

Lust

- I. Back in the 80's I was watching something like *Family Ties* with my mom and dad and this Pepsi commercial came on. It was two boys hanging out on an old fence near a gas station in the middle of nowhere...when this red sports car pulls up and out walks a very young and full figured Cindy Crawford. She saunters over to a Pepsi machine and buys a can. I never thought watching someone drink soda would be so invigorating. I just knew my mom sitting next to me on the couch could hear my heart thumping out of my chest. I can't remember much other than that but I do remember falling in love at that moment. My brain went haywire and I would have sold my brother to slave laborers if I could have met her in person. The sad thing is now Cindy Crawford is doing like denture commercials...how fast beauty fades. But was that love, lust, or simply natural attraction?
- II. This is our sixth week of our Seven Deadly Sins series where we are covering the seven sins, seven habits, attitudes and behaviors, that are toxic and destroy relationships. Christians throughout the years have narrowed these 7 sins as the root of all other sins. For example, stealing. Usually it is a result of greed. One of the seven. Murder is often a result of wrath or envy. Wearing a toupee. Result of pride. And so forth. And today we talk about lust which can lead us to do all sorts of harmful and hurtful things. I will tell you this morning that I am going to be blatantly honest. G3 is a place for transparency not secrecy. Now If you want to pretend that you have it all together this is probably not the place for you. We will just make you mad or embarrassed. We believe we are sinners being made saints by the grace of God, rather than saints chosen to look down and judge sinners. If you disagree you probably will have issues with us. How is that for a sales pitch for a church?
- III. Several years ago, I was driving along Peters Creek Parkway and looked up and saw this sign (**pic**). It hung near a strip club off of Peters Creek. So what did I do? I pulled over and got a picture of course! I have to say that I felt more than a little uncomfortable pulling over in front a topless bar in broad daylight to take this photo. I felt even more uncomfortable going in to take pictures of the employees. 😊 Now you have to give this bar credit for their honesty. At least they are not trying to dress it up, calling it a "Gentlemen's Club" or labeling it as "adult entertainment." You know exactly what you are doing when you walk in. In a strange way, I think that signage is an improvement so there can't be any rationalization. "I am just here for the atmosphere." Or "I am here only for wings and to fellowship with the other guys." No, going into a strip club, "adult entertainment club," or whatever one calls it, is an odyssey into the depths of lust.
- IV. So what exactly is lust? Here is a deep truth. The devil, in his effort to get us off the path to which God has called us, doesn't offer up anything new. **He simply takes something that God has created that is good and corrupts it.** For example, food is a gift from God. Especially Ben and Jerry's chocolate brownie ice cream. And there is nothing wrong with having a healthy appetite. But when food becomes an obsession and is placed before relationships and/or harms our bodies, this is a corruption of what God intends. We talked about this a few weeks ago when we explored gluttony. But this is also true when it comes to the gift of sex. And yes, sex is a gift from God. **Genesis 2:23-25 NRSV** Notice "clinging"

and becoming “one flesh.” These are biblical euphemisms for sex. Adam and Eve are in their birthday suits and they are not ashamed. All is good. Real good! The point? The devil didn’t invent sex or create the human body. God did, and it is a beautiful thing. Women, at least. Men are questionable. ☺ Paul, the early church leader, writes in his first letter to the Corinthians that married couples shouldn’t “deprive each” (another euphuism for sex) except to pray. Now that is what I am talking about Paul! God very clearly has affirmed the goodness of sex. Just like food, **it is always good when it is kept in its proper boundaries. Lust is willfully allowing or seeking wrongfully directed sexual desire.** It is like letting a 400 pound tiger outside its cage at a zoo. In the cage, or let’s say “enclosure” in modern day zoos, tigers are beautiful creatures to enjoy and behold. You open that door and let them free among 500 screaming men, women and children eating ice cream cones, someone is going to get hurt. Same thing with lust. It is sexual desire left unchecked and freed from its boundaries. And so it becomes a dangerous, devouring beast.

