

## **Sermon Series: Disordered Love**

### **Lust**

**Matthew 5:27-30/Galatians 5:13-25**

**David Hockett**

**March 19, 2017**

Attraction and sexuality are God's good gifts. Through them we express love and intimacy and connection and are sometimes blessed with the gift of new life, with the gift of children, and family, and lineage. When welcomed as a God-given gift and used faithfully, love expressed through our sexuality can be beautiful and good and can be an expression of fidelity and God's covenant love. In fact, the faithful love between husband and wife is to mirror and be a sign of God's faithfulness towards the world. As the writer of Genesis beautifully reminds us, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) You can't get much more intimate than that. But like any of God's gifts, sex can be misused, treated as less than something sacred, cheapened, reduced to a commodity, used as a weapon or a means by which others are controlled, abused, or debased.

As I shared a couple of weeks ago a faithful holy life, a virtuous life, or a Christ-like life is one in which our love is properly ordered. We love God with all that we have and are, we love our neighbors as ourselves, and then we love ourselves, our own lives, as a gift from God. Which means that sin, or an unvirtuous life, or unholy life is one in which love is disordered. If our hearts are restless until they rest in God, because God is the ultimate object of our greatest love, then when we love the wrong things, or even love the right things but with the wrong intensity or for the wrong reasons, then love becomes distorted and our restless hearts remain restless because we've given our hearts to things that are not God or we've sought satisfaction and fulfillment in people or places or things that ultimately will not satisfy. And so, we are left empty, longing, restless, still searching for that perfect love that makes us whole.

So, as Roberta Bondi points out, "A life that takes its meaning from eating, or sex, or owning things, or power, or another person, can never be fulfilled because those desires can never be permanently satisfied. Again, it's the vicious 'cycle of desire.' When we live as if all will be well if we can have just one more physical encounter, one more relationship, one more image on a screen, then love has become disordered, and life becomes disordered, and relationships become disordered because all is not well. When we live in this way the good gifts of attraction and intimacy and sexuality are manifest as sin, or the disordered love we know as lust.

Now among many of the things that we believe and hold to be true as Christians is the affirmation that all human beings are created in the image of God. We are embodied spirits. God has given us these fleshly bodies and has called them good and into these bodies of flesh God has breathed God's Spirit and God's life. The early Church combatted the heresy of Gnosticism. Among other things, the Gnostics taught that the material world is imperfect,

temporal, and decaying. The goal then of this life is to seek the *gnosis* or knowledge that will liberate our pure, immortal souls from the weakness of the flesh so that the perfect, divine spark within us might be liberated and return to union with God. In other words, our bodies don't really matter. Many Christians continue to come close to Gnosticism when we talk about the souls of the dearly departed going to be with God with no mention of the hope of the bodily resurrection that is to come, or when we say things like "it doesn't matter so much how I live as long as my heart is right with God."

No, what you do with your body matters. Jews and Christians have always understood that our bodies and our souls are intimately and inseparably linked. And God is concerned with and, in Christ, has redeemed the fullness of who we are, body and soul. The material stuff, the flesh of who we are matters to God. After all we believe that God took on flesh and dwelled among us in Jesus.

And Jesus is all over the place healing the broken bodies of the sick, casting out demons, touching the bodies of the untouchable, giving sight to the blind and the ability to hear to the deaf, restoring the ability to walk, and raising the dead, feeding the hungry. Thus, our creedal confession is based in the resurrection of the body. God made these bodies of ours, loves them, and will redeem them and make them whole. As such we honor the whole person – body and soul – because my flesh and bones are unique as are yours.

They are a God-given part of who I am and who you are. And this matters when we think about the good gift of intimacy and sexuality. Now while we may not like to think about it or talk about it we don't have to look very far to see examples of how intimacy, and sexuality, and attraction can become disordered. People marry simply because of physical attraction giving little thought to the sacred covenant and commitment they are making believing that when the attraction diminishes they can simply move on to the next best thing. Children are born without the benefit and blessing of committed parents. Families and even good marriages are broken apart because one of the partners becomes obsessed with another person with whom they likely have only a very superficial, physical attraction. (Bondi)

The pornography business is a \$97 billion industry worldwide with almost 90% of it being produced in the United States ([www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org)). An estimated 4.5 million people globally are trapped in some form of sexual exploitation. (International Labor Organization) In 2016, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children estimated that 1 in 6 endangered runaways reported to them that they were likely sex trafficking victims. Lust is not love, lust is not God's good gift, it is a distortion of the gift of love and as an expression of disordered love, lust destroys lives, and marriages, and families, and communities, and too often the Church remains painfully silent.

Again to be clear, to condemn lust as a sin and one of the ways in which our love becomes disordered is not to condemn our God-given sexuality. Sexuality is a part of the goodness of humanity. Physical attraction is a part of who we are. So what's all the fuss? Or as some might ask, "What is to be gained by denying your desire for another person, especially if that physical attraction is a part of how God made you? What do we do with Jesus' very pointed words about lust? If your hand or your eye causes you to sin cut it off, tear it out.

