

Guarding, Girding, and Guiding

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober . . . as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” [1 Peter 1:14-15]

The great preacher Thomas Brooks once said, “Saving grace makes a man as willing to leave his lusts as a slave is willing to leave his galley, or a prisoner his dungeon, or a thief his bolts, or a beggar his rags.” This statement provides an appropriate introduction to our subject.

In Matthew 5, our Lord exposed the self-righteousness and carnal interpretations of Scripture by the Pharisees that had been accepted as truth from “them of old time” [v.21]. In their minds they had fulfilled the Law with ceremony and tradition — rules and regulations. Jesus continued with His disclosure of their hypocrisy by pointing out the connection between the impure motive and the resulting action. He was saying that at the heart of the act of murder and adultery was an angry heart and a lustful look. That said, an important aspect that must be included in any discussion of adultery, or specifically lust with the intent to satisfy an evil desire, is that of the imagination.

Within the human mind is a wonderful capacity to imagine. God has given mankind the remarkable and unique ability to be creative, to plan, and conceive ideas via an extraordinary imagination. This is evident through the art world, music, literature and many other avenues that incite the creative mind to wonder. Charles Spurgeon once said, “Holy wonder will lead you to grateful worship.” However, as we shall see, the imagination must be guarded and controlled, which requires self-discipline.

Starting in Genesis 6:5 Scripture records the following: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Again in Jeremiah: “But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” [Jer. 7:24]. Generally speaking, the words “heart” and “mind” in Scripture are interchangeable. It is within the imagination that sin is conceived and fantasized; it is where sin is energized. Sin must be controlled in the imagination where lust is conceived.

The book of James provides some insight regarding lust and the root problem: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” [Ja. 1:14-15]. According to this verse, the problem is not our exposure to sin; nor our environment, as much of our culture is teaching today; nor that sin is present in the world; the problem is — you and me. The problem is not outside of us, but inside of us. Our imagination is the place where sin and temptation are entertained, thought is energized into fantasy, the emotions and will are activated to produce the action. The imagination ‘plays out’ the sin and entralls the heart and passions before it conceives in action. It is where “provision is made” to carry out the act, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” [Rom. 13:14]

Sin finds its entrance through “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” [1Jn. 2:16]. At this point two thoughts come to mind; sin will bring satisfaction, but of what kind? Let Scripture answer this fundamental question: “[Moses,] chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” [Heb. 11:25]. The Greek word for “season” makes reference to that which is purely temporal. In other words, sin does bring satisfaction — temporary or momentary satisfaction. The second thought is that sin dishonors God and violates our relationship with Him: “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me” [Prov. 1:28]. Note at the very outset that the reference is to two thoughts that enter the human mind, NOT two options or choices. Choosing sin is NEVER an option.

How do we control or guard our imagination? Is it clear that if the battle is lost in the imagination, it is lost as well in the affections and desires, and subsequently in actions? Let this study close with some suggestions. An old illustration goes something like this: an Indian had two dogs, one white, one black. An argument ensued regarding which one would win in a fight. Everyone had their own answer, but the owner stated his simply, “The one I feed the most.” Although this illustration should never be used as a formula to establish doctrine or justify sinful behavior, it does serve to answer this question: how do we insulate and protect our imagination? By constantly feeding and informing our minds with the Word of God. Consider

the very familiar words of Joshua 1:8 : “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.” In a present-day culture that is continually developing a new moral system, it is vital that the Christian hide the Word in his heart. Television talk shows parade every known sin and vice that can be conceived in the heart of mankind and yet, most of them conclude their program with no apparent sense of right or wrong and leave the audience to determine their own sense of values. We must protect our minds by constantly meditating on Scripture — by “letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly” [Col. 3:16] — yes, to the point of saturation! Discipline your mind with not just what is good, but with what is very best as the Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 1:10: “that you may be able to discern what is best.”

Without question, it is important what we feed our minds in order to shield our imagination from the “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” [1Jn. 2:16]. This is only possible as we let our minds dwell on the following: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable . . . excellent or praiseworthy” [Philip. 4:8]. When it comes to the battle with the lust of the flesh and eyes, let Scripture ultimately guide us: “Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?” Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched” [Prov. 6:27-28]? Proverbs 5:8 from the Living Bible makes the warning clear with regard to lust and temptation: “Run from her! Don’t go near her house!” Meditate on the Word “day and night” [Ps. 1:2]. “Take the sword of the Spirit” [Eph. 6:17] so that it becomes “a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path” [Ps. 119:105]. As athletes discipline their bodies for only an earthly prize, so let us be on guard for the sake of the heavenly prize.

— Submitted by Chuck Wetzel
December 2020

Prayer: “Lord, grant that we might become so saturated with Thy Word that it shall become to us safety and protection — invincible in every circumstance of life.”