

# Week 6: Lust and Chastity

*“Lust is the craving for salt of a man who is dying of thirst.” (Frederick Buechner)*

Plato once said that all human behavior flows from only three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge. Whether or not this is true, there is no doubt that *much* of our behavior flows from just one of those three sources: desire.

We want, so we pursue. We pursue until we obtain the object of our want, we tire of the pursuit, or we are prohibited from obtaining the object of our want.

Desire is surely one of the most potent propellants of human activity.

And unfortunately, the well of desire is also one of the deepest reservoirs from which sin is drawn.

There are three main issues that have significant bearing on a discussion of desire and its fruits. When sin is a byproduct of desire, it is in large part due to these three factors:

## 1. Discontent

Discontent often manifests itself through the act of complaining.

While complaining is a voicing of one's negative view on his current circumstance, it carries the implicit expression of a wish for something perceived to be better. Thus, the concept of desire is intrinsic to the concept of complaining.

Historically, God has punished few things more harshly than the attitude of discontent.

The children of Israel were expert complainers. Scripture records incident after incident in which the people murmured against God.

And God responded severely:

In Numbers 21, God sent fiery serpents among the people to destroy the complainers. In Numbers 16, God delivered a plague that wiped out nearly 15,000 people.

God detests discontent.

And when desire wells up from the fountain of discontent, it is sin.

## 2. The Grass Is Greener On The Other Side

Closely related to discontent is the notion that the grass is greener on the other side.

Desire is often an outgrowth of the perception that someone else has it better. It really makes no difference whether or not the grass is actually greener on the other side, it matters only that we *think* it is.

When the perception is that things are better on the other side of the fence, one's mind begins to cry, "Woe is me! If *he* deserves something that good, then *I* do, too!"

We try to keep up with the Joneses.

Which is bad enough.

But we often go further than that.

Many times, we want to do more than just be *like* the Joneses...we want to *be* the Joneses. We don't what simply want something similar to what they have, we actually want what they have.

And God calls that covetousness...and He bluntly condemns it:

- "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or *anything* that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:17, NASB)
- "...Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15, NKJV)
- "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth...covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience..." (Colossians 3:5-6, NKJV)
- "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have..." (Hebrews 13:5, NKJV)

When desire gives birth to covetousness, it is sin.

### 3. Excess

One of the most pernicious traits of desire is its ability to lead to excess.

The New Testament repeatedly condemns excess by commending moderation:

- “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” (1 Timothy 6:8, NKJV)
- “Give us this day our *daily* bread...” (Matthew 6:11)
- “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...” (Matthew 6:19, NASB)

At its core, excess carries with it the concept of waste and waste is a misappropriation of the resources over which we’ve been made stewards.

Excess also carries with it a sense of entitlement to more than what is actually deserved. When one chooses to live in excess, he chooses to hoard for himself what he might otherwise use to help those in need.

And as one becomes accustomed to living in excess, he is likely to begin overestimating his own worth as an individual.

When desire leads to the pursuit of excess, it is sin.

### The Hard Reality of Desire

In the end, pursuing our desires with reckless abandon can have catastrophic consequences...yet we often choose to do so.

Consider the man who, desperately longing to slake his thirst, runs to the ocean. He pauses for a moment, scanning the horizon, and realizes that the water he's longed for now stretches out in front of him as far as he can see.

Without any more delay, he dives headfirst into the ocean, mouth wide open. As soon as he hits the water, he begins to gulp it down as fast as he can.

After a few moments, he pauses.

He's discovered something very strange: though he's consumed a considerable amount of water, he's *more* thirsty than he was before.

Looking around, the man reassures himself that there is certainly enough water in the ocean to eventually quench his thirst.

So he begins to drink again.

Much to his dismay, the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes. Determined to quell his thirst, he continues drinking...and drinking...and drinking.

A few days later, some passersby gasp as they notice the man's body washed ashore...dead.

The man had failed to consider the salt in the water. In his quest to quench his growing thirst, he had literally indulged himself to death.

## **Lust**

Of all desires, those of a sexual nature are some of the strongest.

If this were not so, TV, movies, music, and advertising would not be jam-packed with sexual content. Nor would the strip club industry be a \$2-3 billion per year venture. Nor would the pornography industry be an \$8-10 billion per year venture. Nor would AshleyMadison.com (whose slogan is "Life is short. Have an affair.") be the 2,412th most-trafficked website on earth (out of approximately 644,000,000 websites).

God has deeply ingrained sexuality into us and the desires that stem from it can be incredibly powerful.

Which means that we must give both diligent and constant attention to steering clear of illicit sexual desire, or lust.

If there is any doubt as to how strongly God detests illicit sexual cravings, it is cleared up when he equates lust to committing adultery with a person in one's heart (Matthew 5:28).

## **The Problem**

At the very least, lust is an expression of sexual discontent.

Often, though, it is far more...sexual covetousness.

Though one may crave sexual satisfaction from an individual not bound to another person, many occasions of lust involve the desire for one whom God has already bound to another individual.

Either way, lust is sin.

It desires something sexual that one has no right to.

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most unnatural of the sexual perversions.”

It is indulging “...the flesh in its corrupt desires...” (2 Peter 2:10, NASB).

And for this reason, Paul admonishes that “...this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, *not in passion of lust*, like the Gentiles who do not know God...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, NKJV).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not...in lewdness and lust...” (Romans 13:13, NKJV).

Why?

Because, in the end, our sin will surely ensnare us:

“The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust.” (Proverbs 11:6, NKJV)

## **Chastity**

Aldous Huxley, one of history’s most flagrant proponents of unfettered sexual liberation, once wrote in a novel that chastity is “...the most unnatural of the sexual perversions.”

He could not have been more wrong.

If God has categorically condemned sexual promiscuity and anything leading to it, then chastity is anything but a perversion. It is in fact one of the purest of all virtues.

## **The Only Outlet**

God has ordained a domain for sexual expression, but only one: within the bounds of a heterosexual, non-adulterous marriage.

Expression of sexuality outside of that relationship is sin.

## **A Difficult Battle**

Just because God authorized only one domain for sexual expression does not mean that He is unaware of the struggle it is to maintain that purity.

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ity and holiness. And God is both.



Writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul indicates that for the unmarried and the widows, "...it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

It is no small achievement to maintain sexual purity.

But it is a requisite achievement to enter the gates of Heaven. There is only one end that awaits those who choose to let their sexual cravings go uncontrolled:

"But the...sexually immoral...shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8, NKJV).

## **The Bottom Line**

Chastity is far more than just outward control, control of behavior. It is more than simply refraining from illicit sexual activity.

It is also inner control, control of mind and heart. It is refraining from illicit sexual desire.

In the end, why does any of this matter? Why should we be so concerned about our sexuality that we strive to control even our inner desires?

Because controlled sexuality is purity and holiness. And God is both.

If we are to call ourselves Christians, we are to be both as well.

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# Discussion

# Questions for Thought

1. Define lust.

2. What causes a person to lust?

3. What does lust lead to?

4. How do we eradicate and/or prevent lust?

5. What do Proverbs 5 and 6:20-35 teach us about lust/sexual sin?

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion**

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4. How do we eradicate and/or prevent lust?
5. What do Proverbs 5 and 6:20-35 teach us about lust/sexual sin?
6. What are some practical ways to ensure that we are chaste?