincible power of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ into my own body and blood so that God dwells in me and I dwell in Him!

👍 **Perseverance:** - continue in prayer, confident that you can not lose. You may be successful today, maybe in 20 years time, but sooner or later, success will come. It is 100% assured, for it is God who fights for us, and who can withstand Him? The only way for me to lose is if I give up hope and desert the Battle.

Practical Strategies

Some “attitudes” or “changes of outlook” that can help in the battle:-

- † **Reality Check #1.** Imagine what the person will look like in 50 years time- i.e. All wrinkly, hairy, hunchback, dry skin, teeth lost etc. Not an attractive sight! Is this what I lust after?
- † **Reality Check #2.** Imagine what they look like if you just remove the top 5min of skin: muscles, bones, views, nerves, intestines – Yuck!
- † **Reality Check #3.** Remember that this person has parents, family etc: how would I feel to have my own wife / sister / mother so thought of or looked at?!
- † **Reality Check #4.** Lust most often involves reducing the target of the lust to a mere object, a ‘thing’. I may know nothing about that person, who they are, what their personality is like, who their family and friends are – they are not a person to me but merely a tool. Worse still – they often don’t even know that I exist. Yet I enter into one of the most intimate of interactions with them, often without them even being aware. Surely this is a terrible betrayal? How can I accept such devaluation, such humiliation of a fellow human being, and beautiful spiritual being made by God and intended to live in eternity?
- † **Reality Check #5.** Regardless of any other factors, you cannot escape the fact that God has commanded against unbridled lust. Lust has a lawful place within the sacramental marriage relationship, subjected to the superior Aghape love, but anywhere else, it is “illegal”. No amount of rationalisation can escape this fact. To lust is to break God’s law.
- † **Understand the Mechanism.** Understand that lusts are merely physiological process. It is based ultimately on stimulation of the “pleasure centre” (if such a discreet centre exists in humans) and we thus behave in such a way as to repeat this stimulation. Experiments where electrodes were inserted in to the pleasure centres in the brains of lab mice showed that they would continually jump to press the little lever that stimulated their pleasure centre, ignoring food and water, until they exhausted themselves and died! Will I be so made a slave of my physiology?! On the other hand, by just acknowledging the process for what it is – merely a set of chemical and electrical signals – one can discount one’s need for it. A bit like controlling pain by understanding that it’s only a set of signals being sent to the brain. Also, am I to be reduced to the level of a mindless animal, merely being forced to think and act according to my instincts? Or will I live as God intended me to be – as a human being with a free will and eternal spirit?
- † **Contentment.** “A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb...” (Proverbs 27:7). Often, falls result from discontentment, or restlessness, or a feeling of self-pity, poverty or emptiness. Seek to be satisfied by God - to be “full” and content in Him & in His good gifts. Remember, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (I Timothy 6:6).

- † **The Shield. Get into this habit:-** When in the presence of a temptation – whether in reality or in thought – imagine a protective shield or barrier between you and the tempting sight. This “shield” could be:-
 - *the Cross, with the crucified Lord suffering on it*
 - *the face of Jesus (looking at me!)*
 - *A medieval knight’s shield, (perhaps with a red cross on white), behind which I hide myself;*
 - *or anything else that works!*

- † **Remember your sins.** TRUE Humility is a weapon the devil cannot withstand (remember the St. Macarius Story). Remember the sins you feel most guilt about and say, “It is enough: how can I add to these!”

- † **Flee From Temptation.** Analyse the causes of temptation and change your lifestyle/environment to eliminate or at least minimise them.

- † **Protective Wall.** Build a positive environment/ lifestyle that keeps you occupied and surrounded by things that are without sin, or better, building your love for God. Eg. Spiritual books, tapes/CD’s of liturgies, sermons, hymns, icons, contemplations, inspiring people (especially saints).

- † **God is Here.** Remind yourself that the eyes of God are trained upon you- now! As Joseph said, “how can I commit this great sin before God” Even our thoughts cannot be hidden from Him.

- † **Be A Child.** Having children is a great blessing! Coming home is a time of joy, for the kids miss their Dad- they come running to the front door, full of beaming smiles and laughter, jump on their Dad, hug him tight and say “We love Daddy!” or “Are you staying home tonight?” And they don’t let go! This is a beautiful analogy for my relationship with God. Let me also run to Him and cling to Him whenever temptations beset me. Let me imagine myself as a young child, clinging to Jesus, my heart full of joy, peace, security and comfort, headless of the dim, insipid attractions of the world!

- † **The Battle!** Remember that you are in a war. In war there may be many discreet battles. Some are won, some lost – but in the end it is who wins the WAR that matters, not who wins an individual BATTLE. So I must not lose hope, but stay fighting on the “right side”!

- † **Self Review: Revisit Your Goals:** - submitting to temptations implies that one has lost sight of his / her goals in life. “He who loves Me keeps my commandments” and “whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him”. (1 John 3:6). Every sin I commit is a reminder to me that I have not yet entered into a 100% genuine and true relationship with God; and it is a motivation for me to do everything within my power to sacrifice all and put all I have into finding that precious pearl beyond price that is our Lord Christ.

