

## **Christ Confronts the Sexual Revolution**

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Rich Nathan

Christ Confronts the Culture Series

Judges 14 and 16

Does anyone have any doubt that we live in a sex-drenched culture? I don't know if there is any product any longer that isn't sold by associating the product with sex. Someone just sent me an advertisement in the mail. It was an advertisement for oatmeal. Now, I don't know what goes on in your mind, what associations you make when you think of oatmeal, but I can't think of a less sexy product than boiled oats and water. I mean, even if you add brown sugar or maple syrup to your bowl of oatmeal the word sex doesn't come to mind unless you are an advertising firm working for Quaker Oats. There literally was an ad in which they had this bowl of oatmeal, but in the background this guy grabbing what I hope was his wife, leaning her over backwards in this passionate kiss, and over the top of the bowl of oatmeal are the words "steamy, hot, delicious." I don't know about you, but every time my wife serves me a bowl of oatmeal, I mean, it is hard to restrain the passion!

Does any one of you doubt that we live in an utterly sex-drenched culture? Have you watched any situation comedy in the last 10 years? There is only one topic according to Hollywood writers that is funny – sex and sexual innuendoes and sexual suggestiveness, sexual situations. And of course never does sex on TV have consequences. There are no STDs, no pregnancies, no addictions, just pure unmitigated fun. Just this past week there was, apparently, a record set for the number of hits on a website and it had nothing to do with the impeachment of the President or some great national debate regarding schools or taxation. Apparently, Victoria's Secret was doing its annual lingerie show live on the Internet and there was so many hits that the service provider got overloaded and millions of people were frustrated because they couldn't view this lingerie show.

Does it strike any of you that in America right now our sexual appetite has gone off the rails just a little bit?

C.S. Lewis, the wonderful English Christian writer, once commented on the distortion that's taken place regarding our sexual appetites. He said imagine a country where you could get a crowd of hundreds of men who all gathered in this dark, filthy room to watch a person on a stage with a covered dish, who slowly lifts the covered dish to reveal a mutton chop or a piece of bacon. Would you not say that something about their appetite had gone awry? That these people had some exaggerated appetite for food?

Now the way you hear it from some of the experts and some of the critics, they would suggest that the basic problem in that country was that everyone was starving. That their appetite for food had been repressed. That people were living in denial. That a bunch of Puritans had clamped down on the natural appetite for food. But if you then went around the country and you discovered that everyone was fat and that there were food advertisements everywhere and

that in every home food was just spilling out of the cupboards. And food was pouring out of the refrigerators. You practically had to wear a construction hat because food was constantly falling on your head. You might say, "My goodness, this group of people has allowed their appetite for food to get completely out of hand."

Now, of course, we don't sit around watching a plate of food being dangled in front of us in a dark room. But Americans are just as obsessive when it comes to our sexual appetite. And in a sex-drenched culture, what is amazing to me is that people still have the chutzpah (that's a nice Yiddish word), the unbelievable gall to suggest that we Americans are sexually repressed – that we have too many standards and too many taboos, that we live in a Puritanical uptight, nearly Victorian, culture. I think to myself, what universe is this person living in?

The story we are going to look at today is a biblical story about a super hero. It is about someone who is larger than life. His name was Samson. His resume reads a lot like Superman's. He killed a lion with his bare hands. He slaughtered 30 Philistines who had plotted against him. He defeated a 1000-man band of enemies with the jawbone of a donkey. He destroyed the city gates of Gaza by lifting them up, post and all, and carrying them up a nearby hill.

But what we are going to find in the story of Samson and what I am going to talk with you about today is that just as Superman had his particular weakness, he was vulnerable to kryptonite, Samson had a chink in his armor too. He had a vulnerability, a weakness that sapped his strength and ultimately destroyed his relationship with God. The chink in Samson's armor was very simply lust, sensuality, a lack of discipline of his sexual appetite.

