

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

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I appreciate the feedback that I've been receiving on this series. Many people have commented that they are enjoying it and that it's very interesting.

And that is good – but I pray that it goes beyond enjoyable and interesting for us and that what we've been learning about how Sin affects us and how the Holy Spirit recycles Sin is actually translating into some real change in your lives.

I pray that you are coming to a great awareness of how you struggle with these deadly sins.

I pray that you are encouraged by the fact that they can be recycled – so that as you continue to struggle with them you have a better way to respond instead of simply trying harder.

And I pray that as you experience the Holy Spirit recycling anger into justice, pride into power, sloth into renewal in your

life that you would get active in using these energies to help build community at Valleyview.

Now, when I first did this series on recycling these seven deadly Sins I remember people saying *“wow that sounds really interesting, but how are you going to deal with Lust???”*

And the first time we did this series I've asked various people, other than our regular scripture readers, if they would be willing to read the poems about a particular deadly Sin – everyone said *“sure as long as I don't have to read the poem about lust!”*

So brothers and sisters, it would seem that out of all the deadly sins, it's Lust that makes us the most uncomfortable.

And that's because the first thing that comes to mind when we hear “Lust” is sex.

And not just regular old sex – but fifty shades of illicit desires and activities that are shocking and scandalous.

Lust brings to mind things that are not spoken of in polite company, things that you would certainly not 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.

In fact I discovered it's not the first time that this deadly sin has become synonymous with sexual activity.

During the middle ages this Sin was known as the sin of "Extravagance." However, the origins for the word "Extravagance" in Latin was highly sexually suggestive so it was eventually replaced with the more neutral word... Lust.

And it appears that now we've come full circle again with the word "Lust" ironic isn't it! Maybe we need to switch the name of this Sin back to "Extravagance" again??

Now a big part of why Lust has taken on sexual overtones since the Middle Ages has been how we've translated Jesus' teaching on adultery in Matthew 5:27-28 from Greek text into English.

It typically reads 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, given what we understand "adultery" to mean, we automatically make the connection between "lusting"- and it begins to take on sexual connotations.

Originally however, the word "Lust" simply meant an intense feeling or very strong desire, and that's why it was used to translate the Greek word "*epithymeō*" in Matthew 5.

And when the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek, the word “*epithymeō*” was also used for Deuteronomy 5:21 to get at the meaning of the 10th Commandment: “Thou shalt not covet [*epithymeō*]... thy neighbor’s...” possessions: which included his house and servants and his livestock...

Thus a better translation of Jesus’ words in Matt 5:28 that prevent us from linking “lust” with sexual activity would be “But I tell you that He who looks at a woman to covet her...”

So while we can lust for sexual activity, it is clear from how this word is used in the rest of scripture that we can lust – have strong feelings and intense desires for many other things as well.

And even in the case of coveting your neighbors wife – you may have strong desires for her for reasons other than sexual ones: she runs the household better, she has high family status; she comes from wealth... etc...

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 Lust as a Deadly Sin is knowing that it’s wrong to be fixated on, yearning for, obsessed with something or someone – when it is not appropriate for you, when it is off limits, or when God has not yet given it to you.

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

That is the essence of Lust.

And so the irony is brothers and sisters that you might not have a problem with Lust, or with wanting to disobey God

until you actually are in a close relationship with Him and you know what His Law and His Will is for your life.

That's certainly 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 what good thing Sin is twisting into 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 with law sounds weird to us.

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

But... consider Psalm 119, which is the longest of all Psalms... It's an A-Z acrostic on its subject matter.

And 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)

Brothers and sisters, you don't have to be a bible scholar to read this and see this is not legalism, this isn't someone who is trying to be perfect to earn salvation.

Rather, through reading, contemplating, meditating and obeying God's Law, David encounters the very person of God.

He is brought into His presence... He becomes intimately connected with God because God had revealed Himself in and through the Law...

