

What Protestants and Catholics Can Learn from Each Other

“What About Celibacy and Sexual Abuse?”

1 Corinthians 7 – June 22, 2025

WHAT PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER		
Civil Conversations About Beliefs and Traditions		
Date	Message Title	Bible Text
May 18	What Protestants Can Learn from Catholics	1 Thess 5:16-21
May 25	What Catholics Can Learn from Protestants	Mark 7:1-13
June 1	What About Mother Mary and the Saints?	Luke 1-2
June 8	What About the Apocrypha and the Eucharist?	1 Corinthians 10-11
June 15	What About Purgatory, the Rosary, and Confession?	Hebrews 10:1-17
June 22	What About Celibacy and Sexual Abuse? [PG-13 sermon]	1 Corinthians 7

The Catholic Church's Stance on Celibacy for Priests

- Priestly celibacy is a discipline in the Catholic Latin (Western) Rite and is mandatory for those ordained as priests: *“All clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and are therefore bound to celibacy.”* (Code of Canon Law 277 §1)
- The Catholic Church teaches that celibacy allows priests to serve God with an “undivided heart,” modeling their lives on Jesus, who was celibate: *“Celibacy is a sign of this new life to the service of which the Church's minister is consecrated.”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1579)
- In Eastern Catholic Churches, married men may be ordained as priests (though bishops must be celibate).

What the Bible Teaches About Celibacy (1 Corinthians 6-7)

1. God commands **everyone** to be celibate unless or until they are married (6:18-20).

- Some definitions:
 - “sexual immorality” = *porneia* = fornication; sexual relations outside of marriage
 - celibate = abstaining from marriage or sexual relations
 - marriage = a life-long union before God between one man and one woman
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5** – *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexuality 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.*
- Sexual sin is having sex (physically or in your brain) with anyone other than the person of the opposite gender that you are married to (Ex 20:14; Lev 18; Matt 5:27-28; 1 Corinth 6:9-20; Eph 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3-5; 2 Tim 2:20-22).

Adultery – sex with a married person – not your spouse	Topless clubs; strip clubs
Fornication – sex with any one you are not married to	Same sex sexual relations
Petting – touching someone's private parts whom you are not married to	Pornographic internet, pictures, or movies
Oral sex with someone you are not married to	Phone sex
Voyeurism – watching someone else have sex	Cell phone pornography

- **Matthew 5:28** – *Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- According to the Barna study, 75% of Christian men and 40% of Christian women admit to using pornography.
- **Application #1** – Take these steps to overcome porn in your life:
 - Confess using porn as a sin to God. Repent. Receive God's forgiveness through Christ (1 John 1:9). And ask God's Spirit to sit in the driver's seat of your life.
 - Confess using porn to a trusted fellow believer (James 5:16) and ask that friend to hold you accountable (Proverbs 27:17). Regularly ask each other the question: When is the last time that you looked at porn?
 - Ask three or more people to do the Conquer Series with you: conquerseries.com

2. God calls married couples **NOT** to be celibate except for unique seasons of prayer (7:2-5).

- Four observations about this Scripture:
 - Physical intimacy in marriage is one of God's provisions to overcome sexual immorality (vv.2-5). Self-control in the power of God's Spirit is God's main provision for overcoming sexual immorality (Galatians 5:23).
 - A husband and wife's bodies belong to each other (v.4)
 - We are commanded not to deprive our spouse of sexual needs (vv.3,5)
 - This Scripture emphasizes mutual agreement and mutual pleasure (vv.3-5). Marital sex is not for the enjoyment of just one person but for the mutual enjoyment of both.
- Sheila Gregoire: “Sex in marriage should be about a deep connection and ‘knowing’ between both husband and wife, where both partners' needs and desires matter. If only one person's needs are considered, it becomes an act of ‘owing’ rather than a mutual expression of intimacy.”
- **Application #2 for Marrieds** – How is the romance going in your marriage? Is it mutually agreeable and mutually satisfying? With God's help, I am going to seek to meet the sexual needs of my spouse with freshness and excitement. (Recommend “Rekindling the Romance” by Dennis and Barbara Rainey)

3. God **calls** a few individuals to lifelong celibacy and **gifts** these individuals for this radical lifestyle of single devotion to the Kingdom (7:7,29-38).

- Peter Wagner: “The gift of celibacy is the special ability that God gives to some members of the Body of Christ to remain single and enjoy it; to be unmarried and not suffer undue sexual temptations.”
- This is a spiritual gift that does not stand alone but must be coupled with another spiritual gift. In other words, the gift of celibacy has no value in and of itself but is like turbo boosters when combined with another spiritual gift (because you have more time and energy).
- There is an urgency about the time we live in (vv.29a, 31b). Time is short. People's lives are short. People have a limited amount of time

to hear and receive the Gospel before they die (Psalm 90:10; James 4:13-16). Christ is returning soon (Revelation 22:20).

