

Lust

SCOTT HOEZEE

The preacher and writer, Frederick Buechner, was often good at defining certain terms using only a few words. When it came to the deadly sin of lust, Buechner said simply this: Lust is the craving for salt by a man dying of thirst. God created us for intimacy, for relationships of tenderness and love; and in marriage, sexuality deepens such trust and love; but in lust, we seek only the physical surface of sexuality, and as many people can testify, not only does that not satisfy your desire for a loving relationship; it really can make you lonelier than you were before. It is like eating salt when you are thirsty; it just makes matters worse. Today on Groundwork, we think about the sin of lust and how, even in our sexually saturated culture, the Spirit can lead us another way.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

Today, Scott, we have come to the last of the seven, and it is the sin of lust. It makes me think of a story about Dorothy Sayers, whose name we have used in other programs in this series. She was giving a lecture once on the seven deadly sins and a girl came up to her afterward and said, “You mean, there are seven? What are the other six?” This is the one that everybody thinks about, and I think just to clear away a misconception, Christians are not obsessed with sex, at least they should not be, and we are not overdoing it with respect to sexual sin, as if that is the only sin there is. We have been working our way through this whole list of seven and I have felt guilty about every one, but this is one of them. Today, that is what we want to focus on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said on the first program on pride, and we have circled back to this often, that the deadly sins are not in themselves actions, but they are attitudes that lead to actions, and certainly, we are going to be able to see, and we will see in a Bible story in just a moment, exactly how that attitude of only looking at the surfaces of life, only seizing at the appearances and the physical part of our existence in lust does indeed lead to actions that can be very, very hurtful indeed.

DAVE BAST

Right. So, we are not saying that this is the only sin. We are not necessarily saying even that it is the worst; nor are we saying that sexual desire in and of itself is wrong or sinful. Like all things that God has made, it is good, and it has a purpose, and its purpose is to draw us together so that a man and his wife will become one flesh, and it is God’s will that thus the world is peopled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But when it is wrongly directed – when it jumps out of its proper channel, then it wreaks havoc. It is like a flood that breaks the banks of the levee and sows destruction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Water is good; rivers are good, but when they overflow, they destroy. C. S. Lewis, like Dorothy Sayers – we come back to him a lot, but he thought a lot about these things – he wrote in one of his books, he said sometimes you watch a man prowling the streets and people will say of a man like that, “He just wants a woman.” But as C. S. Lewis goes on to say: A woman is the last thing a man like that wants. He just wants a part of a person. He just wants a physical piece of her. The real person would involve a relationship, which is what sexuality is for, but that is what we forget in lust; when we only seize on the surface, we actually lose sight of the people and the purpose of it all, which is a loving relationship.

DAVE BAST

Let’s look at a story that shows us lust in action. It is one of those Bible stories you did not learn in Sunday school, and you have not heard a sermon on it, I would guess.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I preached one on it and people did not like it.

DAVE BAST

Oh, you did?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I did.

DAVE BAST

You’ve got more guts than I do, Scott. I wouldn’t touch this one. But, here we are on Groundwork, and we are going to read the story. I will set it up and then you can maybe summarize parts of it.

It has to do with one of David’s sons; actually, his eldest son, Amnon, and one of David’s daughters, a half-sister to Amnon named Tamar. It is in II Samuel Chapter 13:

¹In the course of time, Amnon fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, son of David. ²

Amnon became so obsessed with his sister, Tamar, that he made himself ill. She was a virgin and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. ³Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David’s brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. ⁴He asked Amnon, “Why do you, the king’s son, look so haggard morning after morning? Will not you tell me?” Amnon said to him, “I am in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.”

So, they hatch a plot; this devious guy...

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Amnon’s friend says: Look, you pretend to be sick. She is a good person. She will come to bring him some medicine, like the ancient equivalent of chicken soup. Then in verse 11, it says:

¹¹But when she took that to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, “Come to bed with me, my sister.” ¹²“No, my brother,” she said to him, “Do not force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel. Do not do this wicked thing. ¹³What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king. He will not keep me from being married to you.” ¹⁴But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her, ¹⁵and then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out.” ¹⁶“No,” she said, “Do not send me away. That would be a worse wrong.”