I won't ask for a show of hands, but is there anyone here who can identify with the chink in Samson's armor? Is there anyone here who could say, "You know, the place of vulnerability in my life, the chink in my armor, the place where I am regularly being drawn down and drawn away from the place I feel really good about, the place where I violate my standards is in the area of sex." There are few things that have caused more pain or more shame than our sexual pasts. I know this is a tender topic for many of us.

Well, we are going to look at this chink in a super hero's armor as we look at the story of Samson. I have called today's talk, "Christ Confronts the Sexual Revolution." Let's pray.

Let's take a look real briefly at the life of Samson. If you have a Bible I would like you to open up to Judges 13 where we read,

"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord so that the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, 'You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.'"

Now Samson was born at a time of great crisis in the nation of Israel. As it says in verse 1, they were dominated by their enemies the Philistines for 40 years. But then there is this note of expected hope. God is sending a deliverer, a super hero, to release the people from their bondage to their enemies.

I want you to learn this lesson. It is really possible to start off extraordinarily well, to be devoted to God and have all the best intentions in the world, and yet, end badly. A great start doesn't in any way guarantee a strong finish. Here is Samson, he is born into a godly home. His parents prayed for a child. His father and mother appear to love God. His own birth came about as a result of an angelic appearance. This young man had all the advantages, a great start. You talk about being born with a silver spoon in your mouth. He had all the advantages seemingly and is blessed by God. Look down in verse 24, "The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him when he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol."

I read a leadership study a few years ago. Someone surveyed all of the leaders in the Bible and found that only 1 out of 4 finished well. 1 out of 4. That means if you look at the person to your left and the person to your right and the person in front of you and include yourself, if those odds held true in your life, only one of you will have a strong intimate, close, warm relationship with God when you are old. The rest of the folks, according to this statistic, will just sort of dim out. Of course, I wouldn't be pastoring if I weren't a person who believed in trying to beat the odds. I wouldn't be pastoring if I didn't believe that we can influence the statistics in a positive direction and that those of you who have an active life with God can grow and continue in that active life with God 20 years from now, 40 years from now. And that those of you who don't have an active life with God right now, I would not be pastoring if I didn't believe that you can begin this very day to start a warm, intimate relationship with God.

But clearly, teenagers, you need to hear this, the fact that you grow up in a godly home, in a church-going family, doesn't at all guarantee that you are going to finish well unless we deal with major weakness in our life. And adults, the fact that you are right now in a relationship with God does not mean that you will continue to experience warm intimacy with the Lord. Beginning well doesn't guarantee finishing well especially when we allow issues to remain unaddressed. And we see that in the life of Samson, especially when we don't address the chink in our armor or the Achilles Heal – whether it is a love of money or unhealed anger or as we read about today, undealt with sexual problems.

Let's read on.

"Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, 'I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.' His father and mother replied, 'Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?'"

Now God had made it very plain. There was an absolute regarding his prohibition against intermarriage between God's people, the Israelites, and all the nations surrounding them. God said, regarding the intermarriage of his people

with the surrounding nations, “No, absolutely not. It is prohibited.” But Samson was living in a day when there was a breakdown of the Lord’s absolutes, and we read this refrain throughout the book of Judges, “In those days, everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” The days of the Judges were days of moral relativism in which everyone decided for themselves how they personally felt about a particular moral choice. The days of the Judges were very much like our own day when we have seen an erosion of absolutes. And nowhere is this clearer than in the area of sexuality. The old rule found in the Bible regarding when was it time to have sex was very clear. The old rule, as taught to us by the Lord, could be expressed to a 3-year old. The time that it is right to have sex is on your wedding night and not a day before – no exceptions, no fuzziness, and no huge ethical debate. When was it right to have sex? The old rule that was informed by biblical morality was very straightforward. It is right to have sex on your wedding day and not a day before. The biblical rule was absolutely straightforward. Flee fornication. Abstain from any kind of sexual expression outside of marriage.

