

Scripture Readings - Proverbs 6:20-35

- ²⁰ My son, keep your father's commands
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
- ²¹ Bind them upon your heart forever;
fasten them around your neck.
- ²² When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you.
- ²³ For these commands are a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline
are the way to life,
- ²⁴ keeping you from the immoral woman,
from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.
- ²⁵ Do not lust in your heart after her beauty
or let her captivate you with her eyes,
- ²⁶ for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread,
and the adulteress preys upon your very life.
- ²⁷ Can a man scoop fire into his lap
without his clothes being burned?
- ²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals
without his feet being scorched?
- ²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished.
- ³⁰ Men do not despise a thief if he steals
to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.
- ³¹ Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold,
though it costs him all the wealth of his house.

- ³² But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment;
whoever does so destroys himself.
- ³³ Blows and disgrace are his lot,
and his shame will never be wiped away;
- ³⁴ for jealousy arouses a husband's fury,
and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.
- ³⁵ He will not accept any compensation;
he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.

Matthew 5:27-30

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Message

The Good & Beautiful Life: Life without Lust

Introduction

From the time Terri and I began our seminary studies together I knew that I had found a good and sincere friend. Terri was an intelligent, caring young man, both devoted to his widowed mother and to his calling to ministry. His abilities soon open doors which allowed him to be an assistant to our seminary president even as he attended classes.

Following graduation our callings took us two different states, until Terri took the church in rural Nebraska, not far from us in Omaha. During those years it was our joy to introduce Kerry to one of Carole's medical school classmates. Soon I was performing their marriage in her home church. And then over the next six years we joined with our friends as the family grew.

When Carole and I moved away from the Nebraska we lost touch with his good friends, except for a few pastoral retreats where Terry and I would meet over lunch. But, a couple years pass without contact with our friends, and then one day I received the tragic news that Terri had died.

Immediately made plans to fly to Michigan to attend a memorial service and to offer our support to Terri's family. As I did so I walked into a reality I had known nothing about. For there I found that these friends had been divorced for over a year, that Terri had died in Chicago; a suicide. I discovered the sad story of how Internet pornography had led to prostitution, the loss of his pastorate and the loss of his marriage. Though he picked up different work, trying to stay close to his children, eventually he went to live in Chicago and enter into a pastoral rehabilitation program. Unfortunately, it was their amid a deep despair for where his sin had led him, and what it had cost him, that Terri killed himself.

The world won't tell you this, but I will, because our Lord does: Sexual lust is a dangerous thing.

>>>> Jesus understood the destructive power of lust; not just to cause us to break God's laws, but to deeply wound and destroy LIFE, our life and the lives of others. (Hyperboles.. eye, hand)

Today, we hear Jesus' warning which calls us to live "higher" than the law, for not only are we to resist the temptation to commit adultery.... we are invited to discover LIFE by avoiding sexual lust.

At this point, I can understand how many people may simply throw up their hands, either in despair or laughter, at even the suggestion of avoiding sexual lust. Maybe there's a chance to resist lust in a culture where men and women are physically separated, cloistered from one another, or where long dresses, scarves and veils hide all but the eyes for others to see! But how can you avoid sexual lust in America? The expectation of many TV and print advertisers is that people will lust; they count on lust to help sell their product. Actors and models know that in selling their bodies and faces to photographers that they are making themselves an "object" of lust. The audience will never even have a chance to explore the wonder of experiencing healthy relations with these models. It will all be fantasy which may grant pleasure, but never fulfill the potential God has designed us to experience in relationship to one another.

Just this past week I was reading about Eugene Peterson's book Run with the Horses, a reflection about learning how to live through the story of Jeremiah. In this article Peterson notes something very appropriate for our discussion this morning.

At first he notes that:

If we look around for what it means to be a mature, whole, blessed person, we don't find much. These people are around, maybe as many of them as ever, but they aren't easy to pick out. No journalist interviews them.

No talk show features them. They are not admired. They are not looked up to. They do not set trends. There is no cash value in them.

