

## **“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: LUST.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Matthew 5:27-30**

### **Creation: God’s good gift.**

Let’s get clear what the Bible teaches about sex and marriage. Some people perceive Christians and the church to be negative about sex, so I want to begin with a clear positive statement about what God says about sexual love.

Before there was lust, meaning before there was sin, there was purity in sexual desire. God created us male and female and called it good, He created marriage and called it good. God created the beautiful and wonderful gift of sexual intimacy and He created men and women to be attracted to each other and to desire relationships with each other. And it was very good.

God has given us a precious gift in our sexuality. What do we do with something that is very valuable and very precious? We put it some place where it will be safe and secure, some place where it won’t be damaged or broken or stolen or cheapened.

The Mona Lisa is probably the most famous painting in art history. It’s in a secure place in the Louvre in Paris behind an unbreakable glass security shield.

Our God-created sexual desire is like a **beautiful pearl**. For its beauty to shine it must be set in the golden pendent of marriage. When you have something that is very good and valuable, you protect it. God wants the very best for us so He gave us one of His very best gifts and He put it in a context where it would be beautiful and safe and clean and unashamed.

But instead our culture takes that pearl and casts it before the swine of fornication, adultery, pornography, incest, child abuse and homosexuality. It cheapens and trivializes it in places like one night stands, affairs, movies, videos, TV, magazines, porn sites on the internet and romance novels. Outside of marriage nakedness and sex becomes abused, polluted, spoiled.

All sexual activity outside of marriage cheapens and damages God’s good gift. It would be like taking the Mona Lisa down to the street corner. Many people try to call sex outside of marriage love but it’s not, it’s really stealing, it’s taking. At the most it’s love of self, it’s selfishness, taking what I want for myself. It’s not seeking the best for the other person.

Sex outside of marriage says “I want your body, but not you as a person. I don’t want you as a covenant partner, just as an object to satisfy my desires.” That desire without a commitment dishonors the other person. That is lust, not love.

### **Fall: God’s good gift destroyed.**

It is no surprise that Satan tries to destroy all God’s good gifts in every way possible. So he sows the seed of lust to entice us into every possible kind of sexual sin.

Lust can be for food, money, power, security. Since we are covering some of those in the other seven sins, we will focus on the most common understanding of lust as an immoral sexual desire.

Lust is not just sexual attraction for a member of the opposite sex. The cause of lust is not an attractive man or woman, the cause of lust is an improper response to an attractive man or woman. Someone called it the look after the look.

Lust is an insatiable thirst that cannot be quenched. You drink your fill and it soon returns thirstier than ever. It is a black hole that cannot be filled. It is enslaving and destructive.

Frederick Buechner said simply: “Lust is the craving for salt by a man dying of thirst.” Picture a man adrift in the ocean dying of thirst and drinking ocean water thinking he is satisfying his thirst when really he is killing himself, and doesn’t realize it. It’s pretty poison.

Lust promises to deliver fulfillment or satisfaction, but it never makes good on its promise. Lust is counterfeit love. Satan tries to pass it off as the real thing, but it never works.

Just as gluttony is not just a food problem, but a heart problem, so lust is not just a sex or porn problem, but a heart problem. The problem isn’t out there, it is in here.

Our lusts and sinful desires make us blind to the truth, make us irrational to what is real. And it makes us blind to the dangers that lurk within our hearts.

Hence Jesus warning.

### **Matthew 5:27-30**

This is a scary passage. Jesus has a way of going straight for the jugular. He doesn’t mince words. He starts off accusing all of us of adultery.

C.S. Lewis famously said if we lust after bacon and eggs, we have committed breakfast in our hearts. If we lust with our eyes, we commit adultery in our hearts.

Jesus says the intentionality of the look is what makes it a lustful desire. Looking and noticing is not necessarily sin, it’s looking and noticing with the intention to gratify immoral sexual desires.

Is there anyone who sounds more out of date and out of touch with the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than Jesus? We live in a world that assumes everyone over about 18 is sexually active. We encourage sexual activity and lust through our TV and cable shows, through fashions and Victoria Secret, through teaching safe sex and condom distribution, through joking about sex and the constant stream of sexual innuendos that fill the airways, through changing what marriage is, through the serial sins of politicians and celebrities, even parading it in the streets.

Who today believes that physical intimacy belongs only in loving, committed marriage between one man and one woman? Who today promotes modesty, who encourages abstinence? Modern advertising, magazine covers, movie trailers and much more in our culture are purposefully designed to inflame lust and sinful curiosity.

