

"KINGDOM CONSTITUTION" – Lessons in the Sermon on the Mount

2.26.17 Matthew 5:27-30

"The Lure of Lust"

Craig Crawshaw

INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to consider a very difficult subject – lust. The subject is difficult for a couple of obvious reasons. (1) For most of us it is a "secret" sin – something we all struggle with, and yet talk little about; and (2) It is a sin we would rather relegate to someone else as being "their" issue rather than acknowledge it as our own. And (3) It is difficult because this pastor admits that I struggle with lust, and it's much easier to preach on a subject that isn't so personally convicting!

I am so thankful that God did not choose to leave us in the dark about something so near (not dear) to our heart, but rather determined to instruct us from His Word – our guidebook for life. So hopefully it will be God, not myself, that will be the primary voice of reason today. I've chosen to title this message "The Lure of Lust" because like a fishing lure spinning in the water, it is something that continually "dangles" in front of us, tempting us to embrace it in thought, if not in action.

Lets begin by reading our Scripture passage from the Sermon on the Mount. Last week Jesus taught us the deeper meaning of the 5th commandment – "do not murder," teaching us that "anger kills." This week He teaches the deeper meaning of the 6th commandment.

Matthew 5:27-30 *You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.*

IMPORTANT OPENING UNDERSTANDINGS

1. THIS CORRECTS INTERPRETATION, NOT THE LAW. Jesus is not correcting the commandment of "do not commit adultery." It was not the law but the rabbinical explanation of it that was at fault. Yes, adultery was strictly forbidden in Jewish culture – so much so that it was a capital crime deserving death. Yet the interpretation never extended to the root of the sin, which begins in the heart and then spends time ruminating in the mind. Jesus makes it clear that lust of the eyes (or of the mind – for it can happen with suggestions other than visual) is "the same" as the act of adultery. (see #3 below)

2. THIS IS ABOUT ANYONE'S IMMORAL THOUGHTS, NOT JUST MARITAL

UNFAITHFULNESS. Though the teaching emerges from an act that can only be made by one who is married (adultery) and is expressed in the person of a male ("who looks at a woman with lust"), the greater principle is about anyone, male or female, single or married, who has lustful thoughts toward another.

3. THE SIMILARITY IS MORAL (SPIRITUAL), NOT JUDICIAL. Let us not think that Jesus was teaching that the thought of adultery is the same as the act of adultery when it comes to social impact and judicial consequence. If it were the same, then thoughts might as well become actions. The reasoning would be: if I'm worthy of hell for thinking it, I might as well do it", which is ridiculous. Of course it is better, and critical, to retrain oneself from the action, Jesus' point is that both thinking about and carrying out an immoral act of lust are equal MORALLY in separating one from God and being worthy of eternal damnation, apart from Jesus' provision. It is not only the act that should make us feel guilty and in need of a Savior, but even the very thought.

4. SEEING, AND EVEN ATTRACTION, IS NOT THE SIN, BUT COVETING IS. Every "red blooded" male who sees a pretty girl (and yes, shapely girl) feels an attraction inside and might

even want to give a second look. And every “breathing” female who sees a manly man will do a bit of a swoon inside and feel an attraction. This is not lust – it is the way we are created and wired by God. It is natural attraction that from the beginning of time has made male and female want to mate and has caused the proliferation of our species. Don’t feel guilty about natural attraction. And don’t make your spouse feel guilty about thinking someone else is attractive. BUT if the attraction crosses the line to coveting it is lusting. The Greek word used here for “lust for her” is the same word in the 10th commandment that says “do not covet.” So lusting is taking the attraction further, deciding to dwell on and fantasize about the other person, wanting him/her for one’s own pleasure - and that is the sin of lust. And “seeing” is not even necessary to do that – it can be done by suggestion in the mind.

A DEFINITION OF LUST

So what is a good Biblical definition of lust? Here I will borrow from a favorite author of mine, Jon Piper, of “Desiring God” ministry. His definition: **Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God.** He gets this definition largely from 1 Thessalonians 4.

***1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*

Here “sexual immorality” is akin to “lustful passion.” And “lustful passion” is “defrauding” or dishonoring the object of that passion. And it is like unto the non-Christian who “does not know God” or disregards Him. Here, lust is “impure” and “transgression” against God, as opposed to “abstaining” and being “sanctified” by the Holy Spirit. Thus again, the helpful working definition: **Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God.**

So marriage is a life-long commitment to honor one another in faithfulness and love. Sexual desire for one’s partner healthily fuels that covenant bond of mutual honor and love. But to focus that sexual desire elsewhere breaks that commitment – even if only in the mind, and it snuffs the fire of marriage passion and dishonors both our partner and the temporary object of our affection, not to speak of dishonoring God Himself.

[AN IMPORTANT DIGRESSION OF EXPLANATION

The Greek word translated in Matthew 5:28 as “lust” can have both a positive and negative connotation depending upon context. For instance, in Luke 22:15 Jesus says “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” The Greek word for “earnestly desired” is the same as is translated “lust” in Matthew 5:28 and elsewhere. So it could rightly be said that Jesus “lusted” to eat the Passover with the disciples. And clearly this lusting is not sin.

I mention this because some commentators have thus decided that lust is not a sin, but the acting on the lust is the sin. They also reference James 1:15:

***James 1:15** Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

They say that this shows that lust has to “conceive” before it becomes sin. I agree that “earnest desire” is not sin, but the improper acting on it is. Eve “earnestly desired” the fruit, but it wasn’t sin until she took (dangerous but not yet sin) and ate (the sin!).

