

# Playing With Fire

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As a boy growing up in the 1930s, I lived in a house built about the turn of the century that had built-in accessories that homes today just do not have. Our kitchen boasted a flour bin built into the kitchen counter that would hold a fifty-pound sack of flour. Naturally, my grandmother used to make some of the most delicious cakes ever made.

The house also had a cooler built into its side. No, this was not an ice box—which is much more modern—but a cooler. A cooler, a cupboard built next to an outside wall, had four shelves made with slats spaced a half inch apart. At the bottom of the cooler on the outside wall was a screened opening to the outside, and a similar one opened at the top about four feet higher. In principle, the cool air flowed in through the bottom, and the warm air escaped out the top. This unit would keep milk fresh for three days, even in warm weather.

Our kitchen also contained a laundry tub to float my boats in—and every Saturday, wash my clothes in—but the one kitchen item that I really enjoyed was our stove. It stood on four long, spindly legs, and over each burner sat a stove lid that had to be removed with a "lifter" before the burner could be lit. The "lifter" was a metal handle inserted into a notch recessed in the stove lid.

I liked the stove so much because at about age ten I had learned to bend and blow glass tubing. I spent many enjoyable afternoons at it, but one afternoon I learned a valuable but painful lesson. Bringing my glass tubing into the kitchen, I lifted the stove lid with the lifter, setting it to the side of the burner, not realizing I had left the lifter handle extended over the flame area. After lighting the stove, I bent a little glass, then noticing the lifter handle was in my way, reached to move it.

By this time the handle had almost become red hot, and I grabbed it firmly. At that moment, I heard the hiss of the lifter handle leaving its impression on the palm of my hand. The pain was excruciating, and I carried the evidence of my folly with me for many months.

## Fire and Sin

Solomon uses the analogy of burning oneself to describe sinning. "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?" (Proverbs 6:27-28).

He discusses sexual sins from verse 24 through the remainder of the chapter. This section is a warning to a young man to listen to the advice and instruction of his parents in this matter. Their counsel will, he says, "Keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot, a man is reduced to a crust of bread" (verses 24-26). Of course, these instructions apply to young women as well.

In verses 27-35, the subject changes to committing adultery. To paraphrase, as sure as one who takes fire into his bosom or walks upon live coals is burnt, so will he be found guilty who seduces his neighbor's wife! Society understands someone stealing because of starvation. That debt can be

repaid, but the sin of adultery can never be atoned for. The spouse who has been betrayed can never be entirely appeased, the deep wound can never be completely healed.

Sexual sins seem to have always plagued Israel. In Genesis 35:22, Reuben lay with his father's concubine Bilhah, an act that branded Reuben as unstable as water and cost him his rights as firstborn (Genesis 49:4). Numbers 25 shows us the result of Israel committing harlotry with the women of Moab. The result was a plague that caused the deaths of twenty-four thousand people!

David's lustful desire for Bathsheba led to the death of her husband, Uriah, and of their son from the adulterous union (II Samuel 11:1-12:23). In addition, it brought shame on David's house, Israel and God (II Samuel 11:11-14). As prophesied, David's concubines ("lesser wives") were later defiled (II Samuel 16:22), which played a part in the death of another son, Absalom, in his rebellious attempt to topple his father (II Samuel 18:14-15).

We can see the results of the sexual sins recorded throughout the Bible, but do we stop to consider the result of taking this kind of "fire" to us as a nation? What has it produced?

Pornography—in magazines, movies, books and even computer bulletin boards—floods the country. Unwed, teenage mothers are commonplace, filling our cities with fatherless children and costing the nation millions of dollars in welfare payments. Schools across the country hand out free condoms to students and teach them a sex-education curriculum that encourages "safe sex" rather than abstinence.

Divorce caused by sexual misconduct is an everyday occurrence, resulting in shame, broken homes and children without two parents in the home. Since 1970, the number of divorces in the U.S. per year has increased by 60 percent, and "In 1994 single-parent families are as common as two-parent families" (*Insight*, June 27, 1994, p. 19). In fact, in Southern California, where social trends often begin, the child with two parents is looked upon as unusual.

Sexually transmissible diseases, such as genital herpes, AIDS, chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis, are taking a tremendous toll on society. New AIDS cases are reported to have more than doubled to over 100,000 this year. Abortion kills millions of babies each year. All these ills run rampant in our society because of disobedience to God's perfect law concerning adultery and its related sins.

