

SEVEN Deadly Sins - #4 LUST

For the last few weeks we've been talking about "*The Seven Deadly Sins!*" You can probably name most of them by now. PRIDE, LUST, GREED, ENVY, SLOTH (LAZINESS or APATHY), WRATH (ANGER) & GLUTTONY. You can find the first three messages in this series posted on our church website at www.standrewnewmarket.org. Today we're going to talk about the sin of LUST.

Now when I was training for ministry, students were told there were three things to avoid talking about from the pulpit. Politics - because there would always be people in the pew who would disagree with us. Money - because people get upset when you challenge their materialism. And sex - because that's just too personal! But if you read Scripture you'll discover that the Bible talks about all three of those things and so did Jesus. So perhaps it is no surprise that even as early as the sixth century Pope Gregory included LUST on his list of the seven deadly sins.

A few years ago a Beliefnet.com internet poll asked people which of the seven deadly sins they had committed the most. 30% of respondents, that's almost 1 in 3, said that they were most guilty of the sin of LUST! Now in many ways that's not surprising, is it? We live in a PG13 world, where we are bombarded with sexual and sexually explicit images on a daily basis. The movie industry create sexual icons out of movie and T.V. stars. Sexuality is used to sell everything from toothpaste to new cars. And if you flip through your T.V. channels or Facebook feeds or watch YouTube videos you find the same obsession with sexuality.

So let's define LUST just so we don't confuse it with God's good gift of our sexuality, because God created us as sexual beings. LUST is when we have an unusually intense or obsessive desire of a sexual nature. It's much more than looking at someone and thinking to yourself "*She is beautiful*" or "*He is handsome*". LUST is when you start thinking about that person as a sexual OBJECT, and you start desiring them in an unhealthy way.

The problem with LUST is where it begins - in our thought life. In the place where no-one else, apart from God, can see it. And because we think no-one can see it, it becomes easy for us to dream and to fantasize, and to plot and plan and to get to such a point where we act out. And here's the real danger. Once you let the genie called LUST out of the bottle it is very hard to put it back in the bottle and contain it.

Now I know how we think. *"It's just a magazine I'm reading". It's just a movie. It's just a TV show. It's just an internet site. It's just pornography".* But if it is true that you are what you eat, it is equally true that you are what you read, and what you watch, and what you listen to, and what you absorb in to your character. Here's what Scripture says in Ephesians 4:22-23, ***"throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes."***

And in Philippians 4:8 we read, ***"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."***

Clearly the Bible thinks our thought life is very important. Here's another Scripture about that. Roman 12:2: ***"2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."***

The bottom line. All sin begins in our thought life long before we act it out. That's where the real spiritual battle takes place.

Where this becomes even more dangerous for us as twenty first century people is that we live in a society where we are bombarded by visual images, so much so that we can easily ignore the fact that our eyes are a portal into our souls. The images we see have a huge influence on helping us to determine how we think about life, about our spouse, about marriage, about family, about ethics and morals, about people in other countries and a whole host of other things.

Think about it. How often have you gone into a fast food restaurant and been persuaded to change your order because of something you saw projected on to the menu screen. Advertisers wouldn't use images and invest in the technology unless it was a powerful persuasive to change the way someone was thinking! In effect, they are trying to change your thinking! And here's the thing. Jesus knew the power of images. Matthew 5:27-28. Jesus said: ***"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** So Jesus says. It's not just the action that is wrong, it is the thinking, the fantasizing, and the plotting and the planning that result from it that are just as sinful as the action.

Now one of the greatest defences people use when it comes to this whole area of LUST is, *"But I'm not harming anyone"*. Well Jesus has pointed out the spiritual risk of nurturing lustful thoughts. And if those lustful thoughts cause you to cheat on your wife then you are definitely harming your spouse, and your children. And if they lead you to commit a sexual crime then you are harming your victim in a very damaging way.

