

### Adult Lesson Nine

# Adultery

*You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20: 14, NRSV).*

This commandment combined with "honor your father and mother" shapes the family unit as God intended it to function. Simply stated, it commands one not to enter into extra-marital sexual relationships with anyone. This preserves one's own marriage and the marriages of others. In our me-centered worldview, it is easy to understand adultery only in regards to the two people intimately involved, forgetting that the command implicitly relates to the spouses or eventual spouses of both adulterers as well. To answer the question "What type of society will we be?" this commandment responds "One that protects and nurtures marriages and families first and foremost."

Just as with the commandment against murder, Jesus examines this command in the Sermon on the Mount and re-defines it. Adultery starts in the heart and the mind, therefore Jesus moves the commandment back to address just this issue. Lust can lead to adultery, so if someone lusts after another person Jesus said that he or she has already committed adultery in his or her heart. In our entertainment-dominated society, lust is the rule of the day. It sells movies, books, TV programs, deodorants, and microwave dinners. The effect on our families and marriages is profound. Leading to unrealizable physical and sexual demands, it reduces both men and women to objects and prompts spouses to search outside of marriage for an idealized fulfillment that does not exist.



#### OBJECTIVES

- Establish God's position on the sanctity of marriage and the family.
- Identify the current outlook toward adultery.
- Examine Jesus' teaching on adultery and lust.
- Create an opportunity for class members to rid their lives of adultery and lust for the sake of their current or future marriages and families.

#### SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20: 14
- Genesis 2:24
- Matthew 5:27-32

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- Three copies of Handout #9.1
- Copies of Handout #9.2 for everyone in the class
- Chalk/chalkboard; marker/dry erase board; or something else to write on

## Part 1 - Cleave to one another

Begin the class period by saying **We have already discussed the importance of the family unit to God as shown in honoring mothers and fathers. Today we will look at the importance of marital faithfulness in keeping this family unit intact. But before we look at what the Bible has to say on this subject, what are some of the reasons that marital faithfulness is important in families?** Let the class answer this question, then ask **What are the consequences of adultery on families?** You will want to write these answers on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Be sure to steer the conversation to cover both one's own family (the effects on the spouse, children, etc.) and the effects on other families.

Then say **We've looked at some reasons marital faithfulness is important. Now let's look at God's original intention for marriage.** Have someone read Genesis 2:24-25. Say **Notice there is no talk here of superiority of one spouse over the other. Parents are left and the husband and wife cleave to one another. Then the two become one flesh. Although the meaning here is more than sexual, it is definitely sexual imagery. The two get married and become one. They are naked before each other, hiding nothing, and not ashamed of who they are. This was God's original plan for human marriage. It is a beautiful picture. With this picture in mind, the concept of adultery seems completely foreign and ugly.**

## Part 2 - Play it again, Sam

Have someone read Exodus 20:14. Say **We see what the Bible says about adultery. What is our own society and culture telling us about adultery?** Form three groups to examine how our society views adultery in television, films, and literature. Allow the class members to choose the group in which they participate, while encouraging a fairly even spread of people. Give each group a copy of Handout #9.1. Allow the groups five to seven minutes to complete their activity, then have them come back together as a class and share what they have discussed.

After they are done ask **Overall, does our society do a good job of respecting the sacredness of the marriage bond?** (No, probably not.) **Do these mediums (TV, films, books) do a good job of showing the pain and brokenness in the families of those touched by adultery?**

## Part 3 - Let's start at the very beginning

Say **Not only do these means of entertainment give us a poor understanding of the biblical concept of marriage, they also contribute to the problem by encouraging dissatisfaction with one's spouse and encouraging lust. It is this longing for someone else that often leads to adultery which Jesus speaks about in the Sermon on the Mount.** Have someone read Matthew 5:27-32. **We see Jesus' concern here for the stable-ness of the family unit as he redefines how and when divorce is appropriate. We also see his**

concern for the beginning of adultery, which is often lust. Ask **Do you think that lust is a major problem in our society?** (Yes, the pornography business is thriving, television continues to push the boundaries of sex and nudity, movies are increasingly graphic, and popular music describes and encourages sexual promiscuity.)

