

# Lust

"Slaying the Seven" Series, June 28 & 29, 2025 | 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

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## What does the Bible say about lust?

### **We should probably start at the beginning.**

In the beginning, God created us in His image as physical and sexual beings.

**Genesis 1:27** says it three times for emphasis:

***So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.***

Saying something three times—that was like putting an exclamation point on it.

We are created in the image of God—physically and sexually.

Sex is part of God's good plan for us, but lust, like every vice, damages something good.

### **God gave us sex for two purposes: intimacy and procreation.**

Sex is given to make two people, husband and wife, one.

Two people become "one flesh" in marriage.

Sex is also given for procreation. God commanded us to be fruitful and multiply, and sex is the mechanism for that to happen.

So, sex touches two fundamental impulses or realities—love and life.<sup>1</sup>

### **But something went wrong in the Fall, and now we all live with the consequences.**

Now our flesh is at war with what God wants, and the results are all around us.<sup>2</sup>

Sexual expression frequently spills out of the boundaries set up by the Bible. Also, defying the boundaries is often celebrated, and the boundaries themselves are questioned and ridiculed.

Sex is available in person, in print, in video, and online.

It's used to sell just about everything that can be sold. Including people.

For today, can we agree that we live in a culture that pushes lust like a drug?

### **Christian author Frederick Buechner described sex as being like nitroglycerin, and he's right.**

He wrote, "Contrary to Mrs. Grundy, sex is not a sin. Contrary to Hugh Hefner, it's not salvation either. Like nitroglycerin, it can be used either to blow up bridges or heal hearts."<sup>3</sup>

Isn't he right? Sex isn't the be-all and end-all of life; it isn't salvation. Nor is it inherently sinful.

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*, pp. 191-4.

<sup>2</sup> Yuan, Christopher. *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, p. 31. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Buechner's quote is from *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* printed by HarperCollins in 1993 (p. 107). I found it in Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung's *Glittering Vices*, 194-195.

Sex is more like nitroglycerin. It's powerful. It can harm or heal.  
What makes the difference? Following the manufacturer's directions.

**That's what Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2:**

***Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.***

God has a plan handed to us by God through people like Paul who passed it to others.

God's plan is good! When we live inside His plan, God is pleased. We usually thrive.

But lust pulls us outside of that plan. And that's when things start to fall apart.

**Lust distorts the Bible's vision of sexuality and humanity.**

**Paul describes and diagnoses lust in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6:**

***For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.***

Once again, Paul starts with a vision of holiness. This is what sex is supposed to be.

When we are letting God do His work in our lives, then we control our bodies.

Staying inside God's plan for sex gives honor to people and holiness to God.

With lust, those things are missing. What does lust do?

**Lust turns our gaze inward.**

After the Fall, we naturally think that life is all about us.

We think that anything we feel is good and anything we want should be ours.

Lust focuses our attention on what we want physically.

We forget that sex is really to build intimacy with a spouse and for procreation.

And we become blind to anything or anyone else.

**Lust dishonors and dehumanizes people.**

If lust focuses our attention on our own pleasure, then we don't see the other person.

We treat the other person as an object, a means to the end of our own pleasure.

We forget that they are real people with a backstory, a life, and a future.

We make them less human.

And when we dehumanize someone else, we become a little less human ourselves.

**Lust disregards God.**

As Paul reminds us, God has a plan for our lives, boundaries He places around our sexuality.

We debate those boundaries, but when we stay inside them, we tend to thrive.  
And when we choose our own will and ways, we are disregarding God, which almost always ends up damaging us and costing us in the end.

**The lyrics to “Your Body Is a Wonderland” remind us why lust is not a victimless crime.**

I know it’s uncomfortable to draw images from our culture in worship, but we can’t ignore the world around us. We need to be honest about what those images are saying and doing to us.

The song talks about the beloved in terms that could come from the Song of Solomon.

Which is good. But it misses the mark because this is just a casual relationship.

It won’t last because, “We got the afternoon.”

And it ends with frustration that the relationship won’t last.

Love takes a lifetime to build, and a single afternoon that everyone knows will ultimately go nowhere leaves everyone less human, not more.

