

Recycling Lust
Ps 119:33-40, Luke 7:36-43

Friends, when I told some people that I was planning to do this series on the Seven Deadly Sins the most common reaction I got was “how are you going to deal with Lust???”

And as I’ve asked people if they would be willing to read a poem in the service about the particular sin that is being dealt with on that Sunday, I’ve had a couple people hesitantly ask if that meant they would be reading a poem about Lust.

Friends, Lust seems to make us a bit more uncomfortable than the other of the Deadly Sins, doesn’t it...

Because the first thing that comes to mind when we hear the word “Lust” is sex.

And not just plain old sex, but sexual desires and illicit activities that are shocking and scandalous. Lust brings to mind things that are not spoken of in polite company, and it’s

certainly not what you would expect to hear about at church on a Sunday morning.

And so... to be honest I was feeling a bit apprehensive about dealing with this particular Deadly sin as well.

But I as studied and prepared for this message I discovered that there is much more to Lust than simply dealing with an out of control libido – I shouldn’t have been surprised really, that’s what we’ve seen with all the deadly sins so far, but none the less...

I discovered this isn’t the first time that this deadly sin has had such a high correlation with sex.

In the middle ages it was known as “Extravagance.” However because the Latin origins for the word “Extravagance” had such sexual connotations... it was eventually replaced with the more neutral word “Lust.” And it appears that now we’ve come full circle again, ironic isn’t it, maybe we need to switch back to “Extravagance” again??

But part of the reason for these overtones is because of how “Lust” has been used to translate Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:27-28. We typically read it translated something like this...

“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

So we automatically make a connection between “lustfully” and what we understand “adultery” to mean, and so it takes on sexual overtones.

However, the original usage of the word “Lust” – and the corresponding greek word in this passage “*epithymeō*”, refers to an intense or very strong feeling or **desire** that one might have about anything – not just sex.

In fact when the Jews translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek they used this word “*epithymeō*” for the 10th Commandment. Thou shalt not covet... thy neighbor’s possessions: which included his house and servants and his

livestock... so obviously it refers to more than just sexual desire.

A better translation of Jesus’ words in Matt 5:28 would be “But I tell you that He who looks at a woman to covet her...”

So yes that could mean wanting to sleep with someone, but this would be wrong according to the 10th commandment and to Jesus’ teaching, because whether they are single or married they are not rightfully yours through a marriage covenant – its not simply an issue of sexual desire.

So yes lusting and coveting can refer to a desire to have someone sexually **when it’s not appropriate...** but there are many other things you can desire intensely which are not appropriate as well.

You can lust for power, for money, for fame, for revenge... and the key to understanding what Lust is as a Deadly Sin in regards to what you lust for... is understanding that it’s wrong to be fixated on it, yearning for it, obsessed with it – when it is

not appropriate for you, or when God has not yet given it to you...

You see friends, Lust produces in us a deep longing and an intense desire to *want* what is wrong, to disregard and disobey what our Heavenly Father has commanded or set out for us.

That is the essence of Lust.

And so the irony here friends, is that you might not have a problem with Lust, with wanting to disobey God until you actually are in a close relationship with Him and know what His Law and His Will is for your life.

That's what the Apostle Paul discovered; listen to what he says in **Rom 7:7-8** *"For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire."*

And so friends if we examine what Paul says here, it will help us discover exactly what good thing that Sin is twisting in us which becomes Lust.

So, Paul identifies that "God's commands" give Sin the opportunity to produce the desire to covet.

What are God's commands? His laws and rules, yes... but really those laws and rules reveal to us who God is, they are revelation; they allow us to know God – to see Him, to be intimate with Him.

Now I know that might sound strange – that **God's law is actually intimacy with God?** We're so used to pitting God's Law against his mercy – legalism and works righteousness against salvation by grace, that combining intimacy and law sounds weird to us.

And when we think about biblical writings that reflect intimacy with God we usually think about the Psalms, not Deuteronomy.

But... consider Psalm 119, the longest of all Psalms. An A-Z acrostic on its subject matter. What is it about? It's about God's law.... and how much the writer – King David desires it, loves it.

Listen to what he says in vs. 20 and 40.

“My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.”(Ps 119:20)

“How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.”(Ps 119:40)

Friends, this isn't legalism, this isn't someone who is trying to be perfect to earn salvation.

Instead, through reading, contemplating, meditating and obeying God's Law, David has encountered the person of God... was brought into His presence... was intimately connected to with God because God had revealed who Himself in His law...

Oh, and guess what greek word was used in vs. 20 and 40 of Pslam 119 to translate the Hebrew word for the “intense longing...” which David has for this intimacy with God? You guessed it - “*epithymeō*”

So what do we learn? **Lust happens when Sin twists Intimacy...**

That longing and desire which we naturally have to obey and worship and be caught up in our encounter with our Creator is twisted by Sin into Lust... and so we desire and yearn to focus on ourselves and be caught up with anything else... but God, and we do so by pursuing what is off limits to us.