### **God's Instruction**

In His wisdom God set the standard for human sexuality in the Garden of Eden: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). He intended this wonderful gift, a physical relationship between a husband and wife, to help bind the marriage in tenderness and love. Through it children were to be produced, trained to understand and trust God as they grew up in His truth, marry and complete the cycle again.

Satan, who cannot reproduce himself, sees the handwriting of his defeat on the wall, and in his hatred he is doing all he can to bring man down with him. One of the first places he prefers to strike is the family, and what better means to its destruction than sex? Even in what we would consider "normal" marriages, the world's perverted influence can have an effect.

Knowing that in this end time Satan would be pulling out all the stops in destroying His plan for mankind, God recorded instructions in His Word to help us to fend off the Devil's attacks. As a church and as a nation, we need to go back to this wise and trustworthy source for the answers we need.

**"Flee sexual immorality"** (I Corinthians 6:18), or "Flee fornication," as the King James Version says, is the soundest of advice. The farther away from temptation we are, the safer we are.

When American soldiers went to Japan from Korea on "R & R" (rest & recuperation) many would visit the red-light districts, and one such area was just across "V.D. Bridge," an apt name. One of our men wanted to cross the bridge, and the girls from the other side wanted him to cross as well, pulling on his arm. His buddies, knowing why the bridge was named as it was, pulled on his other arm. His friends finally won this human tug-of-war, but at first the soldier who was saved screamed to be released so he could cross over. But as he moved farther away from the temptation, he thanked his friends for saving him from a terrible mistake.

How do we flee sexual immorality? More generally, how do we flee any of the sins and perversion that are only increasing in this end time?

Jesus explains the spiritual intent of the seventh commandment in Matthew 5:27-30. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in their heart" (verses 27-28). In effect, He stresses that the ball is in our court—we have to take action to avoid or handle the temptation. He insists that we deal as best as we can with the intent of His law and take proper steps not to allow ourselves to be trapped by sin.

How? He provides instruction: "And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (verses 29-30).

What is being said here? Are we to physically destroy these body parts that offend? Of course not! He has already said that the mind is where the sin takes place first. Therefore it is the mind that must be changed. We have to get our minds "out of the gutter."

Do you have cable or satellite television with the movie channels? Is the watching of that programming producing wrong fruit in your mind? Are we bringing the gutter into our living rooms? If it is, then to protect the mind, the cable has to go.

If alcohol is a problem, then do not allow it in the home, do not frequent the places where it is sold and do not associate with those who drink. If handling credit is a temptation and problem, cut up the credit cards and set up—and stick to—a budget. If the problem is smoking, do not allow cigarettes in the home and avoid where they are easily accessible.

The principle is plain. Whatever drags us down and causes us to sin should be—**MUST BE**—put as far from us as possible. *That is our physical part!*

## Another Step

Satan is satisfied with the condition of our nation and the world. It is easy for him to keep the pot stirred with most people, but we are trying to overcome it and be obedient to God. Because we are working to counter all his pulls and devices, Satan will work tirelessly to push our individual buttons to cause us to stumble. Thus, there is one more step, a *spiritual step*, we must take.

Whatever type of sin we fall into—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (I John 2:16)—we must go before God as we are told in James 4:6-10: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.* Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Overcoming sin is a difficult task, requiring great effort on our part. It will not go away just because we wish it. We are so accustomed to the lifestyle of this world that we do not see the dangers that accompany sin. The problem with taking fire to ourselves is that we cannot see the flames or feel its heat until it is too late. Because this fire is not evident to the eye or the sense of touch, we can be easily burned by it.

In the entertainments, books and magazines of this society, we do not see, for the most part, the penalties produced, the wretched results of sin. Thus, we do not see the urgent need to put out or take control of the temptation or sin that is affecting our mind (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13).

In a recent sermon, John Ritenbaugh said he felt we were at the beginning of the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9) and that time is short. If this is the case, we have little time to do the work of putting sin out of our lives. An old fishing saw we hear occasionally, "Are you going to fish or cut bait?" means "Are you going to be part of the action or sit on the sidelines?" It is time for all of us to "fish."

The scar left by the lifter on my right hand has long faded, and the hand looks fine, except it now looks a good deal older. In looking back over my life, I wish the other "burn" scars were gone as well. I wish I had been able to see the unseen fire and its dangers as I was growing up.

Though we all have scars, the deeds that produced them are forgotten by God upon our repentance. The scars that remain are for us to remember the lessons that we learned from being burned.

We who are the called at this end time can see the fire that can truly burn and destroy us, but seeing is not enough. ***We must take action.*** As we do our part and stay close to Him, be of good cheer, remembering that God will step in and do His part to quench the fire.