That’s why Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 4:6**:

***... that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things ...***

Lust harms us all, and God cares about that.

Lust is not the victimless crime we sometimes make it out to be. But lust isn’t our only option!

**Chastity or “holy sexuality” embodies the Bible’s vision of sexuality and humanity.**

**Chastity—a classic Christian virtue—is better described as “holy sexuality.”**

Chastity is a classic Christian virtue.

However, chastity sounds like something that belongs to the single alone. And most people associate it with saying “no” rather than saying “yes” to something.

So, Christopher Yuan suggests that the term “holy sexuality” is better: Holy sexuality consists of two paths: chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage. Chastity is more than simply abstention from extramarital sex; it conveys purity and holiness. Faithfulness is more than merely maintaining chastity and avoiding illicit sex; it conveys covenantal commitment.<sup>4</sup>

I think Yuan is right. “Holy sexuality” is a good way to describe what God wants for and from us.

**Holy sexuality gives honor to people and holiness to God.**

Holy sexuality means saying “yes” to right relationships, “yes” to intimacy with a spouse, and “yes” to all other relationships in their fullness without lustful objectification.

It means saying “yes” to God’s plan, “yes” to His boundaries, “yes” to thriving, and “yes” to the Holy Spirit’s aligning our hearts and minds with God’s design for us.

**“To a Long Loved Love” by Madeliene L’Engle captures the true joy that can come from holy sexuality.**

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<sup>4</sup> Yuan, p. 47.

She writes about the strength of the relationship between two married people who have loved one another for decades, instead of just an afternoon.

She writes: "More beautiful than spring with all its spate of blooms ...

What joy and comfort these familiar rooms."<sup>5</sup>

Her words lyrically remind us that holy sexuality offers us the fullness of life and love, rather than denying us either.

God's plan is better, and it gives us the greatest opportunity available to thrive!

### **Holy sexuality exposes the decay you might have missed behind premarital sex and living together.**

Despite what we have heard and may even believe ourselves, Paul shows us that premarital sex dehumanizes our partners and us; it disregards God's plan for our lives. When we choose it, we are settling for something less than what God wants or offers.

And I understand that living together looks attractive financially and as a way to determine long-term fit. But living together falls short of the covenant we make in marriage and the faithfulness that we owe to someone with whom we are looking to become "one flesh." People actually describe living together as, "kicking the tires" on a car. But you are not an inanimate object; you are worth more than a car. You are a precious, valuable human being made in the image of God. And marriage is not a contract based on merit and mutual benefit; it is a covenant in which we pledge ourselves to one another and to God through good times and bad.

### **Does holy sexuality sound like something that's too much for you?**

I know that premarital sex and living together are assumed now in our culture.

That may be the path you took at one time; you may be on that path today.

And I know that you may think I am describing a way of living that is impractical to impossible.

But the cost of premarital sex and living together is too high.

Holy sexuality is worth it.

### **Sanctification produces holy sexuality.**

#### **Shame, guilt, and regret need not be the final words for us.**

I don't know your past, your story, or what you are going through today.

Nor do I know how you are processing what I am saying to you today.

You may have shame, guilt, and regret. That can be the work of the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin or the voice of the Enemy seeking to keep you in prison.

You don't have to stay in the prison of shame, guilt, and regret.

In Jesus Christ you can be forgiven for your past—no matter what that past may be.

We can be given new lives, we can be adopted as sons and daughters of God, we can be given God's Holy Spirit who shapes us into the image of Christ Himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Madeleine L'Engle, "To a Long Loved Love" from *The Ordering of Love: New and Collected Poems of Madeleine L'Engle* quoted by DeYoung, 202.

When that happens, our shame, guilt, and regret are cast as far away as the east is from the west. Shame, guilt, and regret need not be the final words for us.

**In 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8, Paul reminds us that God calls us to holiness and gives us the Holy Spirit to make it possible:**

***For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.***

In Christ, we are declared holy. God takes away our sin and gives us Jesus' holiness.

Then the Holy Spirit spends the rest of our lives making us holy. That's sanctification.

That applies to our sexual lives as well.