Do you know what the new rule is that our culture teaches our kids? Ellen Goodman, who was writing in Ms. Magazine, quoted a woman who was trying to teach a new morality to her 13-year old. This woman said, “We are trying to communicate a situational norm like sex is OK under certain circumstances,

- ... if you both really want to
- ...if you both think you will be in each other’s lives for a while
- ...if you are responsible
- ...if you use birth control
- ...if you practice safe sex
- ...if you are old enough
- ...if you won’t get hurt
- ...if this will express commitment and love”

Imagine two teenagers, or two adults, embracing each other in a dark room at night. They are sitting on a sofa alone and there is that moment of maybe, that moment of moral choice – should we go farther or not? Two co-workers are strongly attracted to each other but are not married to each other. Maybe one or both are married to other people, but there is this attraction – there is this moment of maybe. Should we go any farther? The hormones are kicking in. When those teens are sitting on the sofa embracing, when those co-workers are attracted to each other; when there is that opportunity at a hotel bar, what do you think will be a more useful guide for your behavior? The 2000 year old Biblical rule or the new morality? Let me right now engage in a calculus of the following fourteen factors:

- ...will this make me whole?
- ...will this express commitment?
- ...do I really want to?
- ...will I be practicing safe sex?
- ...will this lead to respect?
- ...can I be loving?

My goodness, when the hormones kick in, friends, you can hardly remember your name—you talk about a paper-thin barrier to the expression of all of our lust.

Do you want to understand how morally confused American culture is as we enter the new millenium? Stanford University, one of the elite institutions in our country, the trainer of future leaders, future Supreme Court Justices, future Senators and Congresspersons and Presidents – Stanford University decided to aggressively stamp out date rape. And so they required every freshman to go through this consciousness raising process to understand that no means no. Now Stanford has some very extreme perspectives on what date rape is. They found that 80% of the women on campus had been date raped, although over  $\frac{3}{4}$  didn't even know they had been raped. In Stanford's perspective any pressure on the will, any persuasion or seduction or even, in one example, a moonlit night, could be the equivalent of date rape.

Well, Stanford has aggressively decided to put all of its institutional power behind attempting to stamp out date rape. Has Stanford become Puritanical? Have they adopted the old rule – when is it right to have sex, on your wedding night and not a day before? No, because Stanford has co-ed showers, co-ed bathrooms. They have free condom distribution days. There are condom dispensers in every dormitory, and the Dean of Student Life at Stanford boldly announced, "Abstinence is simply unrealistic and unattainable for students at Stanford University."

Or, as our former Surgeon General said, "Everybody is opposed to sex outside of marriage and, yet, every body does it. All I am saying is 'Get real.'"

Now we see in the story of Samson that it is the parents' attempt, at least initially, to influence his decision. They say, "Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She is the right one for me." (His parents did not know this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines, for at that time they were ruling over Israel).

Verse 4 doesn't mean that God approved of Samson's choice, but rather we see here the absolute sovereignty of God that in the providence of God he can even use a person's sin or wrong choices while the individual will always lose as a result of sin. Sometimes God will use a leader's sin for another purpose. But the sad thing regarding Samson's parents is that they give in to his demand.

Verse 5, "Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and his mother."

I want to say a few words to those of you who are parents today. You have more influence in your kids' lives, and especially regarding what your kids decide to do sexually, than you realize. I don't care who you are or what your kid is like. Survey after survey of kids elementary school kids, junior high school kids, high school kids, and college kids indicate that parents have incredible influence regarding what their kids do particularly in the area of sex.

Yes, we live in a sex-drenched culture.

Yes, there has been an erosion of absolutes.

Yes the moral bottom of our culture has fallen out.

But parents, you don't have to passively drift downstream with the culture or even with the forcefulness of your child's demands.

"Everybody is doing it, Mom."

"Everybody is going to that party."

"Everyone is going to that sleepover."

"Everyone dresses like this."

"Everyone is going out with someone."

"Everyone stays out all night on prom night."

"Everyone listens to this kind of music."

"Everyone has these types of posters."

Parents, you do not have to passively drift downstream with the culture. You absolutely can make a difference regarding whether your children become sexually active before marriage. And parents, you can make a difference if your children have become sexually active to restore them to a place of abstinence and to communicate to them that because they have fallen, they don't have to keep living there.