I want us to be really clear about what we are talking about. We are not talking about normal, healthy physical attraction. As Tom Long suggests, "...sexual energy and attraction are enduring parts of the human psyche...It's not a matter of choice; it's a matter of being human. To some degree that is always at work within us. If that is the lust that Jesus opposes, then we would have to remove not only our eyes and our hands but our brains as well. But Jesus is speaking not about human psychology but our basic attitudes, the choices we make about what we will allow to take root in our imaginations, to shape our thoughts, to govern our actions, and to mold our relationships. For Jesus, lust is covetousness at the heart of a person, a distortion of the will, in other words, an intention to break a sacred covenant (celibacy or marriage). Jesus isn't condemning attraction or an awareness of our sexuality. Rightly expressed that attraction can blossom into love. Jesus is warning us about harboring, and feeding, and nurturing a possessive sexual desire that is not love but leads to destruction because we're not to possess one another, but love one another, and honor one another."<sup>1</sup> "Sexual attraction can be powerful, creative, and energizing; it can also divide, disrupt and destroy."<sup>2</sup>

You see "the body is the outside of the soul, the part of the person we can see. So to lust, to allow our desire for someone to become disordered, is to desire only the body of a person and not the person. This is in part what Jesus means when he says, "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 (with a covetous desire to possess) has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Love builds up. Love humanizes the other. Lust depersonalizes and objectifies. Lust distorts our vision making it impossible for us to see and love our neighbor as one who is created in the image of God. Instead of asking how I might best love and serve another person in a way that honors and glorifies the God in whose image that person is made, lust asks, how I might use this person for my own gratification and benefit?

In marked contrast well-ordered love, the way Jesus calls us to love, asks how we might serve and honor our neighbor and acknowledge him or her as a person of sacred worth? Lust makes possible the exploitation of men and women. Lust says the body is not important; it is merely an

---

<sup>1</sup> Tom Long, *Matthew*. p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

object to be desired and used. What matters is the state of my soul. Lust says, “It’s OK, you needn’t deny yourself.” But God says, “No”. We can’t divide body and soul. What affects one affects the other. The fact that people may consent and give lust free reign does not mean that it is a healthy expression of love.

The body is a sacred gift. It is the temple of God’s very presence, and in baptism our bodies have been united with Christ’s body and with one another. So, whatever we do with our bodies it impacts the whole body, the Church, of which we are all members. We don’t go anywhere alone. Even more, our bodies are no longer our own to do with them as we please. We have been bought with a price – the broken body of our Lord given to redeem our bodies. Jesus loved us enough to sacrifice his own body for the sake of ours and we are called by God to love others in the same way.

Doing whatever we choose with our bodies is not, contrary to what our culture thinks, the highest expression of freedom. It is instead a further symptom of our sin, our bondage, of just how disordered our love and our lives have become apart from God. This is what Paul means when he writes, “It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That’s an act of true freedom.” (Galatians 5:13-15a)

Well-ordered love, a love that begins in God and flows outward towards others, liberates, builds up, enlarges life. Love is like a river that flows within its banks. It gives life and beauty. Lust, like all sin, is like a river that overflows its banks. The flood brings devastation, loss, and destruction.

Love unites us with God and one another in life-giving ways. Lust, or the covetous desire to use and possess others for whatever we might gain, enslaves us and the people we covet. It diminishes our humanity and the humanity of others. It neglects and rejects the image of God in our neighbor. Andy Stanley expresses it this way, “...if there is a God in whose image you’ve been made and in whose image every woman or man you’ve met has been made, if sex is a creation that was created with a purpose and if part of that purpose is to enhance the expression of intimacy and love between two people... and if that fragile, wonderful, delicate experience we term intimacy or love can be damaged or broken through abuse, then the way we care for the gift of sex matters a great deal.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is the model, the author for how we love well. In every encounter he saw others as people made in God’s image. His relationships were never transactional, never about “what’s in it for me?” And when we abide in him, and nurture that relationship as *the* most important

---

<sup>3</sup> Andy Stanley, *The New Rules for Love, Sex, and Dating*. p. 138.

relationship in our lives, when we love Jesus well we will love others well. And that's really the bottom line. Lust is about a search for something that's missing. It's a quest for the unconditional embrace that we all long for and which only God can give. Lust, like any sin, is a disease that plagues us. The remedy for when love becomes disordered and we find ourselves slipping into the sin of lust, of using others to satisfy our longing in a way that only God can... the remedy is cultivating and nurturing our appetite for God. The more we desire God the more we will desire others in the right way.

So, lust for and long for God, because God in Christ already longs for you. Now this takes practice, and discipline. We're talking about cultivating virtue and character and that takes time and intentionality. So, I want to invite *you* to write the end of this sermon with the way you live this afternoon, tomorrow, the rest of your life. Abide in God's word, friends, and instead of all the stuff that we often listen to, that we think will satisfy us, let your ears be filled with the loving sounds of God's voice. Come to worship as often as possible and see the glory of the Lord. Let your eyes be filled with the beauty of God, with real beauty, with images that will inspire you to love well. Humble yourself, confess your sin, and let God embrace you in His mercy and love. Give Christ your heart, not just parts of who you are but your whole heart because he loves you like no other ever will.