But he does; he throws her out and locks the door between them. So, now here you have Tamar weeping on one side of the door, Amnon hating himself on the other – the reason I preached on this in a series on the seven deadly sins is that is the perfect example of what lust does. Proper sexual desire, proper lust, as it were, in marriage draws people together. Here these two, now there is literally a wall between them and nothing

will ever be right again. As readers of the Bible know, this will lead Absalom, her brother, to take some action, which is going to lead to the unraveling of David's whole household; but that is what lust can do. Instead of strengthening relationships, it blows them apart.

DAVE BAST

It is really like a Greek tragedy...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is...

DAVE BAST

As we watch this unfolding, this fatal flaw in a character that is going to lead to just widespread devastation and destruction. It is a horrible thing to see; it is a horrible story. It is raw. It is true to life. It is psychologically profound. This complete flip in Amnon, where he is obsessed with possessing his beautiful half-sister; he cannot think of anything else. He gets her, takes her by force, and then suddenly, just as full of revulsion, hatred, disgust, shame; he rejects her. What he does at the end, she says, is worse than what he did earlier. That is humanity. O, the humanity! That is the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is vaguely bizarre, but sexuality and the sexual urge is so powerful that the stakes, I think, are almost higher – sometimes you overindulge in something – you eat the whole pizza, and the next morning you are like, “I can't believe I ate the whole thing,” like they used to have in the advertisement. Or sometimes we lose our tempers and we say something and we just feel terrible about it; but nothing can turn on a dime quite as quickly as disordered sexual desire. You would do anything to get this thing you want; to hating everything about her, you, him, whatever; and that vignette, an example, a showcase display window of why when this goes wrong, people suffer.

DAVE BAST

Let's talk a little bit more in just a moment about how lust works in our culture and in our society in a sex-saturated culture such as ours, and what we can do as Christians about that.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork. We are looking today – concluding our series on the seven deadly sins with the sin of lust – and Dave, in the last segment we looked at that very raw and tragic and ugly story from II Samuel 13 of the rape of Tamar and saw that as a perfect example of the way we sort of lose our minds sometimes in lust. Shakespeare had a great line, which absolutely describes that story we just read. When it comes to lust, Shakespeare has a line: Past reason hunted; and no sooner had, past reason hated.

DAVE BAST

Right, and as we also observed, legitimate sexual desire is intended to bring people together. God created humankind as male and female in a complementary fashion. Our very bodies, our anatomies, bear testimony to that; that we were made for one another. And when it is legitimate and when it is channeled in the way God intends, then physical desire leads to human flourishing and wholeness. We become complete in a sense. Not that you are not a complete human being if you live a single life or if you are chaste; we are not saying that by any means; but, as far as men and women intended for one another – created for one another – when we do that in the way God designed, then we become fuller, more whole human beings, but when we indulge it in the wrong way, it dehumanizes, it makes us more alone and lonely; it separates; it negates the other person and turns them into a thing, into a commodity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It may be uncomfortable to talk about, but if a lot of the insanity and the tragedy and the brokenness of lust could be seen in the Amnon and Tamar story from II Samuel 13, a lot of what you were just saying, Dave, can be seen in pornography, and particularly in the last 20 years, pornography online, where it is so much easier to get at now than ever used to be true; and what you see in pornography – and you can even see it in underwear commercials or on TV or in magazines that are perfectly legitimate magazines, but they still have underwear commercials in them – what you see is: A) People are reduced to parts. They are not people with a story; they are not people with a name; sometimes they are not people with a face, and that is also true in pornography. The other thing that you see in that kind of thing is: B) Most of the time, pornography is absorbed by people when they are alone. Sexuality is a gift of God and it is supposed to bring us together in a relationship; disordered lust and sexuality means you are exercising some aspect of the physical surface of sexuality when you are completely by yourself; there is not another living human being in sight; and so, you are isolated.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. And it is just everywhere around us. Yes, it is often indulged in in privacy because we are embarrassed; we are ashamed. Incidentally, here is one good practical test: If you are looking at something that you do not want anyone else to see, if you have to do it in private, that is a danger sign that maybe you shouldn't – but, surrounding us – you alluded to advertising, not just pornography, and how you cannot really open a magazine, you cannot turn on television – I mean, for goodness sake, look at the Super Bowl, it is just embarrassing – imagine if we could take somebody from 1950-something and bring them into the present day, they would be flabbergasted! And this is what we are showing our kids – the halftime show – it is all sex. The commercials, half of them are built on sex.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even the ones for dental floss and lawnmowers! But, that shows the power of it, and advertisers know that. But again, what it does is it removes the gift of sexuality from the realm of human relationship. It puts it off to the side all by itself.

