

“THE SIN OF LUST”
Sinning Like A Christian #8
Genesis 38:12-26, 2 Samuel 11:1-11, Matthew 5:27-30
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When the early Church Fathers looked at humanity, they recognized that there are 7 basic conditions that lead us into sinning against God and one another. These conditions are Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust. All of the sins of men and women throughout the ages fall into, or are derived from, these 7 characteristics that all people struggle with.

As we look at these Seven Deadly Sins, we find them imbedded into our lives so much that our modern society would rather accept them and glorify them as virtues rather than identify them as sins. Yet, when we seriously look at the dangerous nature of all of these Sins, while it may be easier to glorify them rather than fight against them, the composition our society is determined by how we deal with these Seven. **If we embrace them as just natural parts of who we are as human beings, we will begin to walk a deadly path away from and against God’s ways**, and end up repeating some of the most horrendous acts that have been demonstrated in the history of the world. Some of them are still happening even now. But if we recognize them as sins, and begin dealing with them, we may just turn our society around and bring it back into following the Lord’s ways, and find His blessings again.

When we refuse to see these Seven Deadly Sins as sins, we end up perverting any good that God has given to us and we find ourselves displaying our worst, rather than our best. When we misdirect, misuse, and obsess with these Seven, we find that “sin is love gotten badly out of [hand]. The Seven are loves perverted, loves attached to the wrong objects, for the wrong reasons, and in the wrong ways.”¹

Pride convinces us that we are better than someone else, so we give ourselves permission to treat them in ways that are less than decent. Envy compares us with one another leading us to think and believe that we must have what everyone else has. Anger gives us permission to retaliate against someone for what has been done to us, even to the point of bringing great hurt to another. Sloth makes us believe that we don’t need to be contributing members of our society, but rather merely consumers,

¹ (William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005] pg. 135)

enjoying the fruits of everyone else's labors. Greed convinces us that we must have whatever we want without sharing with anyone else. Gluttony invites us to live to eat, rather than to eat to live. And Lust persuades us to satisfy every pleasure for the temporary satisfaction of every craving and urge and desire we have through our bodies. Individually, they can be detrimental to our lives, but when we begin to combine these Seven to work conjointly with each other, the effects can be devastating to a community, a region, or even a nation. Today we look at this last of the Seven Deadly Sins - Lust.

Lust is the carnal desires that we humans have, most often related to our sexual appetites.

God created us with desire for intimacy and personal relationship with one another, and marriage between a man and a woman was God's plan for sexual intimacy to be expressed within that covenantal and life-long relationship. God created us male and female in order to increase and multiply. God told Adam and Eve, "*Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control*" (Genesis 1:28). **Sexual relationships were to be for the enjoyment of the husband and wife within the confines of a marriage relationship.** That was God's plan for the desires of men and women. Marriage was God's plan for sexuality of men and women to be shared with each other safely, so that their intimate relationship could draw them close to each other in a bond that lasts for a lifetime.

However, humanity distorted that loving relationship to the point where Lust took over, persuading people that sex should be able to be enjoyed outside of the covenantal relationship between a husband and a wife whenever they wanted. So men burn with passion for women, and women burn with passion for men and sex is used against each other in order to fulfill those carnal pleasures whenever we want. But God gave us guidelines to follow, so that we could protect ourselves from the dangers of Lust, restrictions that enable our desires to be fulfilled, but also protected from the ravages of Lust.

Yet, over time, humanity decided that we knew better than God, and we have downplayed His guidelines and commands, to do whatever we want. And even more, we disobeyed the commands from God, given to us to protect that loving relationship between a man and a woman, and we have made

marriage optional, just so that we can have the pleasure of sex whenever we want. And as a result, we have a society that is plagued with the consequences of Lust; adultery, fornication, promiscuity beginning at very early ages, and sexually transmitted diseases (Aids, gonorrhea, syphilis, human papilloma virus, etc.). Lust leads to teenage and other unexpected pregnancy, sex trafficking, rape, prostitution, homosexuality and abortion. **Lust is the worshipping of human pleasure through the momentary sexual actions of an individual outside of the covenant of marriage.** It is constantly seeking sexual fulfillment from whomever we want, whenever we want, for as long as we want. Lust is cutting loose all restraints away concerning sexual expression.

Anne Widdecombe, Shadow Home Secretary in the British House of Commons, made this powerful statement over two decades ago. “Let's face it, we are not a happier society as a result of the liberalization of the seventies. We have record rates of divorce, record rates of suicide, record rates of teenage pregnancy, record rates of youth crime, record rates of underage sex. We should invite people to recognize that the Great Experiment has failed. **You cannot have happiness without restraint.**”²