So friends, of all the deadly Sins... Lust is the one which really identifies how enticing, seductive and alluring that which we know to be wrong, truly is. That is why it makes us Christians most uncomfortable.

Because, as the saying goes... “we all have our poison” our “guilty pleasures” our “secret sins”

They may very well be sexual in nature, or alcoholic, or perhaps chemical... prescription or illegal, maybe we can't resist spreading a juicy rumor, the thrill of gambling, the self-righteous satisfaction of judging others, or fantasizing about taking revenge on someone.

We all have our secret sins... and we all know they are sins...

But the reality is, that from time to time Lust makes us **actually want and desire** these things; and we find this very embarrassing for us to admit in front of our fellow Christians.

Of course this keeps us at a very superficial level with each other, and prevents in-depth Christian community from developing among us...

But the good news friends is that **recycling Lust can be the catalyst for the formation of real, genuine, authentic Christian community.**

And the first step in recycling our Lust is to find a safe, trustworthy fellow Christian or small group of Christians and put James 5:16 into action *"confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

And what this kind of confession does friends, is it recycles Lust back into intimacy.

And I happen to like Pastor Walter Wangerin Jr.'s definition of intimacy. He **says intimacy means "into-me-see."** To be intimate with others is allowing them to see into us. We pull back the masks, take down the facades, and remove whatever barriers we use to keep people at arm's length, so that we can reveal who we truly are, so others may see.

And we might be ok with that for some things... but allowing others to see our Lust – to see the wrong that we desire... is one of the most difficult parts of building true Christian Community, it makes us uncomfortable.

Not only because we have to get past the shame and embarrassment of it, but also because we need to find mature Christians who understand this and who won't judge us for it.

But it is so necessary because without this confession, Christian Community cannot produce the healing, the transformation of our desires which God wants to effect in us.

But, if we look to Jesus... if we focus on Jesus... if we yearn after Jesus... friends, somehow God's Holy Spirit will make a way for this confession to happen among us and for authentic Christian community to develop.

Because, **Jesus is God's most intimate revealing of himself,** and the Jesus which the Gospels present to us reveal the depth of love, grace and mercy that God has for those who know his Law but still desire that which is wrong – which is absolutely incredible!

And somehow when we experience God pursuing us, even when we don't pursue Him, when He won't give up on us –

even when we want to give up on Him – it changes us... it creates a love for him within us.

That's what happened to the woman in the town of Nain who had lived a sinful life – as an Israelite she knew better, but she yearned for something she could get through prostitution so she lived a sinful life...

Yet somehow she hears about Jesus and what he teaches and what He does - and it changes her Lust – it recycles it into an **intense desire for intimacy, to meet and be with Jesus.**

It is such an intense desire that she is willing to risk crashing a dinner party hosted by those who would be her harshest critics and accusers.

It is such an intense desire that she brings one of her most valuable possessions as a gift for Jesus.

It is such an intense desire that when she encounters God's most intimate revealing of his heart she breaks down in tears,

weeping on Jesus' feet, kissing them and using her hair to dry them off... and then she pours an entire bottle of perfume on them.

May we desire Jesus as much as she did friends...

Can you see how her focus on Jesus brought her through the guilt, the fear, the risk... and how she left her encounter with Christ with her Lust forgiven and her Love affirmed, and her relationship and intimacy with God restored.

So friends, if we set our focus on Jesus Christ, if we commit ourselves to getting to know him through the Gospels, reading his teaching about God's Law and learning about His will for our lives...

If we allow Jesus' teaching to show us what we Lust after, what we might desire that is wrong...

If we believe that in spite of our lust, Jesus continues to offer us forgiveness, and he will always be able to do so because

through his Death and Resurrection He is the fulfillment of God's Law...

Friends we will come to the place where **we also have an intense desire to be in the presence of God**, to be with Jesus, and to be with others who have experienced this as well.

And Lust will lose its power over us, we can confess our secret sins to each other, we can confess them to Christ, and Lust will be recycled...

We will begin to enjoy an increasing intimacy of Christian fellowship, of love and acceptance, grace and mercy

And we will start to experience worship as a very intense and powerful experience of the very intimate presence of Jesus who said *"Where two or three are gathered in my name – there I am with them!"*

Isn't it amazing friends, that our Heavenly Father has opened up a way for us to see into Him – look upon it in Jesus Christ... and let us move past our Lust.

Let us begin to recycle it by embracing intimacy with the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with our fellow Christians.

Intimacy friends – into – me – see...

It's the only way to recycle the Deadly Sin of Lust. Let's pray.