

Honouring God with Our Sexuality

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Ten Commandments series: Each One All-In for Jesus

1 Timothy 1:1-17; LD 41

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1 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

²To Timothy my true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach **false doctrines** any longer ⁴or **to devote themselves to** myths and endless genealogies. Such things **promote controversial speculations** rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. ⁵**The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.** ⁶Some have **departed** from these and have **turned** to meaningless talk. ⁷They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they **so confidently affirm.**

⁸We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and **for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine** ¹¹**that conforms to the gospel** concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³Even though **I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man**, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.** ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation loved by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Most of us have likely heard about the Hockey Canada sex scandal over the past months. The executives of this organization paid off different female complainants who were sexually assaulted by young male hockey players. The story highlights the immorality that was brushed aside because the young men were rising stars in the hockey world. The organization's reputation became more important than the well being of the young ladies or even the well being of the young men who committed gross

crimes against young ladies. Such a sad display of sexual immorality, the underlying motives and the carnage it leaves behind.

On the other hand, hopefully we've all been able to witness beautiful, strong marriages where husband and wife honour each other. We could think of Queen Elizabeth II and her long and faithful marriage of nearly 70 years to her husband Prince Phillip. But we've seen such marriages closer by. We have elderly couples with us today who have experienced love and faithfulness for almost as long as the Queen. And we've had couples in recent years who have surpassed 70 years together. Such marriages testify to the beauty of faithfulness, including sexual fidelity that is at the heart of the seventh commandment.

As we consider God's will for us in this commandment, let's return to the four points I've gleaned from author Ray Ortlund. We begin with considering God's revelation in the seventh commandment.

Revelation

The seventh commandment reveals to us that God loves sex. Not for himself obviously. For us! He created it for humans. God made sex good. He made it for pleasure in marriage. He made it for unity in marriage. And he made it for procreation in marriage. All of those things reveal God's love of sex. It's a good thing when we use it as God intends.

On the flipside, this commandment also reveals how God hates how we violate his good desires for sex. He hates immoral sex. He desires for sex to be used properly. That's why there are so many prohibitions related to sex in the Bible. Everything from warning against premarital sex to adultery, to bestiality, to homosexual sex, to prostitution, to even lust—which in today's world includes pornography.

Because God loves us, he wants us to enjoy relationships that are truly loving. And because he loves sex, he has designs for **how** sex is to be enjoyed or to be limited. When he limits it to marriage, that's for our good. When he limits it in any way, you can be sure that it's out of love for us. This seventh commandment highlights that sex is not the be all and end all of life as it is often portrayed in our world. There are limits to it, which are also good. In the first century Roman world, sex was seen as a mere physical appetite that was irresistible. So this teaching of sex being something we can control is countercultural back then, just as it is today.

Next, we learn in our Bible reading today that **God loves love above all**. What stands out in this chapter is Paul's reminder that God wants his people to be loving toward all those who fall for false teaching and consequently for wrong ways of living.

You'd be well served here if you follow along in your Bible and watch how Paul frames the conversation. In v.3 he tells Timothy, I told you to stay in Ephesus *so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrine....* V.4 says, this bad teaching *promotes controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith*. So, he's concerned about promoting God's work. Then he continues, *the goal of this command* which is the command he just gave in v.3 to tell people not to

teach false doctrine... the goal of that command is love. And that love, he says in v.5, *comes from... a sincere faith*, which is faith in Jesus. So, God's concern is that we know his love which we will find in Jesus. Once we have faith in Jesus, we'll begin to understand how good doctrine leads to godly living and want to do that to honour God for his love and grace to us.

Paul gives himself as an example of someone who was a false teacher but has been changed by God's love. He notes in v.12 and following that he was a blasphemer and persecutor. But the grace of our Lord was poured out on him which brought the faith and love of Christ to him. He explains that, as far as he's concerned, he's the worst of sinners and Jesus saved him. It's like he's saying to Timothy, "If Jesus loved me and could save me—a man of bad doctrine, false teaching and immoral living—then tell the people of Ephesus that God loves them and that their life will be richly blessed if they understand this. If they believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus, that will ultimately result in the transformation of their lifestyle or actions. In short, God's love for us in Christ is the only way we'll know what true life is all about. Good doctrine, Paul is saying, is essential to good living. Apart from knowing the grace of God, we won't even desire to live a good life that is marked by obedience to the law of God.

