

## Message #87 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

*“What Is Lust?”*

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about lust. No, no, no, I don't mean talk about things that come under the category of lust, but about what it means to lust. We know that 1 John 2:16 refers to lust of the flesh and to lust of the eye. In fact, let's start out by reading it. It says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

As Christians, we know that to lust after fleshly things or for things which tantalize the eyes is evil. We are encouraged by scripture to use moderation when desiring earthly things. But sometimes it is difficult to understand what lust really is or isn't. Sometimes we aren't sure whether we are entering into something lustful or maybe we are just having a natural desire that is acceptable. Anyway, let's take a look at the definition for the word lust and see what we can get from it.

In 1 John 2:16, the original Greek word for lust is, Epithumia. Epithumia indicates a desire that is great in intensity, in the sense that it is not well bridled, kept in check, or well contained. But specifically it indicates a longing for that which is desired. This is also what we find in Webster's dictionary for the word lust. It is unbridled desire or a feeling of longing. It is to yearn for, with strong or deep desire, or to wish earnestly for something. The interesting part of this definition is the concept that lust is something that is a longing for. At first, the concept of longing for something seems to be an inappropriate word to describe desire. Initially, the word longing comes from the word long, and we always use the word long to indicate length, such as a long

walk, or a long time, or a long story, etc. But, when we look closely at the definition, we see that the term 'long', as in 'long for', comes from the concept of seeming like a long time waiting for that which you desire. And, because it seems like you have to wait too long for it, then it also indicates that you are not being content in waiting for it. Therefore, if you long for something, you are experiencing a feeling of delay for the coming of that thing. It's like waiting for dinner, and it seems like forever before the food will be prepared. Or, it's like looking forward to your vacation and its seeming like it will never come. When you long for something, you are impatient for it to happen. It's like little kids looking forward to a party, or looking forward to Christmas, and can hardly wait until it comes. When you long for something, to you, it seems like a long time in coming. To long for something is the opposite of contentment. When you are content, you have no yearning for it to come, but are content to let it come when it comes.

Now, here's another little twist that you should find interesting. Let me take you to a scripture in which Jesus himself was speaking, in which Jesus used the same Greek word, Epithumia, to describe his own desire. We find this verse in Luke 22:15, which says, "And he said to them, with desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." In this verse Jesus used the word desire and the word desired to describe his feelings concerning his wanting to eat this special Passover meal with his disciples. The interesting thing about these two words, desire and desired, is that both of them use the same Greek word, and that Greek word is, Epithumia. When Jesus said, "with desire I have desired," he was saying in Greek, "with Epithumia I have Epithumia." If the translators had translated the King James version with the same accuracy they used for 1 John 2:16, they would have written this verse as if Jesus had said, "with lust I have lusted to eat this Passover with you." This doesn't mean that Jesus lusted in an evil sense. I'm just showing you that the actual word for lust is the same word for desire in these two verses. I guess if it were up to me, and I was one of the translators of the King James version, instead of using the word lust or the word desire in either of those two verses, I would be inclined to use the terms longing and longed. Let me read Luke 22:15 with the words longing and longed, instead of the word Epithumia, so that we can get a feel for what Jesus was really saying. Listen to this. "With longing I have longed to eat this Passover with you.

Do you see the concept? Can you see that the desire Jesus was displaying was more than just something he wanted. He longed for this time to eat this Passover with his disciples because it was so important to him. The reason the words, longed for, are appropriate in this verse is that Jesus yearned deeply for the time of that Passover meal and could hardly wait for it to come. To Jesus, it seemed like a loooooonnnnnngggggg time to wait for it. What Jesus longed for was for a good spiritual thing to take place. And, because it was a good thing and not an evil thing, we really don't want to use the term lust to describe it. To those of us who speak the English language, the word lust indicates something that is forbidden, something evil. So, the translators were correct in not using the word lust. However, if we just look at the concept of the Greek word Epithumia meaning desire, or meaning lust, then we really don't understand the concept of that which is appropriate in the spiritual sense and inappropriate in the physical sense. Let me explain what I mean by spiritual sense and physical sense

In this life we should certainly desire the things of God. When it comes to heavenly things we should never be content to be without them. Just as Jesus longed for the time of sharing the Passover with his disciples, we should also earnestly desire and yearn for those things of God to come to pass for us. If we truly have the kind of desire for the things of heaven that God wants us to have, then we can accurately describe our feelings as feelings of longing. They are feelings of longing if we are unable to be content without them. When it comes to spiritual things God does not want us to be content. To be content for the things of God is like sitting back and saying, "Oh well, when Jesus comes it will be soon enough, but I can wait easily enough." That would be ridiculous. We all are eager for the return of Jesus in the clouds of heaven, and this is a good thing. We long for that time to come, meaning that we all feel like it is too long of a time to wait and wish that the time would come soon. God wants us to earnestly desire heavenly things. In Matthew 11:12 and in Luke 16:16, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven and indicates that those who enter the kingdom of heaven must press into it. The things of God are not received by sitting back in contented fashion. If we are going to receive the things of God we are going to have to press in with fervor. Just as it says in James 5:16, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

Well, we can fairly easily see that God wants us to long for the things of heaven, in the sense that our desire must be so great, our yearning so deep for heavenly things, that we long for them, in the sense that we can hardly wait for them to come to pass and their coming seems to take a long time. However, that's good for the spiritual things of God, but what about the physical things of earth? 1 John 2:15, says, "Do not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We also find this concept concerning appropriate desire for heavenly things and inappropriate desire for earthly things described in Colossians 3:2, which says "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." There are many more scriptures which encourage us toward the desire, the longing for, things of God, and discourage us toward the desire, the longing for, things of this world.

