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The Church is the Bride of Christ: Part 2

The Beauty of the Bride

Scripture: Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-8

Sermon Series: *What is the Church?*

Topic: The Church, Sanctification



Introduction

The question before us is, “What is the Church?” Thus far, we have seen various answers to that question. Last week we learned that part of the answer to that question is that **the Church is the bride of Christ**. There are two implications to this truth. First, Jesus is a glorious groom. Second, the Church is his beautiful bride. We spent last week meditating on the glory of the groom. Today we will consider the beauty of the bride. Last week was about Jesus. This week is about us—the Church, his bride.

The Glory of the Groom

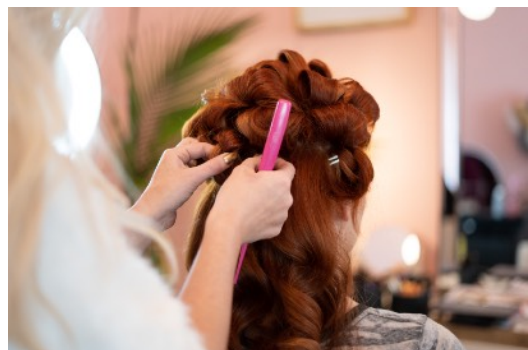
We learn that the Church is the bride of Christ from several New Testament (NT) passages of Scripture, such as 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Ephesians 5:25-37, and Revelation 19:6-9.¹ Jesus is the glorious groom. He is the husband of the church, who is his bride. Why is the groom glorious? Why is Jesus lovely? Last week I offered three reasons. He is glorious because of his physical appearance, because he first loved us, and because he has the power to provide all our needs.

I tried to help you see and savor the glory of Jesus. What is the church? **The church is those people who see and savor the glory of the groom**. The true Church are those who truly love Jesus. If you do not love Jesus, then you are not a member of the Church, even if your name is listed on the membership list of some particular local congregation. This is why I invited you to set aside some time to sit and write down why you love Jesus. Many of you did this and reported that you were blessed by having done so.

The Beauty of the Bride

Jesus is the most glorious groom. A glorious groom is worthy of a beautiful bride. *The bride, who loves her groom, will beautify herself for him.*

Consider how much time, effort, and money goes into getting ready for the wedding day. Frequently, for months in advance, there are diets to be embraced, dances to be practiced, facials to be had, as well as manicures and pedicures. Sometimes tanning is often involved. The hair is to be cut, curled, and bedazzled. *The bride who loves her groom, will do all she can to look her best on that big day.*



¹ There are many Old Testament passages that reference God as the husband of Israel, for example, the book of Hosea. **OTHERS???**

The same is true of the Church. The Church is the bride of Christ. If the Church loves her glorious groom, then she will do all she can to look her best on that day. If we, the Church—the people of God, truly love Jesus, then we will do all that we can do to make ourselves beautiful for Christ. *If you love Jesus, then you will leave sin.* Hear the words of Jesus.

John 14:15 (ESV)

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Love precedes obedience. You don't obey Christ first and then love him later. Love of Jesus precedes obedience to Jesus. It does not work the other way around. No one obeys the commands of Christ without first loving him. No one turns away *from sin* without first turning *to Christ*. ***No one hates his sin without first loving Jesus.*** You will never stop looking at porn unless you first love pleasing Jesus more than pleasing yourself by sinful means. You will never stop worshiping money until you first start worshiping Jesus as your highest treasure. ***No one leaves his sin without first loving his Savior!***

This was the aim of last week's sermon; to help you fall more deeply in love with Jesus; to uphold before the eyes of your heart, the beauty and glory of Christ so that you would be drawn in love to Him. This is the aim of my whole ministry. I want you to passionately pursue Christ with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Preaching personal holiness is pointless without there being a prior passion. I—or anyone—can tell you all day long “be holy and don't sin,” but it will be a waste of breath if the passion of your soul is not first firmly fixed on pleasing Christ above all.