We need someone like Jesus to be explicit and blunt to get our attention. So He calls for self-mutilation rather than face hell. But there is a problem, self-mutilation won't stop us from sinning, even if we cut out both eyes and both hands.

Where is the problem? The problem is sin in our hearts. We have to cut off our hearts, or rather, we need a new heart. We must plead with God to take out our old heart of sin and give us a new heart.

Obviously the sin is serious and calls for serious action. There are sacrifices to be made in this short life on earth so that we don't jeopardize eternity in heaven. It is better to suffer now than later. If being maimed is better than hell, then we should tremble at the seriousness of sin.

I can't over emphasize what He has already said. If we aren't engaged in mortal combat against our lust, we are in the most serious danger we can be in.

Why do people think Jesus is too harsh or radical here? Because they don't value the purity and righteousness and holiness of God. What is an eye or a hand or any earthly sacrifice compared to the greatness of glory and purity and holiness and God Himself. Why would we object to what Jesus says when He is expressing His love for our eternal souls. What price would you put on that, and what price would you not be willing to pay now for your eternal reward?

Joseph understood this and he was willing to go to prison rather than indulge the lusts of Potiphar's wife.

If Jesus is using hyperbole, if He is speaking using a figure of speech, if we are sure He doesn't mean for us to do this literally then we have to figure out what we are to do.

### ***Lust test. Lust diagnostics.***

Like all sin lust is deceptive, it hides, it disguises itself, it tries to stay below the radar and catch us off guard. When it does this we can continue in our sin thinking we are not sinning.

If you don't think this is your sin, are you willing to test and see, to examine your heart, to root out hidden sinful and immoral desires?

Here is one writers list (Jarred C. Wilson):

Do you ever watch movies or shows on TV with nudity or sex?

Is sexual content comes on unexpectedly do you keep watching?

Are you easily distracted by or tempted by some sexual image or attractive person?

Do you read romance novels or watch romance movies and wish or fantasize about them, or get depressed that you don't have that?

Do you make mental comparison of your spouse with others?

Are you in a relationship where you have crossed the line physically or emotionally?

Do you search around social media sites out of curiosity for what images you might find?

Do you view pornography of any kind?

Have you ever texted anything inappropriate?

Do you often notice physical appearance and compliment it or make comments?  
If you are bored or wasting time, do you follow a path toward sexually inappropriate content?

If we can answer yes to any of those questions then there is spiritual work to be done, but it won't be as easy as you think. Will power won't work. It's like the guy who says he can stop smoking, he has done it hundreds of times.

The problem is in our hearts. We have to be honest that we need help and honest about the kind of help we need. It will take supernatural power and supernatural truth and you don't have either in you. It comes from Jesus by the Holy Spirit and by the sword of the Word.

Jesus didn't say, "just say no or don't do it, or come on now, stop it." No, He called for radical measures. The battle is fierce and the weapons must be radical. The danger is real and great, we must go on the offensive early and often.

### **Redemption: God's good gift restored.**

There is help and hope. On the cross Christ died for all sexual sins and sexual sinners. On the cross His redemptive powers are displayed and here we are given forgiveness and freedom and renewed joy. Here there is healing for all our sexual brokenness.

Maybe you have guilt over some past sin, sex outside of marriage, adultery, out of control thought life, desires you know are sin, trapped in porn and can't stop. Or maybe you have been fighting the good fight, but losing the occasional battle. You know your sin, you know your failures, you know the sources of your guilt and shame.

For sexual sinners there is hardly a more healing and hopeful verse in the Bible than

**I Corinthians 6:11** *And such were some of you.* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Our battle is not with flesh and blood but with a very powerful enemy with a very tempting weapon. Do not fight him alone, and do not fight him with a lesser power, but go with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Have you stumbled and fallen into sin? There is hope. Repent, confess it and ask forgiveness for it. Bring it to the cross. Deal with it every time. Hate it every time. Keep asking for a new heart and keep asking for cleansing.

For those lost in the grip of the deepest and darkest sins there is hope. Paul said he was the worst of sinners, and Christ held out mercy to him.

God's grace is sufficient for all sin, even the worst sins, the most violent crimes, the strongest rebellions, the most repetitive sexual sins, the most malicious and intentional acts.

**First**, we must be willing to call sin sin, and call our lust lust. And we must be willing to admit that the problem is in us, not with the temptations out there.

