

# STUDY 4 - DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY

**Commandment 7:** 'Do not commit adultery.' (Exodus 20:14)

## → 1 STARTER

First:

A) Either:

Ask who follows the TV soaps. In which of them is there a marriage on the rocks at the moment? What are the reasons for that failing marriage?

Or:

Below are two role play sketches. You need two *volunteers* for each to play the two roles.

1) Andy and Craig are having a drink. Andy has just left his wife Trish after ten years of marriage for a much younger girl, Clare. Craig has just heard about it and is curious; he has some sympathies for Trish. Andy is anxious to defend his actions.

CRAIG: So Andy, what's this I hear about you and Trish? ANDY: 'Fraid so ...

Now continue the conversation for a few minutes.

2) Hazel and Di are talking over coffee. Hazel has had enough of her husband Dave and has finally walked out on him. Di is both appalled at the collapse of the marriage and curious to know why things have come this far.

Di: So you just had enough of him?

HAZEL: I had enough...

B) Think of an unhappy marriage that you have known but were distant enough from to be fairly objective. When talking of the couple make sure they are unidentifiable.

- Why was the marriage so unhappy?
- Were the problems only on one side?
- Why did they split up (or stay together)?
- Did it help matters?

C) Think of a happy marriage that you have known. (Although anonymity is less critical here it is probably the best policy.)

- Why was the marriage so happy?
- Was it happy because there were no problems?
- Why did they stay together?
- How did they handle conflict?

## → 2 SURGERY

Discuss *at least one* of the following:

A) Consider the following figures (*Source: One Plus One*):

- Five in ten marriages in the US will end in divorce if the current rate is maintained.
- Cohabitations are even more likely to break down.
- The public cost of divorce in the US is over 30 Billion dollars a year.

Shouldn't these figures shock us? Why don't they?

B) What effects of marriage break-up today have you personally witnessed in the lives of others? (*Note: no names!*)

## → 3 STUDY

This is divided into an Old and a New Testament part.

### The Old Testament

*Before looking at adultery and sexual sin it is important to understand how the Bible views marriage.*

**A) Read Genesis 2:18-25.**

**Although Christians debate over how much of this language is symbolic, all are agreed that this passage sets out the foundations for all human marriage.**

- What is Adam's need? (vv.18, 20)
- How does the woman (later named Eve) fulfil that need? Does this passage suggest that the woman has a higher or lower status than the man?
- Verse 24 is effectively the Bible's definition of marriage and is quoted by both Jesus and Paul.

\*According to it, who are the two parties of a marriage?

\*What are the three actions that make up a marriage?

- According to this passage the sexual act results in the man and the woman being united or becoming 'one flesh'.
  - \*What does this mean?
  - \*How does it stand in contrast to the modern view that sex is no different from any other physical contact?
- What does verse 24 imply about:
  - \*Homosexual relationships?
  - \*A polygamous relationship where there is more than one wife or husband?
  - \*A sexless marriage?
  - \*A marriage where, for whatever reason, there are no children?
  - \*Sex without marriage?
- What do you understand by the statement in verse 25 that Adam and Eve were naked and had no shame?

Now look at Genesis 3, which describes how Adam and Eve rebelled against God and the results of that act of disobedience.

- Read Genesis 3:7. What is the first indication to Adam and Eve that something is now wrong? What does this suggest about our sexuality?
- Read 3:16. What has happened to the state of loving companionship between man and woman described in chapter 2?

<b>Leaders Note:</b>	Someone is bound to mention the fact that many of the men of the Old Testament were polygamous. While not banned, polygamy is never approved and it is never praised in the way that the monogamous marriage is. The accounts in the Bible of polygamous households often mention their tendency to be a source of tension (e.g. 1 Samuel 1 :1-8) or temptation (e.g. 1 Kings 11 :3).
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**B) The Song of Songs is a series of poems celebrating married love. Read Song of Songs chapters 6 and 7. Try not to be deterred by the lavish Eastern imagery.**

- Which of the senses are evoked in these words?
- Although some of the details are unclear what is this celebrating?
- 'They don't make poems like that any more!' True, but has our present society's preoccupation with the mechanics of sex damaged our ability to have romance?
- What does the fact that a poem such as this is in the Bible say about how God views sex?

**C) God uses marriage as an illustration of his solemn and unchanging. covenant love for his people. In Ezekiel there are a series of graphic images of how God relates with his people, here termed Jerusalem.**

**Read Ezekiel 16:1-14.**

- What was Jerusalem's position when God found her?
- What did God do for her?
- How does God describe the relationship between himself and his people?
- What does that tell us about God? What does that tell us about marriage?