You say, "What should we do?"

Parents, I don't think you can talk too early to your children about sex, about what is right and wrong, about giving them the simple absolute rule regarding sexuality. When my son was 5-6 years old, I talked straight to him and we didn't use all these euphemisms for body parts. We called body parts what they were. Don't worry about telling too much – not in this culture.

You say, "What would I talk to my kids about? I don't know what to tell them."

Here is something you can tell them. Tell them that if they go to their wedding night as a virgin, they are nearly twice as likely to stay married than if they go to their wedding night a non-virgin. There is a recent study that compared virgins and non-virgins and the longevity of their marriages. Son, daughter, if you wait, if you save yourself for your spouse, you are twice as likely to have a successful marriage than if you don't wait.

Tell your child the truth about living together outside of marriage. According to one university study, cohabiting partners were 80% more likely to separate or divorce than were couples who had not lived together before marriage.

Here is something you can tell a teenager. If you want to just about guarantee that your relationship with your girlfriend or your boyfriend will not result in lifelong marriage, live with them before you get married. The statistics are absolute, the evidence is overwhelming. You have about a 1 out of 5-6 chance of ending up in lifelong marriage if you live together before marriage. Most relationships in which people cohabit end up breaking up before marriage. And those that proceed into marriage are far less stable than marriages where people didn't first cohabit together.

Tell your kids marriage is the one thing you can tell you children that you can't try on like a shoe before you step into it. This idea that we will check out our compatibility, we will learn about whether this is the right one – you can guarantee failure because you are sowing into the relationship a lack of commitment from the beginning.

Do you want to talk to your teenager about sex? How about talking with them about sexually transmitted diseases.

**FACTS FOR THE OVERHEAD:**

- **In the U.S. an estimated 15.3 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases occur each year – at least ¼ of them among teenagers.**
- **Of the top 11 reportable diseases in the U.S. in 1996, 5 are sexually transmitted – chlamydial infection, gonorrhea, AIDS, syphilis, and hepatitis B.**
- **Approximately 2/3 of people who acquire STDs in the U.S. are younger than 25.**
- **In the U.S. in 1994 approximately \$10 billion dollars were spend on major STDs (other than HIV/AIDS) and their preventable complications.**
- **Worldwide an estimated 333 million new cases of four curable STDs occurred in 1997.**

Or how about these stats:

- **At least 1 million cases of pelvic inflammatory disease occur annually in the U.S. every year.**
- **And of all infertile women, at least 15% are at least infertile because of STDs.**

In other words, teen, if you want to play around before you get married, you have a very high risk of getting a disease and, indeed ending up, if you are a girl, being infertile – not being able to bear children.

Tell your teen that when they join themselves to someone sexually, a part of themselves is permanently joined to that other person and cannot be given to their spouse.

How about talking to your teen about the pain of separation once they have gone over the brink. How about talking to your teen, if you are a Christian, about the affect that sex will have on your teenager's relationship with God. "Son/Daughter, if you want to destroy your relationship with God, just start having sex."

Here is what one guy wrote in a letter. "I used to be a real church-goer until I met a girl that I liked. I kept telling myself and God the most that would happen would be that I would kiss her. Well one thing led to another and we ended up having sex. The first 2-3 times I felt really guilty, and I repented and told God that I would never do it again. Now we have sex and I don't feel guilty any more, but I feel like my separation from God is permanent."

Parents, tell you kids to wait. Do you know teen sexual activity is now the lowest in nearly 3 decades? For the first time since the 60's, according to the Center for Disease Control, 75% of high school students are virgins.

Parents, don't send a double message to your teens. Don't be like Samson's parents. "We don't want you to do it, but we don't expect you to follow our counsel." Or, "If you do, let's make sure you practice safe sex." Be clear. Be firm. Communicate to your teens the absolutes of God.

