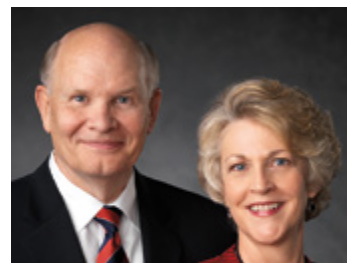




THE Divine Purposes OF Sexual Intimacy



By Elder Dale G. Renlund
Of the Quorum of the Twelve
Apostles
and Ruth Lybbert Renlund

Understanding the God-given gift of sexuality within the plan of happiness helps us understand the importance of the law of chastity.

Our purpose in mortality is to become like our heavenly parents. Our divine understanding and use of sexual intimacy are essential to that process of becoming.

The law of chastity is an eternal law, given by our Heavenly Father to all His children in all ages. It remains in force and is as applicable today as it was in earlier times in history. As with other commandments, the law is given by Heavenly Father to bless and help His children achieve their divine potential. Obeying the law of chastity includes abstaining from all sexual relations before marriage and remaining completely faithful and loyal after marriage. Sexual relations are to be limited to marriage between a man and a woman.¹

Heavenly Father intends that sexual relations in marriage be used to create children and to express love and strengthen the emotional, spiritual, and physical connections between husband and wife. In marriage, sexual intimacy should unite wife and husband together in trust, devotion, and consideration for each other.² Sexual relations within marriage must respect the agency of both partners and should not be used to control or dominate.

We may wonder, though, “Why should I obey the law of chastity? Why does God care about my moral behavior?” To answer these



questions, God has revealed doctrine that, if correctly understood, will motivate us to keep the law of chastity and choose to express our sexuality within the boundaries He has set.³ As with all of God's commandments, the law of chastity is best understood within the context of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation and exaltation (see Alma 12:32). Obedience to the law of chastity will bring extraordinary blessings.

Exceptional Promises

All human beings are beloved spirit sons or daughters of heavenly parents with a divine nature and eternal destiny. The reason we have bodies is to build on that divine nature so we can ultimately realize our eternal destiny.⁴ Heavenly Father wants us to gain earthly experience, progress toward perfection, and eventually enjoy the fulness of happiness that He enjoys. He knows that for us to have this kind of enduring joy, we need to progress along the course He has established, obeying the commandments He has given.

Understanding that family relationships are to be perpetuated throughout the eternities after this life is vital. After mortality, the faithful are promised that "they shall pass by the angels . . . to their exaltation and glory . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

"Then shall they be gods, because they have no end" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20).

The doctrine of eternal families in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is unique among Christian traditions. We were not created solely to praise, adore, and serve some incomprehensible God.⁵ We were created by loving heavenly parents to grow up to become like them.⁶ Male and female spirits were created to complement each other. That is why gender is not fluid in the eternities—because it provides the basis for the ultimate gift Heavenly Father can give, His kind of life.⁷

For us to realize this blessing, Heavenly Father commanded that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman.⁸ Marriage was intended by God "to mean the complete merger of a man and a woman—their hearts, hopes, lives, love, family, future, everything . . . to be 'one flesh' in their life together."⁹ We cannot achieve the kind of life our Heavenly Father enjoys by ourselves or without a complete commitment to fidelity within a marriage to our husband or wife according to God's plan.

God allows us to choose how we will live our lives. He will not force us to follow the path He has established even though He knows it will lead to our greatest happiness. God's commandments and covenants constitute the path that enable us to become a full inheritor in His kingdom, a joint heir with Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:17). Through making righteous choices, we develop the divine nature that is within us. Sexual relations are "one of the ultimate expressions of our divine nature."¹⁰ Our proper expression of sexuality makes it possible for God's plan to unfold on earth and in the eternities,¹¹ qualifying us to become like our Heavenly Father.¹² God promises eternal life for the faithful that

includes eternal marriage, children, and all other blessings of an eternal family.¹³

Distracting Philosophies and Satan's Deceptions

Flawed reasoning and Satan's deceptions have produced distracting philosophies that claim to eliminate the need for obeying God's commandments, especially the law of chastity. Satan's opposing voice is loud, and his philosophies are often enticing. In the Book of Mormon, some espoused these philosophies to deceive others and to profit from the deception. For example, Nehor taught the Nephites "that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord . . . had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life" (Alma 1:4).

If we adopt Nehor's philosophy, we have no incentive to curtail our sexual appetites because there are no eternal consequences. And if we violate the law of chastity? No worries, since those who followed Nehor "did not believe in repentance of their sins" (Alma 15:15). This enticing philosophy can be seductive, and many find it appealing; we can do whatever we want with no eternal consequences.

Other false teachers in the Book of Mormon preached that believing in Jesus Christ, His Atonement, and keeping His commandments is to "yoke yourselves" to "foolish things" and derives from the ridiculous "traditions of your fathers" (Alma 30:13, 14). Indeed, they proclaimed, looking forward to "a remission of your sins" is merely a mental or emotional problem, the "effect of a frenzied mind" (Alma 30:16). The inescapable conclusion of these teachings is that every man and woman succeeds in this life "according to [their] genius" and "strength" and that whatsoever a man or woman does is "no crime" (Alma 30:17). These false teachings promote disobeying the law of chastity because the concept of right and wrong is outdated.

No wonder these philosophies are still popular! No accountability for any choice sounds like the ultimate freedom. If we can avoid most worldly consequences by being discreet and careful, what is the harm? Against this backdrop, the law of chastity seems old-fashioned, prudish, or unnecessary.