Now read verses 15-17.

- What might God have expected from Jerusalem?
- What did Jerusalem do instead?
- What does God say is equivalent to prostitution?
- Why is this a powerful image?

*As we have just seen, the Old Testament's high views on marriage are matched by strong words about the sin of breaking marriage vows.*

**D) Read Malachi 2:13-16.**

- Why is God not accepting his people's offerings?
- What particular sin is God angry about?
- What do we learn about marriage from this passage?
- What do we learn about God's attitude to marriage?

*The Old Testament gives several examples of people who either failed or triumphed over sexual temptation. David and Joseph are the two classic examples.*

**E) At the start of 2 Samuel 11 David is king in Jerusalem and already has a considerable number of wives and concubines.! Read verses 1-26.**

- List the steps through which David descends into adultery in verses 2-4. Where is the start of the sin? Was there a chance for him to stop the process?
- How do things become awkward for David? Why doesn't he just admit that he has sinned? What does he do instead?
- How is the character of Uriah contrasted with that of David?
- As part of his cover-up what other sins does David end up committing?
- What lessons can we learn from this about the danger of lust?

*In 2 Samuel 12 you can read how Nathan the prophet visited David, brought him face to face with his sin and announced God's judgement on him. The catastrophic family problems that dogged David from this time onwards are seen in the Bible as being the results of the sins recorded in Chapter 11. David's own confession is in Psalm 51: see Further Study below.*

**F) Much earlier in history, Joseph was sold into slavery and taken to Egypt. Read Genesis 39:1-20.**

- Joseph is a long way from home; why might a sexual adventure be an attractive option?
- How does Potiphar's wife successively attempt to seduce Joseph (vv.7,10,11,12)? How in each case does he resist?
- What reason does Joseph give for resisting (vv.8,9)?
- What price does Joseph pay for his integrity?
- What lessons are there for us in Joseph's example?

*Don't worry, it all ends happily for Joseph! But the Bible gives no guarantees that this will always be the case.*

### **The New Testament**

The teaching of Jesus revolutionized the basis of marriage and sexual morality. This was partly through his direct teaching on the matter but also in the way that Jesus raised the status of women.

**A) Read Matthew 5:27-32.**

- What does Jesus do with this commandment? Why do you think he points the finger at the thought-life rather than at the action?
- Does Jesus confine adultery to a physical act that breaks a marriage contract? On this basis, can anyone be innocent?
- In recommending a solution, Jesus uses exaggeration for impact (after all, even the blind can lust), but what do his words suggest about the seriousness of lust? How does this contrast with our society's attitude?
- How can we adopt Similarly radical solutions today?

**B) By the time of Jesus, divorce had, at least for the man, become easy. Read Mark 10:1-11.**

- What, according to Jesus, was God's original purpose for marriage?
- Why does he say that a married couple ought not to be separated?
- What attitude to sex and marriage is Jesus seeking from his followers?

### **C) Read John 8:1-11.**

- Doesn't it take two to commit adultery? According to Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 the man should have been stoned as well.
  - \*What do you feel about his absence?
  - \*How do you think the woman is feeling?
- If Jesus had approved the stoning, what would have happened to him? If Jesus hadn't approved the stoning, what would he have been accused of?
- We don't know what Jesus was writing in the dust. Do you think it might have been the Ten Commandments?
- Who are the first ones to leave the scene?
- By not leaving with the crowd, what is Jesus saying about himself?
- Does Jesus condone the adultery? What do you think the thoughts of the woman were as she left?
- What do we learn about God from this?
- How can Christians reflect more of Jesus' attitude in the area of sex?

Much of Paul's teaching on marriage comes in his first letter to the church in Corinth, a town where sexual immorality was widespread.

### **D) Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.**

- From verses 9-11, what do you think was happening in the Corinthian church?
  - \*Is this Similar to what we see happening in our own culture?
  - \*How does Paul view this sort of morality?
  - \*What challenge do these verses hold out to you?
  - \*What hope do they offer?
- From verses 12-20 it is plain that some members of the Corinthian church felt that what they did with their bodies had no relevance to their faith.
  - \*Do people believe that the spiritual and the physical worlds are separate today?
  - \*What is Paul's response?
  - \*What reasons does he give in verses 19 and 20 for seeking sexual purity?