And if your child has stepped over the line and has been sexually active, you can communicate to them the restorative power of the Lord and the ability to now abstain and gain what I might call a secondary virginity. We can't technically be virgins again, but we can be restored. Some young adults feel, "Well, I have stepped over the line and blown it, I might as well keep living this way." Parents, you can communicate the restorative power of the Lord.

But Samson didn't listen and his parents were eroded by the culture. And so in verse 7 we read, "He went down and talked to the woman and he liked her." Another translation says, "He went down and talked to the woman and she looked good to him."

Do you want a definition of lust? Here is the definition of lust. I see it and I want it. Even though God tells me it is something that I shouldn't have, even though God has drawn limits for sexual desire, we are not content with what we have or with what God would provide for us; we have an appetite for more. We want something more than our spouses. We crave something more than our singleness allows for. I see it and I want it.

And of course this is not just in the area of sex that we experience lust. If you look at the magazine covers in the grocery stores you see that every single cover is designed to create an appetite for what isn't yours yet. It could be a car—the latest hottest sports car. It could be financial security. Or it could be a woman whose pouty lips are open on the cover and she is basically saying, "Wouldn't you like to mentally undress me?" Anymore it could just as easily be a guy who is showing off his abs.

There is a notion in a good deal of American culture right now that says, "What is wrong with a little bit of lust? It gives a thrill to life. There is no harm adding some thrill to an otherwise gray day."

You know, there are a lot of things that are thrilling. I mean if you are swimming in the ocean and a large shark comes toward you, I guarantee you your heart will race and your blood will pump faster. There are very few things that are more thrilling than an encounter with a large shark in the water. But that encounter could kill you. And person after person has discovered in their lives that cultivating lust, desire for what God says no to, is more deadly than a shark attack in the water. By entertaining lust and acting on lust, we actually increase desire in our lives.

C.S. Lewis was marvelously helpful in his children's story called "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" in describing how lust grows. In the story there is a witch who gives this food called Turkish delight to a little boy named Edmund. And this Turkish delight is so delicious that Edmund can't stop eating it, but it is the kind of food that creates an appetite for more food. Instead of satisfying his appetite, Turkish delight only increased his appetite.

Do you know that every time you act on lust, giving in sexually to what God says no to, you increase your appetite for more. Lust is never satisfied. And nowhere do we see this truth played out more tragically than in the area of pornography. American culture treats pornography as no big deal, as if pornography actually brings about a lowering of sexual desire. But any person who has been bitten by the pornography bug will tell you that pornography is one



of the most addicting things that they have ever been exposed to. 97% of Christian men who have been exposed to pornography say that their exposure was positively harmful. 70% of Christian men said that their exposure to pornography became addictive. It is like Turkish delight. And the younger that someone is exposed to pornography, the more addicting, the more shaping it is on the person's thoughts about sex, the person's future sexual behavior, on their ability to find satisfaction in a married relationship. Many, many men and some women find themselves absolutely hooked, their wills nailed fast, they feel unable to pry themselves loose because they have given in repeatedly to lust.

Well, the story of Samson goes on and this particular relationship brought him all kinds of heartache. Eventually, this Philistine woman is taken away from him and Samson returns to his career as a super hero. And then in chapter 16, 20 years later, we read,

"One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her."

He has gone through incredible heartache with this Philistine woman. He opened the door to lust, and it practically killed him. And then he gets hooked up with a prostitute. How do you explain this for a man who supposedly has a walk with God?

Let me give you an illustration here. You know what is going on in the secret recesses of a person's soul is often the cultivation of lust. Sometimes I picture lust in our souls as being like a toxic waste dump where a person decides they are just going to keep this lust in this little storage tank of their souls. They are just going to keep this little nuclear waste growing there. And by lust, let me tell you I am only talking about this voracious kind of appetite. I mean a secret emotional attachment to an old boyfriend or an old girlfriend, a fantasy about a co-worker, a little bit of flirtatiousness with a boss or secretary – and that lust sits there like toxic waste and because it glows and provides a certain amount of thrill inside – you have this secret little life, this secret little fantasy that you can tap into and it gives life a warm glow. I just feel so alive with this little emotional attachment.