No one hates sin without first loving holiness. Jesus is holy. His Spirit is Holy. God is holy, holy, holy! Holiness is *the* essential, defining characteristic of the nature of God. Therefore, no one delights in a holy God, his holy Son, or in his Holy Spirit who also delights in unholiness. It can't be done. No one gets into heaven who does not love holiness. If you love sin, then you will not get in. You won't want to. *Anyone who delights in sin cannot delight also in God, because God is the opposite of sin.*

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). “If anyone loves the world, then the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

The Church is the bride of Christ. The Church loves her groom. The Church are people who love Jesus. Jesus loves holiness. He never sinned and always did what was right. Therefore, anyone who truly loves Jesus must also love holiness. ***The Church is those people who, like Christ, love holiness.*** Thus, the Church is those people who progressively put off sin from their lives, while at the same time put on holiness. The progressive putting off of sin only happens in the lives of those who love Christ. The Church are those who increasingly embrace holiness and turn away from sin. Making the Church holy is one of the reasons why Jesus died.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Jesus loved the church and thus he died for the church. The reason he died for the church was *“so that he might sanctify her, cleanse her so that he might present her to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, so that she might be holy and without blemish.”* In other words, Jesus died to make the Church holy. Jesus suffered, bled, and died so that we who are his people—his bride—might be holy, without sin, stain, or wrinkle. In short, **Jesus died to beautify his bride**. True beauty is being free from sin. True beauty is purity. This is why wedding dresses are white. They symbolize purity. Jesus died so that on that great day, the great wedding day, he might present to himself a pure, sinless, and beautiful bride.

Revelation 19:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

This is where the Church is headed. The people of God are all intended for holiness. “Righteous deeds” are beautiful in the sight of our Savior. *In the same way that a bride prepares herself for her wedding day, so the Church ought to be preparing herself for her wedding day.* The way we do that is by putting off sin and putting on righteousness, now, today!

How to Fight For Holiness and Against Sin

Therefore, I aim to help you fight for holiness and against sin. If the Church is those who progressively put off sin and put on righteousness, then by what means can we do this? What steps must we take to prepare ourselves for that great day? I came up with thirteen steps. The first two steps describe what God does while the last 11 describe what we do.

What God Does

These first two steps are solely the work of God, as he helps us embrace holiness.

1) Regeneration: The Beginning of the Fight

The fight for holiness and against sin begins with **regeneration**. *Regeneration is the secret, inward work of the Holy Spirit whereby spiritual life is imparted to believers in Jesus.* This is what Jesus, in his conversation with Nicodemus, referred to as being “born again.”²

² John 3:3.

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Regeneration is solely the work of God³ by his holy Spirit. Peter explains, "**He caused to be born again...**" In the same way that God is the ultimate cause of our physical birth, so he is the ultimate cause of our spiritual rebirth. God effects regeneration within believers by the power of his Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 (ESV) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Regeneration is effected by the Holy Spirit and, according to Jesus, it is necessary in order to see the kingdom of heaven. Jesus told Nicodemus, "**You must be born again**" (John 3:3). In our natural condition, we are dead to God⁴ because of our slavery to sin.⁵ We are "by nature children of wrath."⁶ We are all born as citizens of the kingdom of darkness.⁷ It is only when we put our faith in Jesus, look to him for salvation, and receive his Holy Spirit that we are born again and new spiritual life is granted to us. Regeneration is the term that describes this act of God. It was foretold in the Old Testament (OT) by the prophet Ezekiel. It's the promise of receiving a new heart and a new spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.
²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

No one will ever obey God's rules and the commands of Jesus without a new heart and new spirit poured out within him. The fight for holiness and against sin begins with regeneration.

2) Reconciliation: The Foundation of the Fight

The fight for holiness and against sin is fought on the **foundation of our reconciliation** to God through the cross of Christ.

Colossians 1:21-22 (ESV) And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

³ John 1:13 (ESV) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

⁴ Ephesians 2:1.

⁵ John 8:34.

⁶ Ephesians. 2:3.

⁷ Colossians 3:10; cf. Psalm 51:5.

We can only embrace holiness and let go of sin if we know that God has let go of our condemnation and embraced us as objects of his love. The fact of reconciliation, which is being made right with God, is the great foundation upon which we stand in order to begin new life with God. We will never turn to God and away from sin if we do not first know that God has first turned toward us. Reconciliation teaches us that He will not destroy us if we run to him. Jesus reconciled us to God through the cross. At the cross, God declared us⁸ “not guilty,” so that we can know that he has accepted us and loves us.

Romans 5:8-11 (ESV) but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

If you are in Christ, then God is for you. *Reconciliation means God is for you and not against you.* Being reconciled, or justified, to God shows us that God loves us and ready to receive us. He reconciled us to himself “while we were still sinners.” Thus, through the work of Jesus on the cross, He declares us “right” or “not guilty,” in his sight so that we can then begin living like we are right and not guilty. God first removes his wrath from us—by pouring it on Jesus at the cross—then he calls us and helps us live out the effects of that freedom from his wrath. The fight for holiness and against sin is founded upon the fact of our reconciliation.