We should know what God expects of us in the area of sex. But unless we start with knowing his love and grace, we will only be judgemental to people living in sin, rather than loving and gracious. God does not want to beat people into conformity. He wants them to recognize his love and grace. That's what can change us.

Confrontation

So, how does this seventh commandment confront us then?

Given what Paul has taught us in 1 Timothy 1, I would say that God is telling us that we are powerless in ourselves to gain the victory over sexual sin, or any other sin for that matter. As you and I struggle with sin in the sexual realm or elsewhere, I hear Paul saying that learning to depend daily on God's grace to us in Christ is the pathway forward. Start with Jesus. Draw near to him and find him saying, I love you. Paul found Jesus to be the most gracious and powerful to help him. Without God's grace, Paul knows he'd be stuck in sin. Still blind to his own sinfulness.

Along with that, Paul highlight's the patience of God with us in our ongoing struggle with sin. He says in v.16,

^{1 Tim 1:16} But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Victory over sexual sin involves knowing Jesus has grace and power to help you. Then be patient with yourself just as Jesus is patient with us.

Knowing God's patience and grace, however, means we can take sin seriously. God is not condemning us. Jesus has paid for our sins. Rest in that. But then don't be content to let sin continue to have its way in you. We see this in Paul's life and hear it in places like Romans 6 where he says that a Christian who knows God's grace can't

continue to live in sin. Jesus showed this in John 8. A group of Pharisees assembles. These are people dedicated to the standards of the law of God and trying to force conformity without love. This group has come to judge a woman caught in adultery. Jesus wisely asks a question that convinces all the judges to leave. Then when he's alone with the woman, he asks her, *Has no one condemned you?* Then he says, *Neither, do I condemn you. But go now and leave your life of sin.*

Only when we begin with trusting God's love and grace to remove our guilt can we begin to leave our sin. The grace and patience of God doesn't give us an excuse to hold on to our sin; rather it supports us in letting our sin go.

Now, what sorts of sin should we be concerned about in this seventh commandment? Obviously, adultery. You shall not commit adultery. The Heidelberg Catechism explains that this commandment refers to all sorts of unchastity. We've always known what unchastity refers to. It's sexual immorality of every kind. It's all the kinds of sexual impurity that we find described or listed in the Bible. It includes a married man or woman having sex with someone who is not their spouse. It includes fornication, which is premarital sex. It includes rape and prostitution and so much more. There are prohibitions in the Old Testament against a man lying with an animal. Likewise, against homosexual activity. In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul talks about society plummeting into moral chaos where creational norms are discarded. Moral perversity, he writes, is manifested in men having sex with men or women with women. This is all in the Bible. This is true doctrine, as Paul refers to it in our chapter.

But Jesus gets to the heart of all sexual immorality when he says in his Sermon on the Mount,

Mt 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Sexual immorality—adultery, pornography, homosexual sex, polygamy, polyamory and orgies, premarital sex—all forms of unchastity are before us in this commandment. But so are the ways we talk and think, says the catechism. That's also Jesus' point in the Sermon on the Mount. So, you see friends, sexual immorality—from thoughts to actions—is destructive. There's nothing wholesome or upbuilding about it. It hurts us personally. It makes us look down on others; we degrade them by making them serve our selfish purposes. And it destroys society as it breaks down marriages, homes and families, mistreats women, children and some men as well.

We must hear the Holy Spirit confronting our sins in the area of the seventh commandment and his call to live chaste lives for our own good and the good of our society at large. Sexual immorality is destructive. That's why God hates it. He wants the best for us. Hear his confrontation of our sin as it comes from his loving concern.

Instruction

Now we turn from confrontation to instruction.

Jesus always raises the bar of the Ten Commandments. He's not only concerned about the outward manifestations of sin. He's concerned about the root causes in our heart. When a man looks at woman lustfully, that's the start of adultery.

Our denomination's Human Sexuality Report has been criticized by some people who don't believe same-sex sex is wrong. Meanwhile, the same report spent a large number of pages highlighting the fact that the vast majority of young men—and increasingly young women—are using pornography today which is a form of committing adultery in our hearts and minds. Some researchers say as much as 80% of men are watching porn. It might surprise some of us that those numbers are reportedly the same inside the church as outside of it. That's alarming and rightly needs to be taken very seriously. This speaks to our ability to deceive ourselves into thinking what God says is bad is actually good because we like it.