In Genesis 2 – what we are talking about – and here is the familiar passage, but the wonderful vignette that gets at the idea both that sexuality is a gift of God and what it is for. From Genesis Chapter 2: 0:13:08.0] ¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him.” A couple of verses later, verse 21: The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh, ²²and then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken from the man and brought her to the man, ²³and the man said, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” ²⁴And for this reason, the man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. ²⁵The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.

So, there is that exuberant joy – you half expect him to call her “my sister” or something – the joy of connection; the joy of a relationship, that is the idea; and so, anytime sexuality leaves us more lonely, takes us away from other people, into private – then we know, that is not the way it is supposed to be, it is supposed to connect us to one person in a lifelong, wonderful relationship. If my use of sexuality is making me lonelier, more embarrassed, more ashamed, more alone, literally – something is wrong.

DAVE BAST

And what is wrong Genesis goes on to spell out; again, if you know the trajectory of the Bible, you know that right after this beautiful bit in Genesis 2 describing God's purpose and intention for human sexuality comes the fall, disobedience; and one of the first consequences of that is enmity between men and women, and really, a disordered state within us of desire. How can any reasonable person deny that we are seriously messed up?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if everything before Genesis 3 and the fall into sin showed us the way God wanted it, everything after shows the way it is not supposed to be, to borrow Neal Plantinga's book title. And indeed, churches fragment when some sexual scandal happens or if a pastor has an affair with another church member. Families blow up from adultery or from child abuse. A trusted uncle ends up doing something terrible. Some of us, and I know I did when I went to seminary, I worked at a Christian mental health hospital; you will never see young people or children more messed up forever, many times, or they will be dealing with it some way for the rest of their lives; you will never see more damage done than when it was sexual in nature from a trusted adult, and it happens all the time and it is one of the great tragedies of our age.

DAVE BAST

So, what is to be done? How do we handle this volatile part of our nature; now fallen, now also in all of us, flawed and broken? What is the Christian response to the problem of lust? Well, as you might expect, Jesus has something to say about that and so does the Apostle Paul, and we will look at that in just a moment.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are talking today about lust, the last of the deadly sins, although not the least, perhaps; and what we really want to talk about now is the Christian way to respond to the temptation to misuse sex and our sexual desire.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is not a new problem. We certainly do live, as you said, Dave, in a culture where there is virtually no escaping it in every advertisement, in the Super Bowl, at the Olympics, wherever; but it is nothing new in some ways. The Roman Empire had many hang-ups and many problems and many practices of ritual prostitution and other things that also created problems in the ancient world. So, the Apostle Paul had to address some of those very same concerns in the earliest days of the Church, and maybe one of the things that we can say in this final segment in terms of how do we handle this particular sin of lust – but really, I think retroactively, it could go for the other six deadly sins as well – and that was that Paul always, always, always called us back to baptism; back to who you are, and to remember that because that is who you are now, that is your identity now; you cannot wall off any part of your life from that. Apparently some people, in Corinth for instance, were doing exactly that.