Lust has convinced us to throw away all of God's guidelines and commandments and to have at it with one another without restraint. And, unfortunately, our society feeds into this mindset. TV and cinema productions flow rampant with Lust. Newspapers, magazines and books promote sexual deviancy at every turn of the page. “Lust, along with Pride, has undergone considerable rehabilitation in our own day. None of us wants to be accused of Envy or Greed, but Lust has become a quiet endearing characteristic of modern enlightened folks like us. In modern life, the only damaging thing about Lust is suppressing it. ‘Deny thyself’ is not a watchword in our age. Who wants to be labeled a prude? Our slogan [in our world today] is that of Mae West: ‘When I'm good, I'm very, very good, but when I'm bad, I'm better.’”³

The Old Testament lessons for today display the mindset of Lust and the consequences they have

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 246)

³ (William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 133)

on us as humans. Genesis 38 tells of Judah's Lust driving him to have sex with his own daughter-in law, unknowingly of course. Judah thought he was having sex with a prostitute, but Tamar had presented herself to him because he had failed to give his son, Shelah, to her in marriage after the death of the two older brothers. You see, the law was that if a man were to die before having children with his wife, the next youngest brother was to give her children to honor the legacy of the older brother. When God killed Er because of his evil conduct, Judah told his second son, Onan, to give Er descendants through Tamar. But Onan refused, knowing that the children would not be "his," so God also killed him. Judah was afraid what would happen to Shelah, his youngest son, so he told Tamar to return home to her father until Shelah grew up. However, when Shelah grew up, Judah did not give him to Tamar as his wife. Judah had not fulfilled his promise to Tamar.

But had Judah not lusted in his heart to satisfy his sexual cravings with Tamar, thinking she was a prostitute, **he would not have had to endure the dishonor and disgrace afterwards**. He should have been more like his brother, Joseph, who when Potiphar's wife lusted after him in Egypt (Genesis 39), ran away from her, knowing that it was wrong to have sex with another man's wife. Joseph did what was right, even though he was wrongly accused and imprisoned for doing the right thing. Joseph followed God's commandments and God lifted him up to become the second leader over all of Egypt. Judah did what was wrong, disobeying God's commands, and ended up facing disgrace and shame.

Lust leads us to think, and then do, the wrong things. If we give in to the mindset of Lust, we let our bodies do what our minds direct us to do, rather than following the truth that we know is right in our heart. And look at the trouble that King David got into when he let Lust direct his life. 2 Samuel 11 clearly displays David's lust for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David was in the wrong place at the right time to catch a look at Bathsheba while she bathed in the evening. David should have been with his army fighting the Ammonites at Rabbah, but he had decided to stay home instead. So he was bored, and not having the movie channel on the Jerusalem TV station, he wandered into Lust for a beautiful woman. But this woman was the wife of one of his Mighty Men, one of his best friends! Yet

David let Lust take control of him, and he ended up committing adultery with Bathsheba.

And then, when she became pregnant, David tried to cover up his sin by calling Uriah home from the front lines of the battle field, so that it would be like the child was Uriah's. But Uriah was more honorable than David, and did the right thing. So when he did not go home to his wife, David had this honorable man killed in battle, just to cover up his own sin of Lust. Then he took Bathsheba as his wife – an honorable thing to do for one of his friends who was killed in battle, right? But God saw what had happened, and called him out on it, and punished David for his sin.

God's commandments are for our protection, and when we disobey them, there are always consequences. Not only did an innocent man die for the indiscretion of the king, but the child died, too. Lust causes the death of many around us, and lest we are very careful, our lives will be horribly changed because of it. That's the reason that Lust is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Lives are changed consequentially when we fall into the mindset of Lust. We stop worshipping God as our #1 in our life, and we begin to worship our own personal cravings.

“The fruits of Lust – sexual assault, domestic violence, the abuse of children – can be terrible, among the most universally condemned and severely punished of crimes. But who knows of a human who has never committed Lust?”⁴

It is good, then, to hear Jesus' words, and to strive to follow His commands. Listen to Matthew 5:27-30. (READ Matthew 5:27-30)

Wow! This is harsh! And how many of us, both men and women would be both blind and handless if we were to take this Scripture literally? **But what Jesus is telling us is that Lust is so powerful that it will destroy us unless we face it head on with all our might.** Yet, “in a sex-saturated, sex-infatuated culture, the words of Jesus on Lust will seem awfully overwrought. Why make such a big deal over something that is so prevalent and widely practiced and praised as Lust?”⁵

⁴ (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 133-4)

⁵ (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 134)

Take a moment and consider what pornography is doing to our society. In just the United States, pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry. And what does that industry produce but broken homes, broken relationships, broken men and women, shattered lives because of rape or incest, incarceration because of abuse or violence or even murder. **There is nothing good about pornography!** It is a direct tool used by Satan to destroy the lives of humans, and rather than stand up against it, we want to accommodate it and lift it up as normal in our lives. NO! Lust created by pornography is deadly because it not only destroys the lives of the ones involved directly in it, but also those who are affected by it as a consequence of the actions of the ones involved in it.