So how do we answer this? I say that context is the key. Most of the New Testament passages that use lust are clearly referring to the “conceiving” of the “earnest desire” that is displeasing to God = sin. I give you a number of examples.

Romans 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.*

Romans 13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

2 Timothy 2:22 *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

1 Peter 2:11 *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*

Therefore, I say, in most all of its uses in the Bible, "lust" is sin – specifically "a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God."

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THE MAGNITUDE OF THE ISSUE

I need not dwell on this, but I must bring it to our attention.

Lest we think that this is more of a problem for the young, but not so much for those older, consider this. A man in his 90's was asked how old he was when he was no longer tempted with lust. And he answered, "I don't know, I'm not that old yet." Have any of you outgrown lustful thoughts?

Lest we think that lust is a problem primarily for the non-Christian, consider this. The hotel industry is able to track movie rentals in their hotels. And from them we learn that when Christian conventions are in a hotel, the R and X rated movie rentals and X rated television channels visited are as high or higher than during non-Christian conventions. Likewise, the so-called cyber-sex internet sites and pornography sites are frequently visited by those calling themselves Christian, according to multiple polling results.

And lest we think that lust is primarily a male issue, consider the statistics of those women who regularly watch soap opera television or read romance novels where sexual themes and acts are so prevalent. Or note the high female readership of "Cosmopolitan," "Vanity Fair" or any other number of magazines which contain multiple articles about indulging sexual fantasies.

And lest we think that "clubs for men" and "mature internet sites" and so-called "soft-porn" magazines are seldom frequented by those calling themselves "Christian" – think again. Polling statistics tell the true story.

And be aware of the many Christian counselors and pastors who reveal that their clientele include multiple cases of both men and women with secret sexual additions.

Jesus brings up the issue of lusting in the mind and adultery of the heart because He as the Almighty Son of God knows the hearts and minds of his own. He also was tempted, but without sin. (Hebrews 4:15) May we not quickly think of "the other one" who needs to hear this, but realize that each of us struggles in some way with this secret sin.

When Jesus goes on in verses 29-30 to speak of "cutting off" a body part to prevent lusting, he says that this is preferable than for your whole body to go into hell = gehenna, the eternal place of torment. (Now, He is clearly not speaking of this in literal terms. One could cut off all limbs and still be able to lust. Rather he is speaking of using whatever severe and desperate measures it might take to curb the lusting.) In this He describes the ultimate "magnitude of the issue." It seems to me He makes the point that a life given to continual fulfillment of lust is headed for eternal punishment. This is serious business. This is a life or death issue. In a real sense Jesus is saying, "if you don't fight lust you won't go to heaven. **Therefore, the issue of lust is a crisis of faith.**

A CRISIS OF FAITH

The best way to stop doing something bad is NOT to try to stop doing it. Yes, we must "cut off" whatever is hindering us. (Matt. 5: 29-30) Yes, we must "lay aside every encumbrance and sin which so easily entangles us." (Hebrews 12:1) But just as the more we think about not eating

when we are fasting, we get hungry– the more we think about not lusting the more we think about lusting.

In this regard, Paul told the Philippians not to be anxious. But he didn't say to stop thinking about what makes you anxious – that doesn't work! Rather, he told them to pray with thanksgiving. And then he said to think on all the positive things. (Philippians 4:6-8) In other words, he counseled them to combat the negative of anxiety with the positive of "happy" thoughts.

We could call it "DEFEAT BY REPLACEMENT" – replacing lust with earnest desire for God!

We could even use the non-Biblical, fantasy example of the story of Peter Pan teaching the children to fly. The more the children tried to not stay on the ground and fly they could not. But the secret to flying (other than pixie dust) was to think of happy, wonderful thoughts. They replaced the negative thoughts of not being able to fly with positive happy thoughts.

Now Peter Pan is only a fantasy story. But the story of Jesus' victory over sin, including lust, is absolute fact and truth. And the best way to combat lusting is to fill our heart and mind and passion with an overwhelming love and devotion to Jesus our Lord. When we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength there is no room of lusting of the heart or mind (or strength). (Matthew 22:37) When we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus there no more "sinking" in the lake of our secret passions. (Hebrews 12:2)

Romans 6:14 *Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free.

His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me."

Charles Wesley – "O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing"

The temptation, the "lure" to sin through lusting loses its power over us.

That's why the only fight we fight is the fight of faith. We begin the fight with sincere and contrite repentance and receiving of forgiveness. And we win that fight by filling our hearts and mind with the fullness of the Spirit of God, day by day. And this relates so beautifully to the Beatitude that has gone before: *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*

Galatians 5:16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*

Romans 8:6 *For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.*

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 *Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

"The way to fight lust is to feed faith with the knowledge of an irresistibly glorious God."

Jon Piper

CHECKLIST FOR THE DEFEATING OF LUST

- ✓ Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God
- ✓ Therefore lust (in all forms) is sin [yes, acknowledging context]
- ✓ Lust tempts the young, older, male and female – therefore, me!
- ✓ I must take drastic and desperate measures to curb improper stimulation
- ✓ I must focus my sexual desire and love on my spouse alone
- ✓ My best defense is a powerful offense of loving God with all my heart
- ✓ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)