

## 7 Deadly Sins, week 4

### Lust

Lust?? **Lust??!!!** What a quaint, outdated Victorian concept! The very suggestion that something about our sexual nature might be disordered, defective or excessive is disturbing to many of us. How many **Shades of Grey, Shades Darker, and Shades Freed** are there to explore in darkened cinemas, or in our own secret imaginations? And didn't Maggie Jones' **New York Times Magazine** cover story (Feb. 7, 2018, "**What Teenagers are Learning from Online Porn**") argue for pornographic literacy training for all our high school students?

(Here's the link): <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>

Lust... Please... We've moved way beyond that ancient taboo.

And yet... Is this not the era of **#MeToo, Time's Up, and Never Again**? Don't we read that we have reached a plausible tipping point in our culture, acknowledging that there are widespread, destructive, seriously flawed ways of acting on our sexual impulses or attractions?

But if there is any area of **our own lives** about which we are reluctant to speak, surely it is the area of our personal sexual imaginations, erotic feelings, or fantasies. This, we insist, is private stuff. Remember what happened in 1976, when President Jimmy Carter, in an interview with Playboy Magazine, answered the journalist's question? "**I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times.**" Even though everyone knew him to be the once-and-forever married, squeaky-clean Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, his popularity in the polls took a steep dip. We just don't talk about this stuff!

Let's define our term before we go further. "Lust, or licentiousness, is not the most serious sin... But it is certainly the juiciest and most popular sin. Thomas Aquinas commented that lust is 'about the greatest of pleasures, and these absorb the mind more than any others.' Lust is often formally dissected in terms of such components as promiscuity, pornography, adultery, incest, seduction, prostitution, rape, and unnatural vice. But at its heart, **lust in an idolizing of sex in the sense of an unethical and unrestrained expression of the sexual impulse.** It happens even in proper sexual relations when the object of sexual desire is not the sexual partner, but rather the pleasure or services that the partner can provide... Lust-driven seduction without personal engagement ends only in the void of empty-armedness and an even deeper longing." Os Guinness, **Steering Through Chaos**, pp. 239-241

It is probably fair to say that men experience lustful temptation somewhat differently than women. Testosterone has been shown to be the high-octane hormonal fuel that often directs males in passionate, basic, chemically motivated initiative toward sexual release. For a man of faith, a dependable inner "braking system," is important to resist common, unbidden sexual impulses and to develop consistent self-mastery. I write as a male, and I celebrate the clear teaching of Holy Scripture that teaches us the spiritual discipline of denying, in some sense, naturally occurring appetites. Jesus says we need to get to the source of the sin. He is clear when he points out that the real problem of mischievous sexual behavior is rooted in what we allow, entertain, and foster in the secrecy of our imaginations. It all starts there.

Faithful women have volunteered that the rigorous control of animal instincts is often less of a spiritual challenge for them. Rather, perhaps the challenge of self-control is more commonly seen in contending with romantic images implanted from a book they've read or a movie they've watched. There may be a too-ready-reflex to accept Don Juan's sweet talk, prompting illusions of true affection that take the body along for the ride.

In either case, we have challenges to face if we would keep our sexual thoughts, feelings, and conduct rooted in genuine commitments of cherishing, loyal, responsible loving.

Our remedy? ***"Blessed are the pure in heart..."***

Step one is the refusal to see ourselves as a merely sexual, physical animals. ***We are—at our most true and important level—spiritual beings.*** It may help us to think of the spiritual synonyms for purity: ***unalloyed, single in nature, uncompromised by baser elements.*** Jesus tells us that we are truly blessed when our connection with God is so central to our being that it displaces our lesser attachments. We can take courage that God's loving Spirit is likened to a "refiner's fire." God knows our natures, and is constantly at work within and among us to bring us more deeply and truly into God's nature. Our spiritual source, our connection to God, provides us the hope and the means of being more than the sum of our appetites.

"Purity of heart is the ethical and disciplined devotion of the heart. Whereas lust blinds and dissipates our strength, purity of heart is both clear-sighted and a concentrated focusing of strength."

"The objective basis for purity of heart is monotheism. The prophets and priests called for purity of heart because God is one—therefore, the heart should be purely his. 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.' This declarative sentence is the objective basis for the following imperatives: 'You shall have no other Gods before me,' and 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.'"

Os Guinness, ***Steering Through Chaos***, pp. 260-268

When I consider how basic the sexual appetite is to the survival of a species, I wonder, how can something so primal be tempered, conditioned, or tamed? How can we be other than the willing servants of our passions? And I come back to the Angel Gabriel's words to Mary: "With God, all things are possible."

### Our Homework

1. If there were a large screen HD tv attached to our imaginations--showing everything that we entertain in our psyches for all the world to see--what scenes would we delete immediately? Isn't it best that we keep deleting, even without the public screening?
2. If the spiritual framework for sexual intimacy is loyal commitment, self-giving, honoring and cherishing, then which of our naturally occurring imaginations need to be weeded out? What influences could bolster our purer, finer, godly and loving motives?
3. Because we are all influenced by our environments, what we pay attention to (websites, tv, movies, reading matter) and who we spend time with, what steps might we take to reduce the number and ease of our temptations to lustful thoughts, passions, or actions?