But, sometimes it is difficult for us to recognize when our desire is proper and when it is improper. Using the definition of the Greek word, Epithumia, we can see that the concept of longing indicates that to the person desiring something, it seems like a long time in coming. We can use this concept of seeming like a long time coming to help us determine when something is appropriate and when it is not. The rule of thumb we can use is this. First of all, we must determine whether that which we desire is a heavenly thing or an earthly thing. If it's a heavenly thing, then we must determine if our desire includes a longing for it, in the sense that we can hardly wait for it to come to us. This is good in the general sense. However, on the other hand, if we determine that the thing we desire is an earthly thing, then our next step is to determine if there is a feeling of longing present for it. If we do have a feeling of longing for the physical thing, meaning that it seems like a long time in coming for what we truly want, then in a general sense, this is bad.

In physical things, in earthly things, we have both needs and desires. They're not the same thing. Needs are something that you must have to provide you with the necessary things of daily living,

and desires are those things which you want, but which cannot be categorized as needs. If you long for something, then, according to the true meaning of the word, you are not being content with what you already have. When you aren't content, you will have a feeling of wanting it to come quickly and it will seem like it is taking forever to get it. If we read Hebrews 13:5, it tells us that we should be content with the things that we have, in the sense of being satisfied, and not chasing after covetousness. I think this is the part that we need to focus in on today.

The scripture in 1 John 2:16, tells us that to lust after things of the flesh, or to lust after the things of the eyes, is wrong. When this verse mentions the flesh, it refers to our earthly man which is subject to temptations of this world. It doesn't take a great amount of intelligence to recognize that lust of the flesh or lust of the eyes is not a heavenly concept. We humans have been put into a flesh and blood body while on this earth, and because of this we are subject to earthly things which bring stimulation to that natural part of us, our flesh and blood bodies. Of course, we, as Christians, have been born again. Therefore, although we still have this flesh and blood body we have to drag around for a while yet, we have become spirit beings. When Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven, and we are caught up to meet him in the air, we will be changed. We will lose our flesh and blood bodies, and will have new glorified bodies at that time. The Bible tells us that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and therefore we will have to put off this old flesh form of a body and be given a new glorified form of body. The reason for this is that sin is successful only when it finds its occasion through our fleshly bodies, and only by the destruction of our flesh will sin ever be permanently destroyed.

However, up until now we still have to fight our natural man tendencies and resist the temptation Satan brings us. His temptation is geared to bring satisfaction to us in a fleshly nature, and of course that will also stifle our spirit nature. If we were just meant to be flesh and blood humans forever, then it would be silly to resist things which tantalize our flesh nature. But when Jesus told us that we must be born again, he wasn't giving us an opportunity to have a dual nature of both spirit man and fleshly man which co-exist together. He said that we must be born again in spirit, and he also has shown us in his word that we must crucify our man of flesh. We must die daily to the temptations for earthly things which stimulate our fleshly bodies. Of course, that's not an easy thing to do in a world where just about every delight is offered to us on a continual basis.

It is only honest-to-goodness real Christians who love Jesus. And, it is only honest-to-goodness real Christians who try to resist the things of this world. Sure, there are many people who say they love the things of God, but at the same time many of these same people also love the things of this world. But, notice that when the Bible says in Colossians 3:2, to set our affection on things above, it also says not to set our affection on things of the earth. Many Christians think that it is O.K. to do both. But, that's not what the Bible says. There is only one way to serve God, and that is by loving everything about God that his word shows us and not loving the things of this world. If we love the things of earth, then we are serving Satan, in that we are honoring him by giving in to his temptations for these things. Let me give you an example here.

Let's say you happen to attend a pot luck dinner at church. And, let's say there are about four different lasagna casseroles on the table, and each lasagna casserole has been made by a different person. Now, if you're a Christian, I think you probably understand the principles of pot luck dinners, and that you know you need to be real careful not to offend anyone who has presented their special recipe. So, just to make certain that you don't offend anyone, you help yourself to a little bit of each lasagna casserole, because you realize that if you reject one of the casseroles the person who made it might just possibly feel that you rejected them. Of course, eating that much lasagna might not be healthy for you, but because you try very hard to please everyone, you stuff yourself just a little bit too much. Now, the point of this example has nothing to do with pot luck dinners or lasagna. What I want you to see is that by partaking in what is being offered to you by each of these cooks, you are giving them honor. And this is a basic concept for people. When you accept what the people present to you, then essentially you are accepting them. If they present food to you and you receive it, then you are giving honor and glory, to some extent, to them. If you reject what they offer to you, then you are not giving them any honor or glory. This is the way humans are. But actually, this is the way all creatures are, even God himself.