- † **The power of the Altar.** It really is there for us to use, but we have to focus on it and seek it during the liturgy. Then amazing things happen.

- † **Communion and Temptations.** One must never separate oneself from the power that Holy Communion bestows upon the struggler for purity. The only things that should prevent me from having Communion are if I continue to sin, and enjoy the sin so much that I really do not want to stop; or if my Confession Father asks me to stop. But if I come to the liturgy and feel genuine sorrow and remorse for my sins, even though they be repeated a thousand times, that genuine desire for repentance is enough to make the Holy Body and Blood of Christ a blessing and encouragement to me rather than a curse. St John Chrysostom's parable of the King's Son is useful here, as is the Paradise of the Fathers story, "You Strike and I'll Strike".
- † **Imagining Victory.** A psychology tool may help. Continually take time out to imagine what life would be like if you were free of this sin. Imagine you have been free for a year. Picture in your mind how you are feeling. Imagine how you react to sources of temptation, now that you are now longer enslaved. Imagine the peace and freedom that fills your heart. Imagine the absence of guilty feelings, when you speak to others, when you pray. Now turn this image into a prayer. Do you really desire to be in this pure state? Then beg and plead with God to make it reality.
- † **Lust As Addiction.** It may be that the sin of lust can so take hold of a person that it takes the form of a true addiction, of the same type as smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction or gambling addiction. This has many consequences. For example, in order to overcome addiction, one must first admit that s/he is in fact addicted and that the addiction has taken over control of their lives. Outside help and support is almost certainly needed to overcome addiction. But before any of this can happen, the person must first admit to oneself that they are indeed an addict. Denying this will serve only to keep them in chains forever.
- † **Mentor.** Alone, one may not be able to overcome their addiction because our human will is weak and our resolve is hard to maintain. But notice that when a person is in public, in the company of others they know well and respect, it is harder to fall into sinful thinking or action. If one has a mentor, someone of strong spiritual character, who knows the depths of the problem, they can benefit from that mentor's constant support. A mentor can ring their friend daily, or even more often, with words of encouragement to 'pep-talk' them into continuing to fight against sin. A mentor provides accountability – if a person knows they will have to tell their mentor how things went each day, it is an added incentive for resisting sin. A mentor's pure world-view may 'rub off' on their friend over time as they interact with other over time. But to really work, this mentor must be free an available to give time daily to the struggler. A Confession Father could carry out this role, but with their commitments it is very hard. A better option may be an older, spiritual and experienced servant who could be allocated to look after individuals intensively until they come out of their slavery.
- † **Paper Tiger.** The devil is very good at convincing us that he is unbeatable. He roars and terrifies the hope out of our hearts, keeping us in a frame of mind where we feel that sin is inevitable. "Don't even try to beat me", he boasts, "You know you're going to give in sooner or later". And we believe him. But the reality is that there is no substance behind this boast. The Bible quickly dispels his

power over the person in whom Christ dwells, and who dwells within Christ: “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4); “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4).

† **The Button.** Do I really love God? Can I still be His child if I continue to commit these sins? This is a test to determine whether I am a lost soul far from salvation or a struggling child of God: Imagine a little black box with a single red button on the top. Pressing that button will once and for all remove sexual sins from my life. Consider this: that will mean not only removing the sins, but all that I benefit from those sins, if they meet needs in my life, then they will do so no more, if they give me pleasure, they will do so no more, etc. Would I press the button?

- If my answer is no, then I am in trouble. That means that I have surrendered to sin and become its willing slave. I need to do major spiritual surgery on my heart, to reconsider my whole aim in life. If I don't, my salvation is genuinely in danger.
- But if I answer yes, then I am indeed still a loyal and loving child of God. I am willing to give up all that sin gives me, but I just haven't found out how yet. I need to keep fighting and struggling, as well as seeking new ways to overcome this temptation. I need to trust that sooner or later, God's grace will indeed carry me to victory.

† **The Wicked Slave Master:** An analogy ...Imagine an evil sorcerer who kidnaps you and chains you in his dungeon. To ensure his hold upon you, he laces your food with a very addictive drug so that you become dependent on it. Then, for entertainment, every now and then when the fancy takes him, he stops lacing the food for a day or two until you are craving the drug. Then he brings you out of the dungeon with a heavy iron chain around your neck, and amuses himself by dangling little delicacies (chocolates or lollies) infused with the drug before your face. But he doesn't give them to you so easily! No, he makes you do tricks to earn them. Sometimes just silly tricks. Sometimes totally demeaning and unthinkable acts. And he laughs at how far you are willing to go to get that little delicacy, exulting in his complete power over you! But the longer you are in his power, the more do you lose your self-respect and your humanity. Instead, you become more like an animal, totally controlled by your urges and instincts, a slave of the sorcerer, to whom you have given this power over you by allowing yourself to become addicted. But any addiction can be overcome, if the addict is motivated enough. Rebel! Don't stand for this! Don't accept your chains – how long will you continue to be a slave? Fight for your freedom. Hate that sorcerer and hate the chains and the drug he has used to enslave them.