- Singles have a unique advantage of having more time and energy to devote to the completion of the Great Commission (7:32-34). This is the equivalent of having more “talents” (Matthew 25:14-30).
- Application #3 for Singles – With God’s help and power, I am going to take full advantage of my singleness (whether lifelong or a season) to maximize my impact for the Kingdom of God. I am going to invest my “talent” of singleness well for my Master.

4. Some **pastors** are called and gifted for lifelong celibacy, and some are called to marriage (7:7).

- Verse 7 clearly acknowledges that not everyone has this gift.
- Why I think it is wrong and even dangerous for any church to force vocational ministers to lifelong celibacy:
 - (1) Scripture does not command lifelong singleness (celibacy) for anyone, let alone ministers of the Gospel.
 - (2) The Bible is full of ministers, pastors, and apostles who were married. The Apostle Peter was married (Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38) as were the other apostles and Jesus’ brothers (1 Corinthians 9:5).
 - (3) I think it has set the Catholic church up for a higher rate of sexual abuse by priests.

Four Reflections on Sexual Abuse

1. Sexual abuse is real, and it is **devastating**.

- Sexual abuse takes place when a person knowingly causes another person to engage in a sex act by threatening or placing the other person in fear, or if someone engages in a sexual act with a person who is incapable of appraising the nature of the act or unable to give consent.
- Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act that is committed or attempted by another person without freely given consent of the victim or against someone who is unable to consent or refuse.
- Statistics: By the age of 18-years-old, 25-33% of girls and 14-16% of boys have been sexually abused. The median age for reported sexual abuse is 9 years old. Thirty to forty percent of victims are abused by a family member. As many as 50% of victims are abused by someone outside of the family whom they know and trust. Only 10% of victims are abused by strangers.

2. Sexual abuse has happened in many **churches**.

- Statistics in the Catholic Church: In the United States, over 6000 Catholic clergy members have been credibly accused of sexual abuse. Roughly 1 in 25 Catholic priests have been accused of child sexual abuse. Factors contributing to abuse include asymmetrical

power relationships, historical secrecy, cover-ups, the confidentiality rule of confession, lack of training, and required celibacy.

- Robert Downen’s article “Abuse of Faith” in the *Houston Chronicle* (2019) identified 700 victims of sexual abuse in Southern Baptist Churches. In 25% of these cases, the perpetrator was a youth pastor.
- A Grace Fellowship prayer in 1996 and beyond.
- Grace Fellowship’s Ministry Safe Protocols:
 - (1) **Ministry Safe Training** – All staff and volunteers who work with minors are required to go through Ministry Safe Training. This training is specific to sexual abuse and how to prevent it.
 - (2) **Screening** – To be able to volunteer with minors, you must fill out a Grace Fellowship screening form, be interviewed, and have references checked. You must have attended GF for a minimum of six months before serving with minors.
 - (3) **Background Checks** – All staff and volunteers working with minors are screened with a criminal background check. Grace Fellowship has a zero-tolerance policy concerning sexual abuse.
 - (4) **Policies and Procedures** – Grace Fellowship requires and enforces strict policies and procedures for working with minors. One example: “The Two Adult Rule: Never be alone with a child.”

3. If you have ever experienced sexual abuse (anywhere), I want to grieve with you and apologize to you.

- **Romans 12:15** – *Mourn with those who mourn.*
- Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra all modeled identificational repentance.
- **John 11:35** – *Jesus wept.*

4. The Bible offers hope for **healing of memories**.

- Jesus took Peter through a healing of memories in John 21. Notice the charcoal fire at the denials (John 18:18) and at the lake (John 21:9).
- David Seamands outlines the following steps to seek healing of memories with a good Christian counselor:
 1. **Recognize and name the pain.** Ask the Holy Spirit to bring any painful or repressed memories to light (Psalm 139:23-24). Journaling can help identify recurring emotional triggers.
 2. **Invite Jesus into the memory.** Visualize the moment and consciously invite Jesus into that memory through prayer (Revelation 3:20).
 3. **Feel the emotions honestly.** Don’t suppress or spiritualize away the pain. Allow yourself to grieve, be angry, or weep. (Ecclesiastes 3:4).
 4. **Forgive the person(s) involved** (Matthew 6:14-15). Forgiveness is for your release, not theirs.
 5. **Receive the healing of Jesus.** Ask Jesus to replace the pain with His peace, love, and truth. Let Him reshape your self-image and bring freedom to your emotions (John 8:36).
 6. **Renew your mind with Scripture.** Replace lies you’ve believed (e.g., “I’m worthless,” “I’ll always be hurt”) with truth from God’s Word (Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 10:5).
 7. **Seek support from mature believers.** Healing often deepens in the context of trusted Christian counseling or discipleship relationships (James 5:16).
- Recommended books: David Seamands “Healing of Memories” and Sheila Gregoire’s “She Deserves Better”
- YouTube: “My Sexual Abuse Survivor Story” – Jackie Hill Perry