What We Do

All that follows can be included under the heading of what the Bible calls **sanctification**. This is what we do to help ourselves embrace holiness and turn away from sin. I would define **sanctification** as *the process whereby the follower of Jesus progressively puts away sin and increasingly embraces righteousness in the everyday decisions of life.*

3) Reaffirm Your New, Holy Identity

Third, regularly **reaffirm your new, holy identity in Christ**. Remember who you are. You belong to Jesus. You are no longer your own. By faith you are now joined to Jesus. In him you now have a new, holy identity and you need to regularly reaffirm who you are.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Church, new things have come and old things have passed away. Because you are in Christ, you now have a new identity, a holy identity. Do not believe the lie that you are still defined by sin. Church, you are not defined by sin. The Church is defined by being united to Christ.

⁸ All who would go to God through Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (ESV) To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...

Because we are in Christ, we *“are sanctified, and called to saints.”* Church, you are holy and you are called to be holy. Being a saint does not mean being sinless. It means that a decisive break with sin has occurred (which was effected by Jesus at the cross) and that you are now called to live according to the new identity that you have in Christ. Being regenerate (i.e. having the Holy Spirit dwell within you) changes everything. Being in Christ means that the existential reality of who you are is fundamentally and forever altered.

Colossians 1:13 (ESV) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

Being in Christ means that you have transferred your citizenship. You are no longer a citizen of the kingdom of darkness. Rather, Jesus has grabbed ahold of you and rescued you from the dark domain and has carried you over in the kingdom of light. Church, now you are a citizen of “the kingdom of his beloved Son.” You have a new home, a new kingdom, a new king, a new family, and a new identity. You are a beloved child of God. You are now identified as a saint, not a sinner.

When Paul writes his letter to the church at Corinth, even though the church was plagued with sin and there was much that needed to be corrected, he addresses it *“to the saints in Corinth,”* not *“to the sinners in Corinth.”*⁹ Evidently it is important for us to identify ourselves rightly. Church, in order to fight for holiness and against sin, *reaffirm your new, holy identity* in Christ. In Christ, you are a saint, not a sinner.

4) Renew Your Mind

Part of becoming a follower of Jesus is training your mind to establish different patterns of thinking. In order to fight for holiness and against sin, you must *renew your mind*.

Romans 12:2 (ESV) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Transformation in your life comes through a transformed mind. In order to grow more discerning at doing God’s will, your mind must be renewed. The old mind must be die, and the new mind of Christ must grow stronger within you. This transformation does not take place in one instant, but rather it takes place through daily renewal.

⁹ See also Ephesians 1:1.

2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Learning to love righteousness and hate sin happens through the daily renewal of the mind. There's no magic wand in the process of sanctification. There is only the daily choice of doing what is right in the Lord's eyes which then establishes habits of holiness. This is why daily prayer, communion with Christ, and regular reading of the Bible are critically necessary for consistent spiritual growth. Learning every day, more of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished for us, is part of the process of transforming your mind. The more you know about him, the more you will love him. The more you love him, the more you will live and act like him.

Colossians 3:10 (ESV) ...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

The goal of every Christian is to be gradually conformed into the image of our Creator—Christ Jesus. The work of the Holy Spirit within us is to progressively transform us ever increasingly into the image of Christ. This happens as we "*put on the new self,*" or another way of saying this is, as we increasingly embrace holiness in our lives. We are better able to fight the fight for holiness as we daily renew the knowledge of our minds. Daily renewing your mind will help you fight for holiness and against sin.

5) Rely on the Holy Spirit

Fifth, we need to *rely on the the help of the Holy Spirit*. God has not left us alone in the fight for holiness and against sin. He has sent us a helper. In order to put sin to death and put righteousness into practice we need to *rely on the help of the Holy Spirit*.

John 14:15-17 (ESV) "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him."