God takes away our sin, shame, guilt, and regret and replaces it with Jesus' holiness.

Then God the Holy Spirit spends the rest of our lives shaping holiness in sexuality in us.

Sanctification is God's work, but we have work to do, too.

**For our part in sanctification, we Repent.**

We leave behind sinful, harmful behaviors and beliefs.

We have to identify those sinful and harmful beliefs and behaviors and say "no" to them.

God helps us every step of the way.

But it's a real struggle, a fight. Sinful behaviors and beliefs don't go away easily. It's like putting those sinful beliefs and behaviors to death.<sup>6</sup>

**Then we Believe.**

Before we meet Christ, we put our faith in ourselves and in pleasure as the highest good.

When we meet Christ and repent, we take our faith and trust away from ourselves and empty pleasures.

We put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, in the Gospel He preaches, in the love of God He shows us, and in the love of others that He commands.

**It's a transformation—like spiritual heart surgery.**

The cure for lust isn't just deciding to be good and do good. We can't.

Apart from Jesus, there is a hole in our hearts that we are trying to fill. Sometimes we fill that hole with pleasure and self. That, as we've seen, is destructive, dehumanizing, and worse.

The transformation that really needs to happen has to happen at a heart level.

Jesus needs to fill the hole in our hearts.

Then our whole way of looking at the world, ourselves, and each other changes.

Our beliefs change, and our behaviors change.

It is a radical transformation, like spiritual open-heart surgery that replaces our old, clogged arteries with new arteries through which the life and love of God can flow.

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<sup>6</sup> Yuan, 31.

That is the sanctification that makes holy sexuality possible.

## How can we embrace holy sexuality?

**It may feel out of step with the culture and nearly impossible. However, it is possible. But how?**

### **Fill the cavities that lust exploits.**

Lust usually isn't something we plan. It's something we get caught up in—in moments of weakness. Lust finds cavities in our lives the way decay finds weak spots in our teeth.

We want to fill those cavities in our lives.

We are vulnerable to lust when we are exposed. To resist lust, we want to protect ourselves by choosing the times and places when we consume media. We may even need filters, accountability software, and accountable relationships.

We are driven to lust when we're weak. When we're tired, beaten up, bruised, worn down, and discouraged, we look for something to dull the pain. Lust looks to fill that hole.

Instead, we want to fill those cavities with that which is good.

Paul talks about it in **Philippians 4:8**:

***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***

He is telling us to fill the cavities in our lives.

### **Love others by surrounding yourself with a spiritual family.**

When God created us in His image, He made us for relationships.

An intimate relationship with a spouse is just one of the relationships we have in life.

When He adopted us into His family, God made us brothers and sisters to each other. We are a kind of spiritual family to each other.

And we need relationships with the other Christians who make up our spiritual family.

Our spiritual family makes life richer.

Our spiritual family begins to fill the hole inside of us that longs for acceptance and love and that will otherwise seek them out in unhealthy places.

Plus, a spiritual family is the place to get the encouragement and accountability we need to live holy lives and embrace holy sexuality.

But there is one relationship above all others that makes this possible:

### **Love God passionately.**

God is our highest longing and our deepest love.

When we are corrupted by sin, we go searching elsewhere for a love to fill the void left by God's absence. But nothing else satisfies. Nothing else fills that void in us.

Not even a good, solid biblical marriage that truly models Christ's love for the Church.

If we are to overcome lust, we must fill the void inside of us with that which was meant to fill that void in the first place—God's presence and God's love.

Knowledge of Him, love from Him, and love for Him will leave us whole. Less vulnerable to lust. And more open to everything God has for us—including holy sexuality.

**Your body really is a wonderland.**

That song may have gotten a lot of things wrong, but the title is right.

Our bodies are wonderlands—marvels physically, spiritually, and theologically.

Jesus took on a human body when He came to save us, the same kind of body you and I have.

Our physical bodies—fallen though they may be—bear God’s image.

Lust denies this, but holy sexuality honors the weight of glory God’s image imparts.

Your body is a sacred space. Created for God’s glory and destined for glory. So is mine.

Let’s treat them that way.