But you know there is something about toxic waste. It doesn't remain forever in the container. It starts eating through the walls, and if it is not cleared up, after a while you are going to have that waste seep through the container. So maybe for a little while you can contain your lust through little fantasies and occasional involvements with pornography, watching things you shouldn't watch, and imagining these little romantic flings. But you are not going to stay at that level of danger very long. The waste in your soul will seep through.

Samson carried around lust in his heart for a very long time before it ate through the wall of his soul. He had this corrosion in his soul that was never cleaned out.

Let me ask a personal question. How many of you men and women have toxic waste in your souls that have never been cleaned out? How many of you are carrying around secret thoughts, secret choices, and secret habits that are just eroding you out from the inside. How many of you can trace a weak vein of lust back to puberty and before and it has not been dealt with?

People say, "What is wrong with free sex?"

I will tell you what is wrong with free sex. I will tell you what is wrong with the sexual revolution. It can be summed up with three words: too many victims. Too many broken marriages. Too many sexual addicts. Too many sexually transmitted diseases. Too many abortions. Too many pregnancies outside of wedlock. Too many broken lives. Too much shame. God gave us the clean rules of the Bible because he loves us and wants to keep us safe from pain. Friends, obeying God makes sense.

If you want to read pain, read excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s documentary in which he describes the incredible anguish and self-hatred that he felt because he kept giving in to lust. Here is a good man, a man that I believed God raised up to speak a message of justice to our country, and this good man was eaten alive by toxic waste in his soul.

What you see in Samson's life is that he is getting harder and harder. Before he wanted to marry a woman who was off limits. Now, as his conscience gets seared and we see the same thing in our lives, as his conscience gets hardened and callused, he is willing to go farther and farther away from the Lord, and he ends up with a prostitute.

And in ch. 16 we finally meet up with the woman who was to prove to be Samson's ultimate downfall – of course, her name is Delilah. And so we read in Judges 16,

Verse 4, "Some time later he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah."

The Valley of Sorek was a place for growing choice red grapes for wine. The place speaks to us of sensuality, pleasure. Samson goes to a place known for sensuality and pleasure. He finds Delilah, who was going to be Samson's next conquest. Verse 5 is really interesting. It says,

"The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, 'See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength...'"

They understood the power of Samson's great weakness – it was lust and sensuality. It was the fact that he continually gave himself over to sexual sin. I can tell you the enemy of your soul knows the chink in your armor. Anything that you have that is a chink in your armor, any dark vein that runs down and hasn't been dealt with and brought to the light, anything that you keep cultivating, I can tell you the enemy of your soul knows your weakness. And here these enemies are trying to figure out the secret of Samson's strength, and so they tell Delilah to lure him, "See if you can lure him," entice him. The word literally means, "see if you can find an opening and draw him in."

When I think about luring a person it brings to mind what a fisherman would do in drawing in a fish. Now, I am not in any way a fisherman, but I know fishermen use different baits to lure a fish who is quietly sitting on the bottom of a pond. A fisherman will drop bait into the water according to the nature of the fish and its appetite. So people put bits of dough or bloody bait or use a triple hook. If they are catching trout they might use a hand-tied fly or salmon eggs. The lure. The setting of the hook in the lure.

And so what we have hanging on the hook for Samson is Delilah.

What would hook you into violating God's absolutes? What would hook you so that you step over the line? How could Satan bait a hook for you?

Now, I know that a lot of good people are not on the make. They are not looking around for trouble. Maybe you would be opened up by friendship, just being friends with someone—sharing with them. Maybe you would be opened up by getting involved too closely in a ministry with someone – a worship ministry, children's ministry, prayer ministry, or by spending lots of time with an individual. Maybe you would be opened up by trying to help someone. Maybe you like to think of yourself as a sensitive counselor and the trap would be set for you by getting into a rescuing relationship with the opposite sex in which someone would pour their feelings out to you. Maybe you would be lured by finding someone who is different than your husband or wife, who really understands you. Maybe your vanity would hook you.