When God offers us heavenly things, they are things of God. They are things of him. If you accept heavenly things, you are actually accepting of God himself. It pleases God when you accept his heavenly things. However, when you accept the temptations of the flesh, then you are accepting what is being offered to you by Satan. And if you accept things offered by Satan, you are giving him, to some extent, honor and glory. Satan, in the same way, desires that you accept him instead of accepting God. When you desire earthly things to satisfy your fleshly desires, then by your actions you are making a statement which says that you love Satan, for you love what he presents to you.

Now, this does not mean you can't have anything of this world, for certainly we humans all have needs. God has never told us that we cannot have that which we need. Certainly we need air to breath, food to eat, and clothes to dress ourselves with, and shelter for our bodies. But in all these things, God tells us that we must be content with the things of earth which we have. To be content means that we will not lust after things of this world. If we are content, then we cannot, at the same time, long for anything, because longing describes a feeling of disappointment for not having all that we want quickly enough. Remember, to long for something is to feel that it seems as if it is a long time in coming.

As Christians we need to check ourselves from time to time and determine if the desires we have for things of this world fall into the category of needs or into the category of lusts. Surely, there are actions and words which are in opposition to a righteous spirit of God, and these are clearly labeled as sins. Generally, we Christians don't have too much trouble determining what is right and wrong in the sense of words and actions. However, when it comes to wanting to get things of this world, we have a very difficult time determining whether something is just a need or whether it is something that comes into the category of lust.

We all have desires for things of this world to some extent, and not everything you desire is in the category of lusts. But if you want a general rule of thumb to use to determine if something you want is a lust or just a convenient thing of earth to help you through the day, then this is what you can do. When you have a desire for something, first, determine if it is a need. If it seems to be a need, but is not something that is an absolute necessity, then check your emotions and see if you have this feeling that the thing is not coming fast enough. Check and see if you have a feeling of impatience for getting it.

Sometimes we want something and have determined that from the standpoint of being a Christian it is alright to have it. But, what one person can have may be too much for another person. One person may be able to drive a new car, and another person may find that driving a new car is detrimental to their spiritual welfare because it makes them want too many other things of the world. So, when we want something, and we want to make sure that what we want is not lustful, all we really have to do is check ourselves and see if we have that feeling that we can hardly wait until we get it. If we are impatient to get something, then contentment is not present. Peace and contentment does not co-exist with a feeling of impatience. When the Bible says that we should be content with such things as we have, then that means we should not have an impatient feeling of longing to obtain them. If you want many things of this world, and are impatient to get them, then when your desires are denied, you will not only be impatient, but then will soon become frustrated and eventually angry.

You might want to ask yourself this question. “When I start to think of simplifying my lifestyle and actually not having so much, does that set well with me, are do I start to feel at a loss? Do I then start to feel frustrated and even sometimes angry?” The feelings of frustration and anger are results of being thwarted in your plan of action to obtain that which you want. All these ill feelings are not of God, and come as a result of wanting more than what you can easily get. God is a provider, and he provides us with all the things of this world which we need and even more. But, when we want more earthly things than God is willing to give us, then we sometimes begin to press too hard for those things and attempt to get more than what God is telling us to be content with. When the next time comes that you want something again, you can prevent a lot of frustration and a lot of anger by checking yourself to see if you have a longing for it. If that feeling is there which makes you feel that you aren't getting it quickly enough, then watch out. You have a lust, and not a normal desire. They fall into the category of lust if you have lost the ability to be content without them.

The bottom line is this. If it is a good thing from God, God will not withhold it from you. If it is a thing of this world, and you feel it isn't coming soon enough, then you have fallen into the trap of lusting after it. Your longing, which is your feeling that it isn't coming quickly enough, is your indication. That's the sign that something isn't right. The next sign is frustration, and the sign following frustration is anger. It is at this time that you are dishonoring God, and honoring Satan. If you're going to serve God, you must receive the things of God and you must reject the things of Satan. Checking yourself to see if lust has reared it's ugly head will help you to stop seeking things which God is not providing. However, if you are at peace, and feel content in waiting for it, you have nothing to worry about. When you are content, you are essentially telling

God that he can provide for your earthly needs in whatever way he sees most fitting. This glorifies God, because it tells God that you trust him, and agree with his will. Contentment is a sign of believing God and trusting God. It is better to be content with the things God gives, then to enter into impatience which can give way to the frustration and anger which Satan loves to see. If you stop yourself when you're in the state of longing for something, you can prevent Satan from being honored, and you can therefore give glory and honor to God.