Eternal Laws

God's laws are not negotiable. He allows us to disregard them, but we are not free to create our own rules for the eternities any more than a person is free to create his or her personalized laws for physics. God wants us to be a qualified heir in His kingdom. To expect His heavenly inheritance while following a different course than He has outlined is naïve.

Before being called to full-time Church service, I (Elder Renlund) cared for patients with severe heart failure. In heart failure and transplant cardiology, there are defined, established courses to follow to obtain the best outcome: longer and better quality of life. Treating a patient in another way does not result in the best outcomes. It was astonishing that some patients tried to negotiate the treatment course. Some patients said, "I prefer not to take any medications," or "I don't want to have any heart biopsies after transplantation." Of course,

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patients are free to follow their own course, but they cannot pursue an inferior course of action and expect the best outcome.

The same is true for us. We are free to choose our own course in life, but we are not free to choose the outcome that comes from following our own rules, no matter how many times someone says we can. Heavenly Father is not to blame when we do not receive blessings connected to the law of chastity because of disobedience.

In this dispensation, the Savior taught that eternal laws are not flexible and open for discussion. He said, “And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same.

“That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but *seeketh to become a law unto itself*, . . . cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:34–35; emphasis added). We cannot substitute our own rules for eternal laws any more than a man who touches hot coals can decide not to get burned.

If we are not obedient, we will enjoy only “that which [we] are willing to receive, because [we] were not willing to enjoy that which [we] might have received” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:32). Obeying the law of chastity is one way we demonstrate that we are willing to do whatever it takes to receive all the extraordinary blessings associated with eternal families.

God’s Laws Are Always, in the End, Fair

Not all Heavenly Father’s children have the opportunity in this life to experience sexual intimacy in married relationships

according to God’s law. Some will not have the opportunity to marry. Others are convinced that their unique circumstances make living the law of chastity so challenging and unfair that they can choose to ignore it.

Fairness, however, must be judged from an eternal perspective, from that of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The Savior exhorted His people to withhold judgment on what is fair or unfair until that day when He makes up His jewels (see Malachi 3:17–18). The “jewels” the Savior references are those who, despite perceived or temporary unfairness or any other impediment, keep His commandments.

When our circumstances feel unfair to us, it is best to follow King Benjamin’s advice. He said, “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are *blessed in all things*, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby *they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness*” (Mosiah 2:41; emphasis added).

Ultimately, nothing compares to the infinite unfairness the Savior endured. Yet, if we are faithful, He will compensate us for any unfairness we experience, and we will achieve a state of never-ending happiness.

As we choose to keep the commandments of God, including the law of chastity, we will experience joy and “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:23)¹⁵ because we will be part of an eternal family, with ancestors and posterity.¹⁶ As husband and wife are eternally sealed together by priesthood authority, they will be exalted and have a fulness of glory and eternal progeny.¹⁷

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Temptation and Repentance

God anticipated that we would be tempted as we try to live the law of chastity. That is why He provided His Son to be our Savior

and Redeemer. Through Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we can be strengthened to resist temptation. All God's children who experience temptation of any kind can turn to the Savior for help.¹⁸ Jesus Christ understands what we are going through because He "was in all points tempted like as we are," and we are encouraged to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

When we stumble, we need to remember that we can become clean through faith in Jesus Christ and sincere repentance.¹⁹ Repentance is joyful because, "though [our]

sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). The Savior will not only forgive; He will forget our sin.²⁰ What more could we ask: help when tempted, forgiveness when we repent. Repentance should not be feared even though Satan does try "to block us from looking to Jesus Christ, who stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us."²¹

Testimony

God's laws are designed for our ultimate happiness. He wants us to use our bodies and sexuality in ways He has ordained so that we can become like Him. We have been blessed in our marriage with mutual trust as we live the law of chastity. Our confidence in each other and in our Heavenly Father has grown as we have kept this commandment. God's plan is the only path that enables the fullest measure of joy. We promise that you too can know that God loves you and that you will be eternally blessed as you live His commandments. ■

NOTES

1. See Jacob 2:27–30; *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), "Lesson 4: The Commandments," 80.
2. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (2020), 2.1.2, ChurchofJesusChrist.org; David A. Bednar, "We Believe in Being Chaste," *Ensign*, May 2013, 41–44; Russell M. Nelson, "Nurturing Marriage," *Ensign*, May 2006, 36–38; Richard G. Scott, "Making the Right Choices," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 37–39.
3. See Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 16–18.
4. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145. The intended meaning of gender in the proclamation is biological sex at birth.
5. See Thomas Watson, "Man's Chief End Is to Glorify God," in *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1833), 8; Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (1999), 506; *The Catechism of Christian Doctrine: Prepared and Enjoined by Order of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore* (1885); all as quoted in Terryl L. Givens, *Feeding the Flock: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis* (2017), 1.
6. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," *Ensign*, May 1995, 84–87.
7. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 145. Throughout eternity, we will not be genderless, as some theologians have suggested. See Givens, *Feeding the Flock*, 188–90.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:22–24; see also "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 145.
9. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Personal Purity," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 76.
10. David A. Bednar, "We Believe in Being Chaste," 42.
11. See Neil L. Andersen, "Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 28–30.
12. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," 84–87.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4; 132:19–20, 24.
14. See D. Todd Christofferson, "Why Marriage, Why Family," *Ensign*, May 2015, 50–53.
15. See also Mosiah 2:41; *General Handbook*, 2.1.2.
16. See Malachi 4:1.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
18. See Alma 13:28.
19. See Isaiah 1:18; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
21. Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign*, May 2019, 67.