No Oscars are given for integrity. At year's end no one compiles a list of the ten best-lived lives.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/bibleinsights/runwithhorses.html>

But then, commenting on the stories of faith recorded in scripture, Peterson writes:

*We see what is possible: anyone and everyone is able to live a zestful life that spills out of the stereotyped containers that a sin-inhibited society provides. Such lives fuse spontaneity and purpose and green the desiccated landscape with meaning. And we see how it is possible: by plunging into a life of faith, participating in what God initiates in each life, exploring what God is doing in each event. The persons we meet on the pages of Scripture are remarkable for the intensity with which they live Godward, the thoroughness in which all the details of their lives are included in God's word to them, in God's action in them. **It is these persons who are conscious of participating in what God is saying and doing that are most human, most alive.** These persons are evidence that none of us is required to live "at this poor dying rate" for another day, another hour.*

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/bibleinsights/runwithhorses.html>

This is what Jesus is calling us to hear in His Sermon on the Mount; that **there is a life we can experience which is higher than the life we are presently experiencing.** Today we are specifically called to that greater life by not only “not committing adultery”, but by shunning sexual lust.

We are, on a very practical level, being encouraged to discover a fullness of LIFE that cannot be experienced when we allow temporary pleasures of lust to sidetrack, even snuff out, the potential built into us by God for healthy relationships.

Practically speaking, it is the message of our culture/society that we can arrive at our full humanness by gratifying our sexual desires. But it is the message of God, from Word & Spirit; the written Word, the incarnate Word, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit at work within us, that full humanness is only discovered as we obey God regarding sexuality.

So again, the choice is yours.

If you sincerely seek excellence;
if you want to become all you can possibly be,

- to whose message will you listen,
- in whom will you trust,
- in whom will you put your faith?

I recommend faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 5:27-28

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

This morning I want to present four biblical teachings concerning sexual lust which will help us obey Jesus' teaching:

1. Sexual desire is good, but not all sexual desire.

Perhaps you read our morning bulletin's "Thought Before Worship" from Dallas Willard:

The two main errors in the area of human sexuality are these:

(1) assuming that all sexual desire is good, and

(2) believing that all sexual desire is evil.

I think it is because the Church has for centuries raised opposition to unhealthy sexual desire that the world, and even certain segments within the Church have come to believe that Christians view sexual desire as bad.

And yet, we know that from the beginning God created everything "good", and that included His encouragement to Adam & Eve to "become one flesh", to "be fruitful and multiply". Sexual desire not only initiates an unparalleled opportunity for relational intimacy, but also the joy of creating life. **Sexual desire was designed by God for human relationships and human existence.** It is good thing! It is a good thing! Read the Song of Solomon sometime and discover how it is celebrated.

And yet, as is so evident from the relational destruction around us, and debates about human existence, not all sexual desire is good.

As Frederick Buechner phrased it:

Like nitroglycerin (sex) can be used either to blow up bridges

or heal hearts. *Wishful Thinking, p. 107*

God designed it for good. Human sin has warped much of sexual desire to destructive ends.

Recognize that sexual desire is good, but not all sexual desire.

Which leads to a second teaching:

2. Our culture promotes lust, not good sex.

First of all, let me be clear. **While sexual lust is obviously a male issue, it is also a female issue.** For while male lust plays “out loud” in the physical arenas of pornography and prostitution, female lust is alive and well in romance novels, Cosmo magazine and movies such as “Sex in the City”. Wherever and however two people are physically or emotionally connected for the purpose of self-gratification, God’s good purposes have been warped by sin.

If we study the word used in this teaching, the word we translate as “lustfully”

...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully

we find the Greek word ***epithumia***. And while many have read this passage and mistakenly equated it with the act of adultery, it literally describes “... **intentionally objectifying another person for one’s own gratification.**” GBL p. 90

Again, rather than respecting someone as a person of worth, when we sexually lust we make a person an object for our own pleasure.

We must be careful here to differentiate between a normal and good “attraction” to someone, and lusting after them. As James Bryan Smith describes so creatively to his students:

“Epithumia is not referring to the *first* look but to the *second*.”...

(The old double take.)

“...It is the opposite of love. Love looks into the eyes; *epithumia* steals glances below them.”

And this is what our culture promotes; *Epithumia*, lust. And while our culture may support “safe” sex, it certainly does not promote good sex. In reality, what our society promotes through lust is a cheap imitation of what God designed us to experience in our most intimate relationship.

The world offers pleasure that will quickly fade, while God offers us “fulfillment”.

What are you striving for in your life?

A third lesson known by too many people through personal experience:

3. Lust is insatiable by nature.

The primary reason our culture is so full of lust and temptations to lust is because lust “sells”. If there wasn’t a market for it.. a buck to be made, the pornography, prostitution and movie industry would dry up. But they exist and they grow because lust is insatiable by nature.

It was Augustine who, in his younger years, knew a thing or two about sexual lust, who is often quoted about emptiness in our hearts which remains, until our hearts rest in God.