And... guess what Greek word was used to translate the Hebrew word for the "intense longing..." in vs. 20 and 40? You guessed it – it's "*epithymeō*"

So, we could render the English translations as "*My soul is consumed with Lust for your laws at all times.*" and "*How I Lust for your precepts!*"

But there's this parasitical Sin concept that's attached to Lust in the English so it doesn't really translate very well...

But the point that we learn in all this is that Lust occurs when Sin twists Intimacy...

That longing and desire which we are all created with to obey and worship and be caught up in our encounter with our Creator, is twisted by Sin into Lust...

And thus we desire and yearn to focus on ourselves, on humanity instead of the divine, or on false gods, or on the creation, pursuing things that are not appropriate or have been set off limits for us.

We are caught up with anything else but the one true God.

And of all the deadly Sins brothers and sisters, Lust is the one which really reveals how enticing, seductive and alluring that which we know to be wrong, truly is for us.

And 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 very may very well be sexual in nature, or alcoholic, or perhaps chemical either prescription or illegal...

Or 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 know full well that they are sins... we shouldn't want them – but we do.

Brothers and sisters the truth about Lust is that from time to time it makes us **actually want and desire** these things; and this is very embarrassing and shameful for us to admit in front of our fellow Christians – because we ought to want better.

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

So you can see how Lust prevents community from forming and when someone does open up and admits to lust often

times we are so shocked and disgusted by the sinful thing that someone desires that we judge them and reject them... and so in this way Lust wrecks relationships.

Now from time to time we all find ourselves desires things that are off-limits and sinful – but there are those for whom Lust is a continual struggle.

And it's important to make a determine you're not struggling with Gluttony here: where you are looking for something created to give you the spiritual life that only God can give... you may have a good strong desire for that life but you're using a created thing to fill it.

Lust is that strong and intense desire to want something because it is wrong and forbidden and off-limits.

Now the good news is that if you are someone who struggles with Lust then you were created with a very high capacity for Intimacy.

And once you start co-operating with the Holy Spirit to recycle your Lust can become the catalyst for the formation of real, genuine, authentic – intimate - 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.

But what is intimacy? Well I think Pastor Walter Wangerin Jr.'s has a good definition, he says intimacy means *“into-me-see.”*

So 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.

Now we might be ok with that for some things... admitting that we were proud, or slothful...

But - allowing others to see our Lust – to specifically tell them of the wrong that we desire because it is wrong... well that 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 and reject us for it.

But brothers and sisters, this is so necessary because without this confession, Christian Community cannot produce the healing, the transformation, the recycling of our desires which the Holy Spirit wants to work in us and use to build community.

But, if we look to Jesus... if we focus on Jesus... if we yearn after Jesus... then brothers and sisters the 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.

And this 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... He creates a love for him within us.

That's what happened to the woman from our scripture passage this morning.

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 the Holy Spirit make us 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, that what we might desire that is wrong... and we desire it specifically because it is wrong...

If we believe that in spite of our lust, that 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 of shame and embarrassment over us. We will be free to confess our secret sins to each other, we can confess them to Christ, and the Holy Spirit will recycle our Lust.

We will be helping to build community with 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 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 who He is – first with His Law so that we might know our Sin and then through Jesus Christ so

that we might know our Salvation – and through it all so that we grow more intimate with Him.

Brothers and sisters – I know this is probably the most difficult and uncomfortable of all the deadly Sins to work at recycling, but it's so important that we do.

And if you haven't picked up on why that is yet from the message – then let me close with this.

I saw a preview for the movie 'God's Not Dead' last night and was struck by a line from a young college student who is struggling to see why the Church and Christianity have any relevance to her life.

She says; *"Everyone knows what the Church is against – it's getting harder and harder to know what it is for!"*

You see brothers and sisters, if we don't get working at recycling lust then all we'll end up doing is pointing out to

people that what they want is wrong – and they'll know what we're against but they won't know what we're for.

But if we start to recycle lust then people will know that we are for openness, honesty, acceptance, forgiveness and community – but most importantly they will know we are for Jesus and how He brings us into authentic intimacy with God and with each other.

So let us start to recycle Lust 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.

Amen.