There were people like that in Ephesus as well that Paul speaks to Timothy about. He's not referring to sexual sins from what we can tell but nonetheless there are teachers who teach the wrong stuff about God but claim it's right because they like it.

Pornography is rampant and destructive. People often justify our sins by saying, "I'm not hurting anyone." But that's not true. You are hurting yourself. Sin never leaves us untouched and God loves us too much not to care about how we hurt even ourselves. In the case of porn, though, you are hurting a large number of people who are being misused for your personal pleasure. Even if **they** are providing it without compulsion, it is still hurting them whether they realize it or not. If you're not married, let me just say that you're hurting the person who could one day be your spouse. You are hurting your future sex life which is being damaged by your involvement with porn today. If you never get married, that's perfectly fine. But using porn still hurts the way you view other people, not to mention what it does to you personally. If you are married, you are committing adultery in your mind and creating expectations and visuals in your mind that your spouse can never attain. That will create tensions and disappointment which destroy your sex life. That, in turn, can ultimately destroy your marriage and break apart your family.

Porn is not a small matter. It is destructive, whether we want to acknowledge that or not.

I have a book here entitled, *The Death of Porn: Men of integrity building a world of nobility*. It's a call to men to put away their porn by finding our hope in Christ to help us overcome this shame-filled and destructive addiction. It encourages us to starve the porn industry which dehumanizes women as well as children and also some men. We must see ourselves as God's royal sons and daughters who are responsible for building a world of nobility where we honour everyone as image-bearers of God and temples of the Holy Spirit. It's a book for individuals or for group study and accountability. Let me know if you'd like to borrow it or start a small group to discuss it.

Congregation, sex is a beautiful gift from God so the hardest part about talking about sexual sin in our day is that when you don't agree with some people, they say you hate them and want to rob them of the gift of sex that God created for them.

As I said earlier, the Apostle Paul knows that his sin is as bad as the next guy's. It's not about accusing others of sin. Paul says what he does with all sincerity and all humility because he knows his own sin. As a Pharisee, he thought he was blameless. As a Christian, he knows only Jesus is blameless and he has taken all the guilt of our sin on himself. We know this. I know this. So, when I tell you that the Bible calls certain actions sin, I'm not saying you're a terrible person. Worse than me. No, I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where I found bread.

I think the biggest mistake we are making today in the church with regards to sex is that we no longer believe that self-denial is a virtue. Like Rome of old, we see it as an irresistible appetite. We believe that sex is a necessity for true living and robbing anyone of that blessing is cruel. Only a few years ago a well-known CRC man in the Edmonton area suggested in an article that since young adults are getting married later in life, it is unreasonable and unloving to call them to refrain from sex until they get married. It is cruel. Well, frankly friends, just because we don't like what God says doesn't mean it isn't true and good. Self-denial is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus and of truly loving ourselves and others.

Friends, the greatest example of love is Jesus and he showed his love through self-denial. Self-denial is the greatest form of love! Jesus offered his life to the service of the Father's plan of salvation. To that end, he laid down his life for us. *Greater love has no one than this: that he lays down his life for another.*

It's funny that sex is one of the things couples fight about. Why is that? I tell young couples in pre-marriage classes that whether it's sex or anything else in marriage, the example is Jesus: He took on the role of a servant, according to Philippians 2:7. And if the husband and wife take on the role of serving each other, rather than being served, whether in marriage generally or sex specifically, that will be nothing but good. Serving is a form of self-denial. It's putting others ahead of yourself. It's love at it's best.

Unmarried people are called to refrain from sex until marriage. Yes, that can be difficult. It is self-denial that comes from trusting that God has the best plan. Married couples also need self-control and self-denial. Sometimes a spouse has to refrain for the good of their partner. The Old Testament prescribes times when men and women shouldn't have sex. The New Testament says there are good spiritual reasons to fast from sex for a mutually agreed upon season. Widows and widowers are no longer eligible for sex after their partner dies. Many married people are no longer able to have sex for various physical reasons. The list goes on. Sex is for married heterosexuals only but it even has limits in that context. And most of those limits revolve around self-denial for the good of your partner.