And Jesus tells us to reject Lust like the plague. He tells us to go to such extremes as to put out our eyes or cut off our hands because Lust will always lead us where we do not want to end up – in hell. Lust stands diametrically opposed to the standards that God has given to us, and it ALWAYS leads us to hardship and brokenness. And we, as humans, are so susceptible to Lust, especially when it surrounds us in almost every avenue of life, and in almost every aspect of our culture. Everyone seems to be affected by it in some way or another. Is it any wonder, then, that our nation is falling apart? When our moral standards are in the gutter, people treat one another as objects to be used rather than as individual people with value. How can God continue to bless us when we have become like Gomorrah?

Take for example Wilt Chamberlain. He was a professional basketball player from 1958 to 1973, primarily with the Los Angeles Lakers. He “had great numbers as an NBA star, but the number he will probably be remembered for most is 20,000. That is how many women the never-married Chamberlain claimed in his autobiography to have slept with.

“What few may remember though,’ says columnist Clarence Page, ‘is Chamberlain went on to write that he would have traded all 20,000 [one night stands] for the one woman he wanted to stay with for keeps.’”⁶ He may have been great on the basketball court, he may have been good in bed, but he was lousy at following God’s standards for keeping sex within the confines of marriage.

⁶ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 253)

And sadly, there are many in our world today who mimic the sexual cravings of Wilt Chamberlain. Lust has them in a death grip and they cannot get away from it by themselves. So they glory in their shame. Since Lust is a very personal sin, we want to try to treat it individually, but there is no way that we can break the bondage to Lust on our own. But, as we heard earlier in our series, “*what is impossible with man is possible with God*” (Luke 18:27). Only God can cleanse us from our Lust.

And that is the value of the Church Fathers identifying and calling out this Deadly Sin of Lust. On our own we are beaten up, mauled and shattered by Lust. On our own we are led away easily from the commandments of God. On our own, we have no hope of ever coming back into the presence of God. Our only hope is to seek the help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus died to sanctify sinners, and if you haven’t noticed, that’s all of us. Jesus took our place on the cross, claimed all of our sins on Himself and paid the penalty for all of those sins, not so that we could go on sinning, but so that we might become free from our sins and become pure and holy once more in the sight of God. Jesus made it possible for us to find forgiveness through God’s grace so that “*when we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (I John 1:9).

Jesus saw the condition of our souls, the bondage we are in under the Sin of Lust, and He called out to us to come to Him, “*all who are weary and heavy laden, and He will give us rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus invites us to take on God’s commandments, obey them and follow them, and then we will have peace within our lives and comfort in our minds. Though the world around us will be torn apart in Lust and Pride and Envy and Anger and Greed and Sloth and Gluttony, when we seek to follow God’s will and God’s way, we will be satisfied in every area of our life.

So that demands that we fight against Lust in our life. And though we’re not very successful at it on our own, we need to gather others around us to hold one other accountable, providing support

and encouragement and correction so that we don't fall victim to "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, which is not from God, but from the world*" (I John 2:16).

John Wesley advocated for small groups called classes, consisting of 6-8 people, who could get together on a regular basis to help out each other. Rather than try to face the world's garbage on their own, these classes were to bring about accountability within the church to help us to grow closer to the Lord and follow His commandments. It was a time to pray for each other, read the Bible with each other, practice sexual chastity in singleness and purity in marriage, confess their sins to one another and confront one another about their spiritual growth. That kind of group looks out for each other and brings those involved into a setting where the membership grows together as family, as new creatures in Christ, as a holy people called the Church.

On our own we are no match for the schemes of the Devil, but in a group that confirms the struggles we face, we are able to do and be much more than we could ever hope for on our own.

You see, as one sin develops within our lives, it suddenly shows up stronger in other areas of our lives. Sin multiplies into more sin. So the best way to combat Lust in our lives is to stand strong with the understanding that we are not our own, but we are the Lord's, "*created for a life of good deeds, which He has already prepared for us*" (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, we take the stand to say "NO" to the temptation of Lust at the very first time, and thereafter, we will have a greater strength to resist. "A disciple of Christ is someone who, by the grace of God, has somehow been given the ethical resources to be able to look upon all the wiles of the world and say no."⁷

Jesus tells us that when it comes to Lust, when it comes to sexual sin, it's the thought that counts. That thought, entertained by the mind, leads to a plan, that leads to actions, which always takes us into sin. So if we can curb the thought, if we can eliminate the concept of looking at another person with the thought of Lust towards them, it eliminates all the rest of the dangers of the Deadly Sin of Lust.

I know, it's a very difficult thing to do in our world today, but with the help of others around us,

⁷ (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 141)

with the help of the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can train our minds to that which is good and pleasing to the Lord, and even perfect.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for these bodies and minds that You have given to us. Thank You for the guidelines You have provided to keep us healthy and safe. Forgive us for turning away from Your ways and going our own way. Forgive us of looking at another person as an object rather than as a person of value and importance. Give us the courage to gather together in groups to encourage one another, support one another, pray for one another, study Your Word with one another and challenge each other to stay true to Your purpose of loving each other in the marriage covenant as husband and wife. Guide us to live for You each and every day. Forgive us and make us brand new creatures in Christ. This we pray in Jesus' powerful and holy Name. AMEN