To accomplish a spiritual goal, you need spiritual help. *Leaving sin and loving Jesus will only be achieved by relying on the Holy Spirit*. Notice that immediately after talking about loving and obeying him, Jesus tells his disciples the he will send a Helper "*to be with you forever.*" Who is this Helper? He is the "Sprit of truth." This is another name for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not sent to help the people of the world. The Holy Spirit is sent to help only the people of God. The people of the world cannot receive him because "*they neither see him or know him.*" However the Church both sees him and knows him. The Holy Spirit is sent to help the church. He is sent to help those who believe in Jesus. He helps them love Jesus and obey his commands. Thus, you must rely on the Holy Spirit to do both. The Spirit will help you love Jesus with all your heart because he will give you such a heart, a new heart! And it is only by

the help of the Spirit that you will have the power to fight successfully against sin. If you try to fight sin without the Holy Spirit, then you will fail every time.

Romans 8:13 (ESV) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

No one wins the fight against sin without the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Will power always will fail in the face of fleshly temptation. It is impossible to white-knuckle your way to holiness. However, if you rely on the help of the Holy Spirit, then you will put sin to death.¹⁰ He who raised up Jesus from the dead is the same Holy Spirit who now dwells within you. If you rely on him, then by his great and holy power you will be able to “*put to death the sinful deeds of the body.*” The only way to overcome your sinful desires is by crying out to and relying upon the help of the Helper. If you want to win the fight to live in holiness and die to sin, then you must rely on the Holy Spirit.

6) Resist the Devil

Sixth, you must **resist the devil**. After relying on the Holy Spirit, then make up your mind to resist the devil when he tempts you. Have a battle plan in mind before the battle begins. Determine beforehand how you will respond so that when temptation comes, for certainly it will come, you will have already made up your mind how you will respond.

James 4:7-8 (ESV) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Determine in advance that when temptation comes that you will **submit** to God’s will rather than your own or the will of the enemy. Then **resist** the devil. Say no to Satan. Perhaps even say it out loud. Resist him by saying, “I am submitted to God, therefore I will not submit to you. He is my Lord so in the name of Jesus, begone Satan!” Then run to God.

Draw near to him. Cry out to Him for help. Draw near in prayer or in songs of worship, or in your mind by quoting a portion of Scripture that you have memorized. When Jesus was tempted, he resisted Satan by quoting Scripture. Resist the devil’s lies with the truth of God’s word. Fight for holiness and against sin by resisting the devil by the power of God’s word.

7) Refuse to Blame God

Refuse to blame God for your temptation and your sin. Admit that the source of your trouble comes from within.¹¹ Don’t cast blame on anyone else but yourself.

¹⁰ 1 John 3:9.

¹¹ Mark 7:21-23 (ESV) “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

James 1:13 (ESV) Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Sin twists our own desires. The ammunition for the devil to tempt and entice us lies within us. He would corrupt our own desires against us. So don't blame God for your temptations or your sins. Sin's base of operations lies within our own desires. God is lured by evil, but we certainly are. The fault for our sin lies within us, not God. So, as you fight against sin, refuse to blame God.

8) Remember That You Are at War

You cannot toy with temptation and sin. Sin is not a play-thing. We are caught in a spiritual battle which Peter and Paul both refer to as war.

1 Peter 2:11 (ESV). Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Flirting with sinful passions of the flesh is like running around in a combat zone. No one in their right mind does that. No sane person plays in the line of fire, therefore, why would you play with temptations. Peter pleads with us to abstain from uncontrolled sinful desires. Don't allow your passions to become enflamed. You're in a spiritual war, so act like it.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (ESV) For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

The war is spiritual and mental. The weapons are not fleshly. To fight for holiness, do not pick up a sword or a shotgun. The spiritual weapons we wield have divine power and the weapon is truth. It is by telling the truth that false arguments and arrogant opinions are torn down. We need to tell ourselves the truth when Satan is trying to lie to us in our thoughts. The spiritual battle in which we are engaged takes place in our minds. Therefore we must train ourselves to *"take captive every thought and bring it under obedience to Christ."*

When Satan whispers lies to us, we fight them with the truth—the truth of God's word. We must be spiritually vigilant to identify **every** thought.¹² *If we can control our thoughts, then we can control our desires.* Fighting for holiness and against sin happens in the context of a spiritual battle. Remember you are at war.

¹² Prov. 4:23.

9) Redirect Your Thoughts

Since the war is in your mind, when you are being tempted and you have identified the sinful thoughts, then **redirect your thoughts** toward more excellent things—pure and holy things.