There's a great story about LUST in the Old Testament book of Second Samuel Chapter 11. King David was taking a late afternoon nap but he can't sleep. So he gets up and start walking around the roof of his palace. ***"From his vantage point on the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was stunningly beautiful."***

Did you notice the words, ***"He saw"***? Remember, the eyes are the portal to the soul. Now, to be fair to David, he just happened across this scene. So, at this point, no foul.

"David sent to ask about her..." OK. He clearly doesn't know who she is. He was just checking out her availability in case he wanted to ask her out on a date.

But then the situation gets red flagged. The result of his enquiry is, ***"Isn't this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*** Now at the point, David's interest in Bathsheba should have ended. Not only was she married, but she was married to one of the soldiers in David's army. But by now, David's interest had led him into an obsession with this woman. So he broke all the rules. ***"David sent his agents to get her. After she arrived, he went to bed with her."***

David seduces her. Now let's remember that he is a position of power over this woman. King and subject. Male, in a male dominated world, over female. He crossed the boundary. This is sexual abuse born of the lust that had grabbed hold of David's heart. Lust always costs you more that you are willing to pay. So here's what happens next. ***"Then she returned home. Before long she realized she was pregnant. Later she sent word to David: "I'm pregnant."***

Now his LUST has serious consequences. David moves into cover-up mode. He tries to manipulate the situation instead of owning up to his personal responsibility. So he brings Bathsheba's husband Uriah home from the battlefield supposedly to report on the army's progress. But his real intention was for Uriah to go home to his wife, and sleep with her, so Uriah would think the baby was his. But Uriah shows himself to be more honorable than David. He tells David, ***"My master Joab and his servants are roughing it***

out in the fields. So, how can I go home and eat and drink and enjoy my wife? On your life, I'll not do it!"

So David goes to plan B. He arranges for Uriah to be put in the front of the battle line where the fighting was fiercest and it was there Uriah died in battle. In effect, David murdered Uriah. Next thing we know, after a decent period of time, David marries Bathsheba and makes her his Queen and she gave birth to a son, who died in infancy. Now listen to what Scripture then says, 1 Samuel 11:27, "***But God was not at all pleased with what David had done.***"

Now here's what I find very interesting. If you read the rest of the story about David's family, you'll discover that most of David's sons had a problem with LUST. I've often wondered if that was because David felt he could not challenge his sons thinking, or their sexual behaviour, because he couldn't handle his own guilt and shame. Ephesians 5:3, "***Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed.***"

So if we want to fight LUST and sexual promiscuity, especially in a culture that preaches instant gratification, and "*if it feel right do it*", then we need to do something about where the Scriptures say LUST is hatched – in our thought lives. We need to obey Scripture by "***changing the way we think.***" (Romans 12:2) That means you have to deal with lustful thoughts when you get them. Walk out of the situation. Put down that magazine. Change the TV channel. Leave the conversation. Turn off the computer. Talk to a trusted friend or counsellor. Read Scripture. Why? Because Philippians 4:8 is true: "***...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.***

Let's pray:

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy, holy, holy, God.
 We come into your presence
 and we realize in light of your holiness,
 that we are not fit to enter that presence.
 We have sinned against you
 in thought
 and in word

and through our actions.
Thank you for Jesus
who delivers us from our sin
and who teaches us how to live.

We pray today for all those who struggle
with lust,
with pornography,
with unhealthy sexual desires.
Free them, we pray, from the chains that bind them.

We pray for the victims of sexual assault,
and sexual exploitation.
We pray for the victims of domestic violence.
We ask for healing and for justice.

We pray for our young people
growing up in a society where
people are often judged
according to their looks, or their appearance.
Help them and all of us to understand
that we are valued and loved by you
simply because we are your children.

Grant your wisdom to the General Assembly of
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
as it meets next week
and as it discuss issues that include matters of human sexuality.
May your Spirit grant gifts of patience,
understanding and wisdom to difficult discussions!

Today we remember before you the people of Manchester, England.
We pray comfort for the mourning,
and healing for the injured.
We pray for those traumatized by what happened,
and for the emergency responders who saw so much tragedy.

All these things we pray in Jesus Name. Amen.