I'm very proud and honoured to know a gay man who grew up here and said to me, "I just want to know what the Bible says about being a homosexual so I can live as Jesus wants!" That's self-denial. Isn't that what every one of us should be saying, whether we are old or young, male or female, gay, straight, transgender, or black, brown or white?

In a sentence: **Give your sex life to the Lord and trust his directions for you in that regard.** Let self-denial for the love of Jesus and others shape our actions. Rely on God's wisdom as our creator, rather than on the things we see and hear in our world today. Blessings will flow from your willingness to honour God with your body, doing as he instructs us in his word.

Promise

So, then, what does God promise us in regard to the seventh commandment?

First, he promises no condemnation for our failures. You might feel like Paul, "I'm the worst of sinners" because of what I've done wrong. Remember Paul's message in 1 Timothy 1. It's not about our sin but about God's grace. Lean on God's grace. Believe the promises of the gospel as Paul did. Our sins—big or small—are forgiven and our debt paid in full through Jesus' sacrificial love for us. Stop beating yourself up and start remembering, believing, and perhaps preaching to yourself the glorious gospel. Maybe sing the doxology that Paul writes in the last verse we read:

¹ Tim 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Jesus paid it all. Hallelujah. Life a life of thankfulness for his grace, not a life of regret.

A second promise we can hold on to is the presence and power of Jesus in the face of temptation and trial. My heart goes out to our young people and young adults today who live in a society that suggests that sex is for now. Sex is fine even apart from love. It's recreational, just like going to a dance. It's also hard for parents today to tell their kids about sex as God's gift for married people alone when society is screaming that it's not.

Maybe think about Lot. Remember him? He took the better land when Abraham offered him first choice. He first moved his family to Sodom where there was all kinds of immorality, including men banging his door down to have sex with the men who came to visit. But there was more to the man than that. Listen how Peter gives assurance of God's presence in the face of trials and temptations.

² Pet 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

That's quite the paragraph, right! I don't know how our society compares to the world in which Lot lived. But clearly the Lord was with him and Noah and others and he'll be with us as we face trials, no matter how depraved our world gets. You who are

young and feel the pressure of your friends and society to engage in sex outside of God's design, know that he will be with you and bless you for your faithfulness. But should you fall into sin, run to Jesus for his grace and know he loves you.

While in the thick of the temptation, it can be hard to trust the promises of God for a blessed life when you do what he commands. In the short term, it's hard to put up with mockery or friends turning on you. In the long term, however, you'll be able to live without guilt and shame. You'll learn that the Lord is with you in some of the hardest times of your life. And some day, if that's God's plan, you'll be able to get into a marriage without baggage from previous sexual relationships. And believe me, there is baggage from that.

God longs for us to remain sexually pure because it will make us healthier, happier members of society. It will help us build solid homes where single people are noble and walk with integrity. Where marriages thrive because husband and wife serve each other instead of their own selfish desires or fantasies. Where children have parents serving them together. And where singles, couples and families gather for worship together as a family of God. These are signs of a blessed life, according to God's design.

In Ephesians 5, Paul speaks of how a couple ought to love one another selflessly. And he ends by saying such relationships reflect the love of Jesus for the Church, his bride. His aim is to present her as a holy and radiant Church to the Father. That's a good image for us to end with.

We started out reflecting on the brokenness in our society where young men gang rape young women. Nothing could be sexually uglier, less honouring to God and more destructive to a healthy society. The opposite in this life is the fidelity and faithfulness that is modelled by those who have enjoyed many years of marriage or those who have lived faithfully and lovingly as singles. But we end with an eye on Jesus who serves us selflessly and invites us to enjoy life his way. May God help us—from young to old—to aim for and live by God's holy standards for our body as well as our soul. And to that end, may our lives and homes be a greater blessing to our world.

Amen.

The Ten Commandments from Exodus 20, up to #7.

³ “You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them...

⁷ “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God....

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

¹² “Honor your father and your mother.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

Lord’s Day 41

Q & A 108

Q. What does the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That God condemns all unchastity,¹
and that therefore we should thoroughly detest it²
and live decent and chaste lives,³
within or outside of the holy state of marriage.

Q & A 109

Q. Does God, in this commandment,
forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul,
and God wants both to be kept clean and holy.
That is why God forbids
all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,¹
and whatever may incite someone to them.²