Useful Sayings

“Love God and do whatever you will” -St Augustine

“You cannot prevent a bird from landing on your head. You can, however, prevent it from building its nest there!” -HH Pope Shenouda III

Useful Stories

Delicious Rottenness

Anba Abraam, the saintly Bishop of Fayoum was renowned for his sincere ascetism. But this story reveals that he too had to fight the battle of the spirit against the flesh. One day, he found himself craving a dish of nicely cooked and seasoned quail. So he asked the cook to prepare the dish for him and place it on the dining table. He came, and sat before it, but did not eat any of it. He told the cook to leave it where it was. The next day, he did the same, and again the next. The food, of course, began to go off, and eventually, mould grew in it. Finally, he came and sat before the rotting mess and said to himself: "Go ahead, my soul, eat and enjoy your desire. Isn't this the meal that you craved?"

"You Strike and I'll Strike!"

The Paradise of the Fathers contains the story of a young monk who found himself beset with temptations of a sexual nature. He went to his spiritual father and confessed this weakness, explaining that he felt that he could not possibly be suited to the monastic life if he was so carnal. But his wise father told him not to give up, but to continue his spiritual life without interruption. If the devil managed to make him fall, he was to get up immediately and continue his prayers and fasts and metanias. "Every time devil strikes you down, you strike him back. You know how labourers installing a fence post in the ground will stand on opposite sides of the post, each with a heavy mallet, and take turns in striking the post to drive it into the ground? Well, you tell the devil, 'Every time you strike a blow, I too will strike a blow'."

The young man was doubtful, but chose to obey his spiritual father. After some time, he grew weary of this battle. He went to his father to complain and beg to be released to go back into the world, but his father insisted that he should keep fighting. "Remember," he told him, " 'Every time you strike a blow, I too will strike a blow' – be persistent. Be stubborn. Don't give in". Thus encouraged, the young monk went back to his battle.

Some years passed in this way, with the young monk getting support and encouragement from his spiritual father whenever he weakened and wanted to give up. Finally, after many years of spiritual battle, the young monk was praying when the devil suddenly appeared before him, looking angry and frustrated. "I came to tell you," he spat out, "that I will no longer be tempting you with sexual sins. But I want you to know that the only reason I am stopping that particular line of attack is that I do not wish to be the cause of you winning a heavenly crown for your struggles!" And with that, he vanished. From that day, the young monk had peace from the temptations that had plagued him for so long.

Pushing the Rock



A man kept having the same dream. In this dream, God would bring the man to a place where there was a very large rock, bigger than the man himself. God would say, "Your role is to push that rock". The man would obediently apply his shoulder to the rock and start pushing with all his might. Sometimes he would try different ways to push - higher or lower on the side of the rock, using his hands or lying down and pushing with his feet. Yet however hard he tried, however tired and sore he got, that rock would never move an inch. Night after night he would push as hard and as long as he could without once seeing a reward for his labour. But he was happy, for he was doing what God had asked of him.

One night, the dream was different. The devil came to him as he was pushing with all his strength and asked him, "Why are you trying to move that immovable rock?" The man answered, "Because this is the job God has given me, and I must obey him."

"Why do you waste your energy on such a useless exercise? Surely God is sitting up there laughing at you now! And what do you get out of all this? Nothing but sore muscles, aches, pains, bruises and scratches. It's not worth it! If there were any hope you might actually move the thing it might be different, but do you really think you can ever move a rock that size? If I were you, I wouldn't strain myself on a task that will never succeed. Why don't you just take life easy and enjoy yourself?" This seemed to make perfect sense to the man, so he took the advice and stopped trying so hard.

Every night, he would put less and less effort into trying to move that rock, until at least he would just sit with his back leaning against it and let his thoughts drift aimlessly...

And then, one night, God came back.

"Why are you not pushing against the rock as I asked you to?" He asked.

"Well", answered the man, "I really can't see any hope of shifting the thing - it's far too heavy for me. So I thought I might just rest instead until I got a chance to ask You for another job. I think there must have been some mistake."

"There was no mistake", said God. "When did I ever ask you to MOVE the rock?"

"But ... wasn't that my task?"

"I asked you to PUSH the rock - I never said anything about it MOVING."

"Now I'm really confused," said the man. "What's the point of pushing against a rock that I have no hope of moving?"

"My son, why do you not trust Me? Look now at your arms. Look at your legs and your shoulders and your chest. Were all those muscles there before you began this task? Where did all those strong muscles come from, if not from your efforts in PUSHING against the rock? THAT was the purpose of this job that I gave to you. When you were obedient to Me, you were growing stronger and stronger, but when you decided you knew better, you stopped getting stronger and started to become weak and flabby again. Trust My requests and obey them, even if you don't know where they will lead. For at least you know this: that I love you and will always do what is best for you. But please trust Me and obey My requests."

Further Reading

Books:

- "Life of Repentance and Purity" by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.
- "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" by Joshua Harris.
- "Spiritual Warfare" by HH Pope Shenouda III.
- "The Spiritual Man" by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.
- "The Spiritual Means" by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.