Do you know where the hook could be set for you? Do you have enough self-knowledge regarding why you would succumb to sexual sin?

Some people are lonely. Listen, sex is not the answer for loneliness. Sex outside of marriage only increases your feelings of loneliness. Greater involvement in healthy, life-giving non-sexual relationships that will end your loneliness, but not sex.

Some people go after sex to build their sagging self-esteem. If you want to destroy your self-esteem, have sex outside the bounds that God set for it. You are not going to feel better about yourself by violating your conscience, you are going to feel worse.

And you are not going to relieve tension or stress or depression by having sex outside of marriage, you are just going to increase it. Do you think that God is going to allow you to find peace outside the doing of his will? Do you think that God will allow you to find blessing when you don't listen to what he tells you?

Do you know where the hook is for you? Do you know yourself well enough to know where your weaknesses are?

Well, once Delilah entices Samson she ties him up. He is entangled ultimately. Samson reveals the secret of his strength to her. In verse 17 he says,

"So he told her everything. No razor has ever been used on my head, he said, because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

His strength lay in his relationship with God and the fact that he was set apart to God from birth. And now he reveals the secret of his strength. She cuts his hair off. And verse 20, I think is one of the saddest verses in the entire Bible. It says,

"Then she called, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you.' He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.'"

And here is one of the most tragic phrases that I know of in the Bible,

"But he did not know that the Lord had left him."

Friends, there is only so long that we can be half-hearted in our relationship with God. There is only so long that we can carry around the toxic waste of lust in

our hearts. For a long, long period of time God would allow himself the indignity of being put in second place, fifth place or tenth place in our lives. But I have watched this over and over again, at a certain point, God withdraws his presence from a person and even gifted people who started off great and had everything going for them, even gifted people discover the anointing leaves. Their teachings don't have any effect anymore. There is no power of their evangelism. There is no ability to counsel with effectiveness or pray for the sick or hear God's voice. At a certain point, the half-hearted approach to God just stops working and the presence of God leaves. A person shakes themselves like they did before and they go through all the gyrations and the outward stuff and nothing happens.

One of the most powerfully gifted men I have ever met in terms of moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, gave himself over, like Samson, to sensuality. I have seen few people operate with his level of spiritual gifting. There was undiscovered in his life this sensuality, this dark thing in his soul, this toxic waste dump. What occurred as you watched this man's ministry was a decreasing level of effectiveness. He was going through all the same gyrations. He shook himself as he did before, but he didn't know that the Lord had left him. And the last several months before he was uncovered, you noticed a major change in his ministry. Lots of showmanship, lots of acting, but there wasn't any anointing on him or his teaching. There was no power.

What happened? God pulled the plug.

Now, let's talk briefly about healing. God wants to help every one of us with the chinks in our armor. No one of you is hopeless. You do not have to lay down in your sin and say, "Well, I have gone too far. This has gone on too long in my life." The toxic waste dump in all of our souls can be cleansed.

Listen, most times God is not going to just throw a switch in your brain and say, "OK, I am going to completely fix you in one moment. If you come to me I will throw the switch. Though you have been living in a pattern of life for years and giving yourself over to certain kinds of activities, in a moment I am just going to instantaneously change you." Sometimes that happens, but mostly it doesn't. Because God wants in the end to say to you, "Well done thou good and faithful servant," and if he just threw a switch, he wouldn't be able to say that. He wants you to learn the joy of walking after him. Of willingly following him even though this relationship with God is hard. Even though this thing called discipleship is difficult. God wants you to learn how to be a disciple in your own right and so he lays out some steps.

You say, "What are they, Rich?"

Start seeing sexual sin as dangerous. See that lust and the toxic waste of lust is unacceptable. Say to yourself no level of lust is acceptable in my life. It is not as if I can live with a low level. Because friends, a low level will grow. It will take over and spread and erode your soul. Stop rationalizing your sin. Stop saying, "Well, it's not that bad," or "That everyone else does it," or "I deserve a break," or "My wife [husband] doesn't understand me," or "This is just not a time in my life where I can have sex in the way that God desires it." You have to be ruthless and say, "No level of sin is acceptable. It's all toxic waste." We are going for zero contamination of the soul.