Again, lust is a cheap imitation of the fullness God wants us to experience in relationship with another person, and in our relationship with God. It is pleasure trying to disguise itself as fulfillment. And when that pleasure fades, the empty heart goes searching for something to fill it. Like hunger which returns even after a banquet is enjoyed; the empty stomach, like the empty heart, eventually yearn for “more”.

And the only way to stop that insatiable need, is to fill one’s heart with a relationship that is full and healthy. Lust is, as someone more clever than I once said, an “individual sport”. **One cannot satiate a heart built for relationship by themselves.**

Lust will never satisfy because it simply cannot.

For you see in our fourth teaching;

4. At its base, lust is selfishness.

Lust is being willing to make someone else an object for your personal gratification, by not being willing or able to offer yourself fully to them.

From an extremely insightful book, *Glittering Vices*, by Rebecca DeYoung, a philosophy professor at Calvin College, we get this comparison:

Followers of Jesus ask, “How can my life – my thoughts, my choices, my emotional responses, my conversations, and my behavior – make me a

person who is best prepared to give and receive love in relationship with others?” Lust asks “How far can I go on a date?”

Citation: DeYoung, Rebecca, *Glittering Vices*, Brazos Press, 2009 p. 178 mod

In my readings this week I ran across a cute story of a father needing to have a talk with his 12-year old son who called him up one day, after school was out, with the question, “When is it okay to kiss a girl?”

I was amazed with how simply he answered the question. He told his son to imagine a triangle with equal sides. With one edge serving as the base, the left side represented escalating physical intimacy (holding hands, kissing, hugging.....). The right side of the triangle represents escalating relational commitments. The father taught the son that to follow God’s lead for healthy relationships he must always have an equal level of relational commitment to levels of physical intimacy.

In other word, if you are ready to hold a girl’s hand, you also have to be ready to acknowledge to your friends that she is your girlfriend. And before you kiss her, you need to know her family and to know that her family likes you.

If you have ever looked for an argument when someone says “Why do we have to wait... until we are married? Everyone else is doing it!”, this is why. God designed us to experience fullness in LIFE. He doesn’t want us to settle for the cheap imitation of temporary pleasure, but to aim for the LIFE that is experienced when both physical intimacy and relational commitment max out at the top of the pyramid.

But that can only happen if, by God’s help, we can rid our hearts and minds of lust.

Today Jesus' teaching calls us to make changes in our lives that will allow us to experience fullness in our relationships, changes in how we view and deal with lust.

There are some practical things we can do to help ourselves, our husbands, our wives, and our children deal with bombarding cultural messages about lust.

- a. Do not allow computers to operate behind closed doors, keep them public.
- b. Make use of internet filters and accountability software.
- c. Be vigilant about the books, TV, movies, magazines & websites which come into your home.
- d. Dress modestly. Always ask yourself if you are allowing yourself to become an "object" for someone's lust, rather than a person open to healthy relationships.
- e. Regularly talk about God's love for us, and the fullness of LIFE He guides us to experience. Because in truth, if your relationship with others and with God feed your need to love and be loved, you will not only see through lust's false promises, but you will despise what lust is trying to offer you. Again, it will be as if someone is offer salt water to quench your thirst after you've already tasted the pure living water given us in Jesus Christ.
- f. Ask a trusted friend to hold you accountable for living a purer life week by week.

In short, what I am describing here is but a few suggestions as to what Jesus calls us; he wants us to live higher than rules and regulations by choosing to live a chased life.

And what I mean by that is not that we abstain from sex because “sex is bad”. Rather, we abstain from “bad sex”.. sex outside God’s definition of sexual relationships. We are to abstain from what is so widely practiced even among Christians today; walking as close to the edge of the temptation’s cliff as we can, hoping that we can keep our balance and not fall off.

Maybe at the end of the day we can all say to ourselves: “Alright, I didn’t commit adultery today. (Just like last week we imagined rejoicing that we did not murder someone!) But that falls so short of the LIFE God offers us!

Today, Jesus is saying, “Don’t even get close to the edge.” “Don’t tempt yourself with lustful thoughts, because lust is more powerful and destructive than you think it is, and it harms you and your relationships even if you don’t break the law. Jesus is saying...I want you to discover the fullness of LIFE I am offering to you, and it begins with healthy relationships.

Put your faith in Jesus Christ. Trust His salvation for your eternity, but also trust Him as He offers you salvation from lust.

AMEN