Philippians 4:8 (ESV) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Every Christian ought to have this verse memorized. When your thoughts are sinful, redirect them to whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or worthy of praise. These are the things that we then ought to dwell on. Don't linger on sinful thoughts. Dwell on pure thoughts. In your mind, don't toy with lies, but rather dwell on the truth. Don't imagine what is impure, but focus on what is pure. Focus the thoughts of your mind on what is right, rather than allowing it to wander down mental pathways that are sinful. In order to fight for holiness and against sin, you must **redirect your thoughts** away from the untrue and dwell on the truth, the right, and the good.

10) Remove Yourself From Temptation.

Look for the way out, and there will always be one. Like Joseph, remove yourself from the temptation because there will always be a way out.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV) No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Don't allow Satan to isolate and trap you in the prison cell called "no one knows what I'm going through." Every temptation you will ever face has already been faced by someone else. Satan will tell you that you are all alone and that you cannot endure the struggle. He will plead with you to give in, to collapse under the pressure with which no one else can identify. Don't listen. It's a lie! He will tell you that the allurements of whatever temptation you're suffering through is too great and thus is ok to give in. Don't believe the lie. There is always a way of escape, if only we'll look for it. The way to endure the temptation is to escape it. Sometimes, like Joseph, you need to flee, to remove yourself from that place of temptation. Maybe it's as simple as changing your location. Move. Remove. Then move again. Do whatever you need to do in order to escape the temptation. You're not alone. There is a way of escape. Look for it and get out. In order to win the fight for holiness and stand strong against sin, sometimes you need to **remove yourself from the place temptation**.

11) Regularly Confess Sins and Receive Forgiveness

There will be times when you fall. When you do, confess your sins and then receive God's gracious forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 (ESV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When you sin, confess it as sin, not as a 'mistake,' or 'misstep' or an 'accident' or some other weak word to downplay the seriousness of disobeying God's word and will. When you sin, confess it as sin to God and then be amazed that he will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. To fight for holiness and against sin, **regularly confess sin** as sin and the graciously **receive forgiveness** and cleansing.

12) Relentlessly Pray

To advance your love for holiness and rejection of sin, you must **relentlessly pray**. No one grows in practical holiness without persisting in relentless prayer. And what should you relentlessly pray? You should pray for yourself what the author of Hebrews wrote about Jesus. He was quoting Psalm 45:7 when he wrote,

You have loved righteousness and hated evil. (Hebrews 1:9 ESV)

Never stop praying against evil and for righteousness. Pray this night and day. Pray that God would turn your heart away from sin and towards righteousness. **Relentlessly pray that He would cause you to love holiness and hate sin.**

13) Read Christian Biography

Read about the lives of godly people who have gone before you. Read about the lives of Christians who have succeeded where you have failed. If you struggle with sexual temptation then read *The Confessions* by Augustine. Consider his struggle with his own lust and the final means by which he overcame them.

There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged. . . . I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant. . . . I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. . . . I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. . . . I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees.

I was held back by mere trifles. . . They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, "Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever." . . . And while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continnence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me.

I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes . . . In my misery I kept crying, "How long shall I go on saying 'tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?" . . .

All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain 'Take it and read, take it and read.' At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall.

So I hurried back and . . . seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: "Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites" (Romans 13:13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.¹³

Augustine was converted because *he perceived that the beauty of Christ was more to be savored than the sensuality of sex*. He embraced Jesus because in that moment he became convinced that holiness was a far better treasure than was sin. By the inner work of the Holy Spirit, for the first time he saw the "beauty of continence with her unsullied joy" and he saw "the ugliness of sin." He was forever changed.

Conclusion

You'll never say no to sin unless you prefer to say yes to holiness. No one leaves sin unless they first love Jesus. No one, who is dieting, says no to unhealthy foods unless they prefer to say yes to healthier foods. You will never deny your sin without delighting more in righteousness. You will never leave a guilty conscience until you prefer to live with a clean conscience. The key to holy living is a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus.

The only perfect internet filter on the planet is a heart that prefers purity over perversion. The eyes always follow the heart.¹⁴ The heart that is truly in love with and prefers purity above all, will never allow the eyes to dwell on perversion. You will never break patterns of sin until it is sweeter to you to please your Savior rather than your self. Surrender to the sweetness of a holy Savior and abandon the ugliness of you sin. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. By faith embrace holiness and make yourself beautiful for your great and glorious groom.

¹³ Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), Book VIII (Apple Books. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/confessions/id374438263>).

¹⁴ Job. 31:7.