

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

Three years ago, I preached this sermon series.

At the end of the service

After the introductory sermon

As I was greeting people on the way out

Two rather elderly women within earshot were talking

And one said to the other . . .

Well, I confess I struggle with 6 of the 7 deadly sins.

The other woman responded

Really? 6 of them?

Which one DON'T you struggle with?

The first replied, “Lust!”

It left me a loooong time ago!”

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Lust, by definition, can be an excessive desire

For things other than sex.

But today, we'll focus specifically on lust as a sexual sin.

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Of all the deadly sins

Sexual sins are the most titillating!

We are obsessed analyzing and critiquing

Other people's bedroom activities.

But what constitutes sexual sin?

For years, the church has had the ongoing debate

Whether same sex marriage constitutes sexual sin

And struggles to understand and support

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

Folks within the LGBTQ community.

It continues to be a hotly debated subject.

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I dare say, at some time or another
We all have struggled with lust.

And the reason for this is simple.

Sexual desire is a God-given part of human nature.

God created sexual desire
For the procreation of the human species.

God designed it to be stimulating, exciting, and satisfying.

God called it good!

Now if you want to read something
Read the Song of Solomon in the Bible

In it you will discover what William Willimon calls
An unabashed, innocent, mutual eroticism
Of a couple's love for one another.

The Song of Solomon or the Song of Songs
Depending on translation
Is in the Bible

To show us the good, healthy, pure and innocent
Sexual desire between newlyweds.

And yet, good, wholesome, sexual desire

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

When abused and misused
Has trashed what God had intended.

Consider King David's lust and its deadly consequences.

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I like the way John Piper in an essay in the book
Killjoy, the Seven Deadly Sins defines lust:

I *Lust is a sexual desire
That dishonors its object and disregards God.*

He bases his definition on the Thessalonians passage

2 I Thessalonians 4:4-5 (NRSV) ⁴that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Sexual desire needs to be controlled.

According to Piper in 2 ways:

Honor toward the other person and holiness toward God.

In other words, lust is what happens
When honor and holiness is left out of the equation.

It is the teaching of the Bible
That sex is an activity expressed only
In the sanctity of a covenant relationship

The Bible specifically denotes appropriate sexual activity
Is to be between a husband and a wife.

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

There is no place in the Bible that suggests otherwise.

Today, some within the church have broadened
The category of a covenant relationship
To include same sex marriages.

Sex is a unique and precious expression of love
Intended for a lifelong commitment
Mutually honoring each other
In faithfulness and fidelity.

When sex happens outside of the scope of this definition
It becomes lust . . .
An unbridled, uncontrolled, and illicit sexual desire.

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How does lust reveal itself in modern society?

In its more innocuous ways lust is expressed in:

3

- Sex before marriage
- Casual sex (the hook-up lifestyle seen on college campuses and online dating services, and in many LGBT communities).
- Cohabitation (living together as husband and wife without the sanctity of marriage)

In its more insidious forms lust looks like this:

4

- Sexual assault, including date rape
- Sex trafficking
- Domestic violence (most stem from lust)
- Prostitution
- Pedophilia
- Pornography

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

We live in a society today
That says all humanity has a God-given right
To satisfy their sexual urges

No matter how far it deviates from the norm
As long as it is between mutually consenting adults.

What happens in the bedroom stays in the bedroom.

This is not unlike the society the Apostle Paul lived in.

The Greco-Roman society was very promiscuous.

Paul tells the church to control their sexual desires.

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If you think Paul was strict in his interpretation of lust
Then you might want to skip over what Jesus said.

Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount
That it was said in the OT, *Do not commit adultery.*

But Jesus says that's not good enough
That anyone that even looks lustfully at someone
Has committed adultery in their heart.

He then goes on to say . . .

5

Matthew 5:29 (NLT) So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Jesus nails this lust thing pretty hard!

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

So why is he so strict about this?

Why is Jesus so concerned about lust

Especially when it is just a desire not an act . . .

A sin with a small s?

Because he knows if lust is left unrestrained

It can quickly leads down a path

That leads to destruction.

But shouldn't we be concerned over the bigger issues?

Of course!

Is it a big deal if a consultant

On his way to a global conference on world poverty

Engages in a little stress-relieving pornography

What's the harm in that?

Spend a little time reading the ill effects of pornography

And you'll learn that there is a vicious cycle to it.

Like gambling, drugs and alcohol

There is in pornography

And lust in general . . .

An escalating addictive feature

That requires more and more

And kinkier and kinkier thinking

To achieve the same effect.

There is evidence that pornography can lead

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

To social, interpersonal and physical problems.

Here are some ill effects pornography has on its users
From the website EducateEmpowerKids.org

6-12

1. Pornography changes the brain. Pornography trains the brain to require more and more dopamine to feel that initial effect. When porn usage is frequent, the dopamine level required to feel excitement is so heightened that the person can no longer feel pleasure at things that used to make him happy.
2. Porn can affect behavior. Because of the need for increased levels of dopamine to experience the high that porn first gave them, people tend to look for harder and more explicit or deviant images to feel that initial excitement. Research also shows that porn users exhibit more dominating and harassing behavior toward women, have less compassion for rape victims, and have more violent attitudes toward women, even leading to actual violence against women
3. Ironically, porn can lead to sexual dysfunction.
4. Porn stunts the ability to have meaningful and satisfying real-life relationships.
5. Porn teaches that women are sexual objects.
6. Porn can make you feel bad about yourself. Porn usage can very easily and very quickly spiral out of control and hijack a person's self-image and self-esteem.
7. Porn can make noticeable changes in your everyday mood.

Porn is just one of the expressions of modern day lust.

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We're all doomed aren't we?

For who HASN'T lusted in their mind?

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

Lust is everyone’s sin!

This affirms Paul’s statement when he said

13

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The sin of lust puts us all on common ground.

It may reveal itself in different ways
But it is something we struggle with.

It reminds me of a Face Book post I saw Friday:
*Don’t judge someone
Just because they sin differently than you!*

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Many will struggle with the sin of lust their whole lifetime.

But with the strength of the Holy Spirit
The desire to live a Christ-like life
And some practical tools
One can overcome the temptation to lust.

I found this to be helpful from John Piper.

He calls it ANTHEM, A Strategy for Fighting Lust.

14-20

A—Avoid

Avoid as much as possible the sights and situations that arouse unfitting desire.

N—No

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

Say no to every lustful thought right away. And say it boldly with the authority of Jesus Christ.

T—Turn

Turn the mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction.

H—Hold

Hold the promise and the pleasure of Christ firmly in your mind until it pushes the other images out.

E—Enjoy

Enjoy a superior satisfaction. Cultivate capacities for pleasure in Christ.

M—Move

Move into useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. Lust grows fast in the garden of leisure.

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As William Willimon writes in his book

Sinning Like a Christian

We discuss the Seven not only honestly to point to them, but also to deal with them. The God who was able to raise the dead is able also to redeem sinners.

Although I may not be able to extinguish the fire of Lust as it burns in me, I can dampen some of its flame. I can't do this by myself, but if Jesus can raise the dead he can surely deal with a little old thing like Lust.

7 Deadly Sins: Lust

He came not only to receive and to forgive sinners but also to redeem sinners, to give us the means to conquer even something so utterly natural and congenial to our natures as Lust.

Willimon closes his book with this statement.

By the grace of God, a good-enough church, and lots of practice, it is possible even for ordinary folk like us to become saints.

Amen? Amen.