The second – battle your sin at the front door. Paul's advice to Timothy was to flee youthful lust. I have found that with respect to every temptation in my life, if I meet it at the front door, I can win. But if I let temptation into my house, I have a really hard time keeping it out of the study, the kitchen, and the bedroom. Once temptation enters – the temptation to get angry, the temptation to gossip, the temptation to lust – once it enters through the front door, I lose. You have to battle temptation on the porch of your mind and not in the bedroom of your mind.

So you flee at the front end when you see yourself going in a certain direction; you cut it off. You can practice thought control. If there are places you can't go, don't go there. If you need to quit your job because of a relationship, you quit your job. If you can't be alone in your apartment with your boyfriend without jumping in the sack, don't go to your apartment. Jesus said, "Get rid of this. Cut your right hand off if you have to. Put your eye out, if you have to."

If there is a place that lures you to pornography, you avoid the street. You avoid that area of town. If there are TV shows you can't watch, don't watch them. If you need to cut the cable today, cut the cable. Why ruin your relationship with God so that you can have a few cable TV stations. If there are some programs you can't watch, cut the cable. Make no provisions. Battle sin at the front door. Zero tolerance. Battle sin at the front door.

Third, I would encourage you to tell on yourself. If you are having a problem, in terms of your thoughts about another person in the church or at work, or if you are having a problem with pornography, or a problem with a relationship, there is low level toxic waste in your soul or high level – tell on yourself. Find a safe relationship with someone of the same sex or with your spouse and tell on yourself. Satan loves to work in the darkness, but he flees from the light. If you get into a habit of exposing your inner being, Satan will not be able to isolate you behind walls of guilt and shame where this stuff festers.

If you are sleeping with someone outside of a marital relationship, tell on yourself. Tell a pastor. Tell a Christian friend. We have several wonderful support groups for men who are struggling with sexual sin and for women who are likewise struggling. We have information out in the lobby, pick up a card before you leave tonight.

Let me give you a fourth disinfecting prayer. There are good prayers to pray that pours Lysol over the infection of lust. It is good to pray to God,

"God, I have sinned against you and unless you come to rescue me I don't have the strength, I don't have the power. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one."

It is good to pray a prayer of weakness and dependence upon the Lord. But if you find yourself emotionally entangled with some one who is not your spouse and you are drawn to this person and you have developed an unhealthy attachment, here is a prayer to pray. It is a prayer by David Brainard, who was a missionary to the Indians.

"God, make me utterly repulsive to the opposite sex."

Do you want to kill an emotional entanglement? Pray that you would be physically repulsive to that other person. See, praying, "God, free me" just won't do it because you can still enjoy the attention and like the fact that this other

person is attached to you. That this other guy still seems to enjoy you. That this other woman seems to enjoy you. There is pride underneath it. While I am praying, "Lord, free me" I am enjoying their attention. But if you pray, "Lord, make me repulsive to this other person," trust me, you will absolutely kill your emotional entanglement. If you are serious about wanting to end an emotional affair, you pray the prayer that David Brainard prayed.

Fifth, of course, cultivate the relationship with your own spouse, if you are married. Proverbs 5 tells us "To drink water from our own well." Nurture a relationship with your own spouse. If you are not married, you don't have to use sex to heal loneliness.

Sixth, you might want to make a list and write out all the consequences of falling.

What has this thing done in my life?

What has it done to my marriage?

What has it done to my relationship with God?

What has this thing done to my witness?

What has it done to my effectiveness?

What has it done to my self-esteem?

What has this done in terms of my sense of joy?

Last thing: Cultivate your relationship with God. If you are struggling with a sexual problem in your life, get your mind off sex for a while and just cultivate your relationship with God. Build yourself up in the Lord. Spend time with God. Read the Bible. Worship. Listen to worship CDs. Listen to teaching tapes. Pray. The Bible says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

Let's pray.