**E) Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-8. This passage follows on from the previous one. In cultures that are obsessed by sex there is the danger of becoming as immoral as the surrounding world. But there is also the danger of rejecting sex in its rightful place.**

- Is Paul positive or negative about sex?
- According to verses 3-5, which partner in a marriage has sexual rights?
- Do people think of sex in marriage as being unspiritual or impure? What would Paul say to this?
- In verse 10, what ruling does Paul make on divorce?

#### **F) Read Ephesians 5:21-33.**

- What does it mean to submit to one another?
- What duty is imposed on the man in a marriage? Why is this hard? What should this mean in practice?
- What duty is imposed on the woman? Why is this hard?
- What causes of divorce and adultery would be eliminated if husbands and wives followed the pattern outlined here?
- Is this pattern an impossible ideal? Does Ephesians 5:18 -'Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you' -offer any help?

#### **→ 4 SUMMARY**

Think about marriage

- What, according to the Bible, is the purpose of marriage? How does that differ from the world's view of it?
- Why is marriage such a serious business?
- Christians have always been quick to condemn sexual sins; why have we been less effective about proclaiming the goodness of marriage?
- How can we affirm marriage without making singles feel isolated?
- How can we keep ourselves from being dragged down to the world's view of sex and marriage?
- If you are married, how can you help your marriage improve?

Think about adultery

- Why does the Bible view adultery as such a serious sin?
- It might be easy for many people to say that they have kept this commandment because they have not had sex with someone else's marriage partner. But if we look at it in the way that Jesus does, have any of us kept this?
- With theft we saw that restitution was possible. Can this be done with sexual sin?
- What practical steps can we take to avoid sexual sin?

## Discussion

1) What could you do in the following situations?

- You are watching the TV with your children and you realize that three out of the four adverts in an interval use highly sexual images and innuendo.
- One of your married friends has become increasingly remote. You have a feeling that he has been developing an inappropriate relationship with a woman. You don't know that anything is happening but you are concerned.
- At church there is a married man who is obviously flirty and far too familiar with women. He obviously makes people feel uncomfortable yet is in a position of responsibility.
- A married friend comes to you to ask for your help. She says that she *hi* found herself attracted to a man she is working with and she is aware that he is attracted to her.

2) What do you think the local church could do to help the following groups of people?

- Those who are married.
- Those who are young and single.
- Those who are older and seem set to spend the rest of their lives as singles.
- Those Christians who are struggling with a homosexual orientation.

### So what?

At the end of this study:

- What has challenged you most?
- In what areas are you most vulnerable?
- What attitude or action do you need to change?

## → 5 STEPPING OUT

Practical suggestions

- Is there something in this area that you need to repent of?
- Is there someone that you need to apologize to?
- What specific actions do you need to take to help keep this commandment?
- If you suddenly found yourself facing a major sexual temptation, do you have someone who you feel you could talk to honestly? If not, why don't you ask God to grant you such a friendship?

## Further study

1) Leviticus 18:1-27 lays down the rules on sexual purity for God's people.

- The sort of large, close-knit families that existed in Old Testament times could easily have been the setting for wholesale sexual abuse. What lessons can we draw from these restrictions for our own culture?
- What things are condemned here that surprise you?
- These rules were given before the Israelites moved in to take the Promised Land from the Canaanites. According to verses 27-28, why are the Canaanites being expelled from the land? Can the Israelites repeat their sins? If they do, what will happen?

2) Read Proverbs 5:15-20.

- What attitude to sex within marriage is taught here?
- What attitude to sex outside marriage is taught?

3) We have already looked at King David's disastrous adultery with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 13:1-22, we move forward a generation.

- Amnon says that he is in love with Tamar. Judging by what happens, is it really love?
- What does Tamar suffer?
- What does David do? What should he have done? Do you think his own past might have made him unable to impose discipline in this case?
- In fact, the repercussions of Tamar's rape are terrible; within a few chapters both Amnon and Absalom die violently and the country is plunged into a bloody Civil war. What does this tell us about lust?

*Yet there is hope.*

4) Read Psalm 51.

- In view of the adultery and murder he has committed, do you think David has any right to come to God at all?
- Does he offer excuses?
- What does he ask God to do for him?
- Do we need to pray a prayer like this?

## **Questions to think about**

- Is it any of our business what those outside the church do with their sexuality?
- What seem to be the reasons for men committing adultery? What seem to be the reasons for women committing adultery?

## **For prayer**

- The moral climate in the nation at the moment.
- The witness of Christians in this area.
- Christian marriages.
- Those in vulnerable and exposed positions.