Say **Men generally receive the lion's share of the attention in the area of lust, but women are as susceptible to lust as men, though sometimes from a different source. Romance novels, movies, and soap operas can feed a woman's romantic and emotional lust. They paint pictures of men that are as unfair and problem-causing as the picture of women painted in pornography and movies. Any type of medium that is designed to feed the sexual or relational needs of men or women outside the bounds of marriage is lust and causes problems within a marriage or family.**

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## Part 4 - Oh, cut it out

Although in the passage we just read Jesus was not speaking literally about gouging out one's eyes, he was pointing out the need for getting rid of lust-feeding objects and habits in our lives before they began to tear apart our families. Distribute Handout #9.2. Allow a few minutes for the class members to look over the worksheet. There is no need for them to actually mark the problem areas, but encourage them to pick one or more that they may need to work on. Ask **Can you think of other areas in which lust is a problem in our society.** Allow only a few minutes to this part of the discussion. You want to look at the areas of problem without glorifying any one area. Read Matthew 5:29-30 again. Say **We've looked at some areas that destroy marriages and families. God defines these as sin in the Ten Commandments and through Jesus' teaching. This passage clearly challenges us to cut from our lives these sinful areas instead of allowing them to control our destinies. Some of you may feel like lust has become a controlling part of your life.** Now is a time to cut it out of your life. Lead from here into a prayer time. Allow a time of silent prayer for class members to talk with God about lust-producing areas in their lives.

# Media and Adultery

## Group #1 - Television



As a group consider television episodes and shows that have dealt with the subject of adultery. How has this subject been presented? What is the general attitude that television displays towards adultery? Is it biblical or tolerant? Be sure to consider different genres such as soap operas, comedies, and dramas. Can you remember a show that portrayed the devastation adultery brings? Can you remember a time when adultery was presented in light of biblical principles? Select someone from the group to summarize your discussion with to the class.

## Group #2 - Films



Adultery has been portrayed thousands of times in movies. Sometimes it is seen as tragically romantic (*The Horse Whisperer*, *Casablanca*), sometimes as a way of life (*Dangerous Liaisons*), and sometimes as a decision with horrible consequences (*The Ice Storm*). Overall, how would you define the Hollywood attitude towards adultery? Identify the movie (or two or three) that best illustrates this attitude. Select someone from your group to present to the class the Hollywood attitude towards adultery and the films that best illustrate it.

## Group #3 - Literature



There is no end to the amount of literature and novels on the subject of adultery. From classics (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Great Gatsby*), to Harlequin Romances (take your pick), to popular books (*The Bridges of Madison County*, *The Firm*), every literary genre has dealt with adultery. How is adultery generally conveyed in these works? Are they biblical in their approach? Is adultery seen as "wrong" or just unfortunate? Choose one classic and one contemporary novel that best illustrate how literature tends to look at adultery and choose someone to share these with the class.

## For Men!!

### **Do you have a problem with any of these lust-producing areas?**

1. An attractive or caring woman with whom you work?
2. Online pornography?
3. Movies?
4. Advertisements in your favorite magazine?
5. Men's magazines such as *Maxim*, *Gear*, *Playboy*, or *GQ*?
6. A particular character in a TV show?
7. A woman or girl in the neighborhood with whom you have become friends?
8. Books that have heavy sexual themes?

Is it time you took some steps to cut some of these things out of your life? What do you need to do?

## For Women!!

### **Do you have a problem with any of these lust-producing areas?**

1. Harlequin romance novels?
2. Soap operas or other shows with idealized male characters?
3. Movies?
4. Pornography?
5. A man at work who you find caring and considerate?
6. A male friend who offers support and understanding?
7. Memories of a past relationship in which it seemed that more of your needs were being met?

Is it time that you took some steps to cut some of these things out of your life? What do you need to do?