- V. So then what should be our sexual boundaries? I remember as a single college student someone gave me a Christian book on dating. My question was how far can I go with a girl without sinning? There was like this graph that started with holding hands, then kissing, necking, and then petting, and so forth. As a typical guy I wanted to go right to the brink. I can’t remember where the author drew the line but I knew it was woefully short for me. Later I discovered that the bible doesn’t have a chart on sexual boundaries. In the biblical world men and women were married as soon as they hit puberty so there wasn’t a need. So in the bible we find that all sexual activity was reserved for a man and women bound by marriage, period. There is no “thou shall not smooch thy girlfriend below the neck” or anything of the sort. So where does that leave us in postmodern America? When the average age for marriage is now 27 for women and 29 for men? Well into our sexual maturity. What does Jesus have to say? Very little in fact but not completely silent. **Matthew 5:27-29 NRSV.** Jesus here first affirms the Jewish understanding of sexual boundaries. **To have sex outside of marriage is adultery.** He goes on to say we shouldn’t even lust for someone we are not married to. This means we shouldn’t mentally fantasize about having sex or sexual activity with that person. And then he goes to great lengths to tell us how serious this is. Jesus really isn’t encouraging us to take an ice pick to our eyes, he is using hyperbole here to make his point. Don’t take this lightly.
- VI. Seems awfully strict, doesn’t it? But what did he really mean by that? Does it mean that every time we go to Myrtle Beach, or kiss our girlfriend or boyfriend, our soul is in jeopardy? Let me tell you what it doesn’t mean...to have attraction for someone. That is the way we are wired. It doesn’t matter if you are 13 or 83, it is natural to feel sexual desire for people you find attractive. This goes whether you are single or have been married 40 years. You can’t help the attraction. I was reading this past week in an online scientific journal about how men particularly cannot *not* react physiologically when they see an attractive woman. Now before we husbands begin to elbow our wives and whisper, “See honey, I can’t help it! So get off my case when I check out the waitress at Ruby Tuesdays!” What we can help and what is wrong is when we (men or women) embrace that attraction and actively sexually

fantasize about that person. Give in to it. Seek it out. And mentally undress them and such. That is lust...sexual desire gone wrong, and that is what Jesus is talking about.

- VII.** Let me give you an example. This is RL- Real Life. This might surprise you but I go to the gym regularly. It is like my “thang.” I don’t play sports except outdoor stuff like kayaking and such, but I love lifting weights. My lift partner is Andy Lambert, the associate pastor at Mt Tabor. We egg each other on to push harder and lift more, all to stroke our male middle age egos. Our wives couldn’t care less, so the only person we brag to is to each other. Well, that and Facebook occasionally. A few weeks ago, Andy and I were doing deadlifts at the Y in the smaller room on the side. Usually we work out around lunch time and we are often the only people in the room. But not that day. I got into position to get ready for my squat and in saunters this 20-something-year-old woman. A rather fit and attractive woman dressed in yoga pants and a very low cut t-shirt. To be honest she was very Cindy Crawford-esque. I am a pastor, but I am a man...and not a blind one. But I was trying to be good and stared straight ahead at the mirror in front of me to focus on my form. But then she grabs a mat and walks directly in my line of vision and plops down. She starts doing all these Yoga contortions with her “lady parts” flopping here and there. I thought, is this some kind of set up? Some reality TV show where they put pastors in tricky situations and see how they react? But I continued to stare ahead...primarily for two reasons. For one, Andy was right there keeping me in check. But more importantly, her bodybuilding boyfriend entered the room almost daring me to look at her. Now, here is the deal. There was nothing wrong with the fact that I found her attractive. I am, after all, just a regular guy. But it would have been wrong to stare at her and to begin to fantasize. So instead I turned my gaze on the mirror ahead and my shaking back and legs. So I didn’t lust that time. But I wish I could say that is always the case.
- VIII.** So why is lust, sexualizing someone who I am not married to, so bad? I mean it doesn’t hurt anyone right? Like what harm would it have caused the girl at the gym? Larry Flynt, the infamous publisher of the over-the-top porn magazine *Hustler*, wrote an article making a case that people should thank him for all the good he has done for society. He goes on to say that he has given millions of men and women a chance to live out their sexual fantasies, which has enabled them to free their repressed desire. Otherwise, he argues, there would be exponentially more ruined marriages, rapes, and sexual crimes. His view is that pornography, instead of feeding the lust machine, is uncorking it before it explodes and goes off the rails. To me that is like trying to help an obese person by giving them a free subscription to the Food Network. Let’s be real. Porn doesn’t decrease the desire for illicit sex, it just increases it. What Jesus knows that Larry Flynt doesn’t is that when it comes to acting out sexually in appropriate ways, it starts in our mind before we live it out in the world through our actions.
- IX.** And to think porn can help us in this way is ludicrous. When I was a teenager and I managed to get ahold of a *Playboy*, do you think I went from drooling over the centerfold and then seeing my female neighbor thinking, “Oh, look...it is Sally, a wonderful young lady that I really need to get to know better and find out what her interests are.” No, porn feeds