DAVE BAST

Right. When he talks about baptism and the significant passages from I Corinthians 6 in the context of sexual immorality, he has heard a report from the Corinthians that some of them have been consorting with prostitutes. Corinth was full of them. They had a special temple on a hillside in Corinth that had hundreds of professional prostitutes working there. So, it was not quite as accessible as our Internet is for wrongly indulging this, but it was right up there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There it was. Apparently, some of the men in Corinth did not seem to think that Jesus and being a Jesus person had anything to do with it, and so they kept going. So, Paul gets wind of that. We think that the Corinthians sent Paul a long laundry list of questions and this was one of them: Dear Paul: Can you help us with spiritual gifts? Can you help us with the Lord's Supper? And oh, prostitutes; good? Bad? Opinion: what do you think? And so, Paul says: Here is what I think, and he says in I Corinthians 6:15: Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? Shall I then take members of Christ and unite them to a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that the one who unites himself with a prostitute is one

with her in body? For it is said, “The two shall become one flesh?”¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him in spirit.¹⁸ So flee from sexual immorality. All other sins people commit are outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies.¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit?

So, there is that refrain: Do you not know? Do you not know? He is basically calling them back to baptism. Look, you have become one with Jesus. He goes with you everywhere, which would include when you go to a prostitute – is that where you want to bring Jesus? I wouldn't!

DAVE BAST

Right. Also, interestingly, he says it is the act of sex itself that makes you one with another person. There is something much, much deeper than just temporary physical pleasure that is going on here. On a spiritual level, the two become one flesh as a result of having sex together. He says if you do that with a prostitute, you become one with her; you become one flesh. That is why it is so volatile – it is so powerful – it is like spiritual dynamite – it needs to be kept within the proper bounds. There is this sense that you cannot belong to Jesus – you cannot be one with Him if you are united through faith in baptism – and at the same time be physically one with someone outside the bounds of marriage.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You never leave Jesus behind, is what Paul is saying. Whether you are eating and drinking; whether you are shopping at the market; whether you are going – today we would say whether you are going to a movie – and certainly when you are going to a prostitute – you cannot leave Jesus behind. You are one with Him; He is going to come with you. As we are talking about some practical things, that means also today we need to wonder a little bit about, maybe wonder a lot about what kind of lines do we draw in our own lives? Sometimes in literature or in films or in television there is a need to show the world as it is – verisimilitude is the big literary term – you need to have the world reflected; and so, you are not going to be able to read novels or see movies that are completely devoid of sexuality, including sometimes depictions of sexuality that are wrong; adulterous affairs. True, to know the world as it is you have to, but are there times when we should say: This is a book. This is a film. This is a television show.

DAVE BAST

Or a website.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are not going to watch. We are not going to go there.

DAVE BAST

We cannot go there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are temples of the Holy Spirit and I am not going to go there. What would those be – I suppose it would almost have to be a case-by-case basis – but it is something Christians should struggle with, at least, and I wonder if we do?

DAVE BAST

You need to answer that, probably, for yourself, where the lines need to be drawn. But clearly, there are places where we are going maybe and it is not art, it is not verisimilitude, it is not great literature, it is something else again.

So, number one: Remember who you are. Remember whose you are; that wherever you go, if you are a Christian you are bringing Jesus with you; you are one with Him. But, here is the second thing, I think; there is a famous passage – maybe the most famous thing about lust was said by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where He says adultery is more than just physical. If you look lustfully at another person you have already committed adultery in your heart; and then He goes on to say this: If your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. He is talking

there, I think, about a kind of radical discipline – it is figurative language for what we have just said – there are places where you cannot go and there are things that you cannot look at, and you need to be fierce about this; you need to be decisive about what you are not going to do and where you are not going to go and what you are not going to look at; and if you don't, it could lead you into a very bad place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, we do not take literally the gouging out of eyes, but Jesus' point there was to shock, and to say: Look, you have got to take this seriously; you have got to be proactive. So, whether it is a television show, whether it is the series of books called *Fifty Shades of Gray*, which apparently are highly sexually charged books – and a lot of Christians are debating – I have read some articles in *Christianity Today* and elsewhere: Should Christian people look at this? Well, those are good questions to ask, and those are the right ones because of the incredible power of all of this, and its incredible power to destroy.

But, to end on a positive note, to also remember that we want to keep that power in its proper place, because when it is, when it glorifies God in marriage, the results are wonderful, and that is exactly what God wants us to have; to flourish in His good creation.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/lust>

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