**Second**, we must be willing to deal with it, to die to it, to begin killing it, before it kills us. To love sin is to hang on to it and indulge it and give it safe harbor in our hearts. Harbor no secret sins, but confess them and repent of them honestly.

**Third**, we must admit our need for help, that apart from God's power, our will power is worthless. Alcoholics Anonymous has this right, we are powerless, there is a greater power, we must submit to that greater power. We recognize that greater power to be Christ.

**Fourth**, we must see the purpose of our bodies as God has made us to reflect His image, and as He has made us to be temples of His Holy Spirit.

**I Corinthians 6:18-20** Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Glorify God in your body by fleeing from sexual immorality.

Like an alcoholic who takes practical steps like getting rid of all the alcohol in his house or the person who decides to stop smoking and gets rid of all cigarettes, so there are practical steps to fighting lust and sexual desires and temptations. By themselves they don't change our hearts, but they help in tandem with the spiritual steps.

Flee all evil, flee anything that inflames lust, books, magazines, movies, TV or cable show with sex or nudity, websites, social media.

Adopt the Joseph's strategy and run, flee, resist, fight, don't give in.

**I Corinthians 6:18** Flee sexual immorality.

**II Timothy 2:22** Flee youthful passions.

**I Thessalonians 4:3** This is the will of God ... abstain from sexual immorality.

One way to kill something that is living is to starve it to death. One way to kill lust is to starve it, avoid whatever stirs up lust.

We live in an image saturated culture. But you can abstain from images, you can turn off the TV and get away from screen time, especially when you are bored. Get a hobby, read a good book, play cards or board games, have a conversation. Stop the constant flood of images trying to entice you to buy something you don't need or incite you to see something you shouldn't see.

External controls can control behavior to an extent. Unsubscribe from movie and other cable channels or magazines that are a problem. Keep all computers in public places with the screen facing the room. Delay smart phones as late as possible. Use parental controls, filters, reporting software, learn how to check the history and cookies of your computers and how to see what has been deleted. Get Covenant Eyes on your computers. I have it on mine, my sons have it.

But none of that changes the secret thoughts of the heart. Friends have friends who help. Find a good Christian brother or sister you can be accountable to, be honest. Want help and ask for help. For the sake of your eternal soul.

Our children are being seduced by the entertainment world, by the music and movies and TV and social media. You can't watch and listen to all of that and not be effected and the kids who say they can handle it are at best deceived and at worst lying.

Parents, the purity of our children must be a constant part of our prayer life. And it needs to be a part of our conversation and communication. Talk about the elephant in the room. Learn how to talk about this with honesty and grace and love. I didn't do that enough.

Any talk about the facts of life has to include the facts of sin and our sinful hearts and how to guard our hearts, and the facts of God's beautiful gift and how to protect it. Read Proverbs 5-7. Just read it, read it several times, read it to your teenagers, make them read it. Talk about it.

I need to give a warning with each of these sermons. If you take each one to heart and resolved to fight each sin, the week after each sermon that sin will be especially strong, or you will be faced with that temptation more than usual. The tempter increases the temptations whenever we start to fight a particular sin. We need to be aware of that and prepared to fight with the armor of God, with the strength of the Spirit and the sword of the Word.

Don't give up, ask God's constant help, it is a spiritual battle. No one said it would be easy or just go away. Satan is a prowling lion, out to deceive, devour and destroy.

God forgives sin and gives grace to the hearts that repent. And when we fall again, repent again.

Resist to the end, to the death. In the name of Jesus, by the help and power of the Holy Spirit, with the sword of the Scripture.

Our Savior is so great and so powerful and so merciful and loving, He can and will wash away every single sin. Thanks be to God who alone gives us the victory.

He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.

**Prayer:** Holy and merciful Father, have mercy on us and forgive us for our failures in the continual fight against lust. Forgive us for weak and half-hearted efforts and prayers. By the power of your Holy Spirit in us, sever the root of lust in our hearts and replace it with a far greater and purer passion to be like Christ. Father, I pray for those wrestling with sexual immorality and sin, for those caught in a web and who feel like there is no escape. Help them to see through the lies and deception of the enemy. Give them strength and courage to respond in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Help them to see the beauty of holiness, the pure truth of your Word. Put your Word in their hearts so they can stand on the strength of your Word and not return to evil. Deliver us from evil and lead us all in paths of righteousness for your names sake. In the pure and holy and mighty name of Jesus we pray, Amen.