and leads to lust, and fires up our animal instincts. It causes us to view people as mere things for our pleasure rather than beloved children of God. On top of that, watching or looking at some air-brushed woman or man in the prime of their life engaging in unbridled sex creates this completely unrealistic expectation for our spouses and future spouses. Without even intending, we will compare our wife who has been up all night with our crying baby to a well-rested, cosmetically enhanced, twenty-something who has never given birth and spends her days doing Pilates and drinking kale smoothies. So, yes, lust, even if it goes no further than our mind, hurts us and corrupts how we view and relate to other people, including our spouses if we are married.

- X. So what do we do? Especially in this age where the marriage age is getting pushed back further and further, and you can't turn on the TV without a Victoria's Secret commercial coming on, or opening your inbox without an invitation to a hot moms' website. I think Adam Hamilton offers us five really helpful ways to overcome lust. He calls them the five R's. First, **Remember who you are**. A husband, a father, or a mother, and if a Christian, a follower of Jesus. I would also add to remember who the one you are lusting after is too. Instead of seeing that attractive bikini model that pops up on the news web page as a sexual plaything, remember that she is someone's daughter or sister. This is like taking a mental cold shower. Second, **Realize the consequence of our action**. Over the years, I have talked to so many people, both married and single, who would do anything if they could undo what they did. One moment of giving in to their lust caused a lifetime of pain and suffering. So ask yourself, "If I continue to lust, what would that do to my life and to all those I love?" Destroyed marriage, children separated from their parents through divorce, or if single, disease, unwanted pregnancy, or the emotional baggage. Third, **Remove yourself from the situation**. When I was living in the BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters) in the army before I was married, I made an unusual request. It was like a cross between a hotel and an apartment complex. I asked the lady at the lobby desk if she could turn off the cable in my room. They had all the premium channels and I knew myself well enough at that point in my life that I would give in to temptation late at night when all the "adult" programming came on. It was embarrassing, I admit. Especially when she asked the reason why...for which I gave a very lame response. But we need to be willing to do whatever it takes, even radical steps, so we don't end up destroying our mind and eventually our lives to lust.
- XI. Four, **Rededicate yourself to the Lord**. This can be as simple as praying, "God, I am your disciple. Help me to act like it." I do this often, not just to resist lust but envy, greed, etc. Let me tell you, it's hard to lust when you are talking to Jesus. It's on par with telling a dirty joke in front of your grandma. But it's even more than that. When we pray for God's help, He helps. He gives us power to overcome that which we can't on our own. Paul the church planter tells us in Romans 8 that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is working in us...and we need to call upon that power to not only overcome lust but overcome all those things that bring us down. And finally, **we need to Reveal to a friend our struggle**. As I have shared before, following Jesus is not a solo event but it is to be done in community. And in part what that means is we need to share our struggles with each other. It means that if you are a guy or gal here and you struggle with lust, porn, are tempted to have an

affair or go too far with your boyfriend or girlfriend, talk to someone. There is no shame in admitting this. You are just human. Join the club. I am not saying you need to take out an ad, post it on Facebook or tweet it, but you need to find at least one other Christ follower you trust, admit it, and ask them to pray for you and keep you accountable. Please do this before it is too late.

- XII.** As we close I want to share this on sexuality as a whole. As an older teen growing up in Florida I was responsible for keeping chemicals right in the family pool. If I didn't add enough chlorine, we would find hundreds of tadpoles happily swimming in our pool like it was the neighborhood pond. But if I added too much, my friends and I would emerge from the pool with red eyes like we just woke up from an all-night bender. The key was striking the right balance. In a sense, establishing chemical boundaries. When this was achieved, we had an amoeba-free, eye-friendly swim. In a sense the same goes with our God given sexuality. It is a wonderful gift when expressed in its proper place...namely within the context of marriage. But once it strays outside, like with lust, watch out because someone is going to get burned.