

Teen Lesson Nine

Maintaining Right Relationships

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

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:14
- Hebrews 13:4
- Matthew 5:27-28
- Proverbs 4:23
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

WHAT YOU NEED

- Song collage
- Bibles
- A copy of Handout #9.1 for each student



PURPOSE

To Know: God is concerned with every aspect of our lives. Our thoughts, relationships with members of the opposite sex, and behavior behind closed doors are all areas that reflect and shape our relationship with God.

To Value: Human life and relationships are precious to God and must not be abused or exploited. This commandment (as well as those surrounding it) shows us that God has a plan for how our lives should be lived in relationship to him as well as those with whom we share life.

To Apply: Reflect on your relationships with members of the opposite sex. Are your relationships with and attitudes towards members of the opposite sex marked by purity and good intentions? Do you think God is pleased with your thought patterns and spoken words concerning members of the opposite sex? Is your life inline with the life God calls for in these commandments?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Behind this text is a desire to protect and uphold God's plan for marriage and family. Much like the previous commandment, this apodictic law (formed as "do not...") requires careful interpretation due to its limited scope; especially for application to teens. This commandment raises several questions that we must confront in order to understand what is meant here by adultery. By limiting this commandment to adultery, does this mean this is the only sexual sin with which God is concerned? What about the stories of men in the Old Testament who had several spouses? What was the family structure like in ancient Israel?

Initially, this commandment was only concerned with adultery within the union of marriage. It was an effort to protect the family structure from inward collapse by prohibiting others from infringing upon what God had brought together. The main issue at stake with this commandment was that men could not have a relationship with a married woman. When this happened the most basic and essential part of Israel's existence was fractured. People could not survive without family. As was stated in earlier lessons, everyone's lives were dependent on the family unit working together. When this was broken through sexual sin, the ripple effects could be felt in every aspect of life.

Over time the scope of this commandment's interpretation broadened. Whereas the commandment initially was focused on marriage infidelity, it came to be interpreted in its broader sense of sexual impurity. This impurity included fornication (sex before marriage) as well as anything else that would breach the plan God had laid out for marriage. The heartbeat of this commandment is that God has placed enormous value on humanity and the institution of marriage. As is the case with everything God has designed for good, this institution can be abused, distorted, and manipulated. Within the seventh commandment we find God calling his people to protect the institution of marriage by refusing to give to another what belongs to one's spouse.

The comparisons drawn between Yahweh's relationship with Israel and man's relationship with woman cannot be overlooked. The parallels are so pronounced that the same word is used to describe both relationships (*yada*). When the prophets spoke of Israel's idolatry they often used adultery and prostitution as the metaphor. Both relationships required covenant faithfulness and were to be set apart as distinct and free from outside corruption.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

What God has called good. Ancient Israel's view of sexuality and human relationships is in stark contrast to the self-indulgent and debased views with which we are bombarded from mainstream media. What teens witness on MTV, in music lyrics, and in the movies concerning sex is usually drastically different than what they find in the Bible. To even state this point seems unnecessary. The popular view of sex primarily consists of a mere physical act for the purpose of gratification. This is a significant departure from the Bible that depicts sex as symbolic of one's relationship with God and participating in the beauty of God's ongoing creation in the world. It is a physical act that unites two people in the deepest intimacy possible. However, it is not merely a physical act. What Israel understood was that sex had implications that went far beyond physical fulfillment.

This high view of sex and the marriage covenant does not mean that the people always adhered to God's plan or practiced covenant faithfulness in relationships. One main difference we find between the Israelites and us is that for ancient Israel there was not the distinction between sacred and secular, private and public, that we have today. All of life was ordained by God and was to be lived in proper relationship to him. Most people today interpret the Israelites fixation with law codes as legalism. For ancient Israel, however, all of life was sacred and was designed to glorify God. The laws expressed a desire to align even the most mundane task to the will of God.

In relating this commandment to teens there are two things we must keep in mind: a) God has a wonderfully orchestrated plan for how man and woman are to relate to one another, and b) it is very difficult in our society to understand this plan due to the ways in which we have perverted God's design. Teens that seek to understand and follow God's plan for marriage

and sex encounter much confusion over the conflicting views they receive Monday through Saturday in contrast to Sunday. In attempting to work through these differences it is easy to view sex as an evil thing or revolt against the church's strict standards. To compound the problem, the message from the church often is nothing more than negative judgments on our mainstream culture's appropriation of sex.

Desire. If we are to faithfully deal with this commandment in the world of our teens we have to ask what struggles they face in attempting to follow God's plan for marriage. And in dealing with these issues we must be careful not to frame everything in the negative. The standards governing our life are meant to bring us freedom rather than bondage. In talking to teens about abstaining from sex we must show the vision God has for marriage and allow them to understand the how and why other alternatives do not work.

We can learn a lot from the Old Testament world in regards to this issue. God ordained sex and called man and women to enter into a covenant relationship similar to that of Yahweh and Israel. Sex was a significant part of the human relationship and was viewed with a great deal of meaning. The act brought forth life and united two persons as one. People began allowing desire to overrun their virtue, however, and the results were devastating. The same temptations people encountered in Old Testament times are still being encountered today.

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Open this week's class by asking **From what source do most teens develop their view of relationships and sexuality?** Most researchers agree that the media is the strongest influence on teenagers with respect to relationships and sexuality. Ask **Where have you seen correct and incorrect views of relationships and sex in the media?** Allow the teens time to share examples of specific scenes in movies or television shows.

As the teacher, the week before this lesson you might work with two or three teens to produce an audio collage of songs played on a radio station teens listen to often. Include songs that talk about sexual desire. Discuss the content of the songs and the behavior they encourage.

Say **In 1999 a movie about three teenage boys trying to lose their virginity before the high school prom was released. *American Pie* was described by Blockbuster (blockbuster.com) as "a raunchy teen hit." You might not be surprised to know that many teens flocked to this movie. You might not even be surprised to know that many Christians watched this movie without any reservation. What might surprise you a little is that young actors in the film were confessing Christians who saw no contradiction between their behavior and their beliefs. Thomas Ian Nicholas plays in a Christian band that produces music "by God, through God, and for God." Seann William Scott says he was often referred to as "church boy." Ask Do you agree with these actors that their behavior on the movie should not be seen as contradictory to the teachings of Christianity?**

Ask **How different is the media's portrayal of sex from that of the Bible? Why do you think the Bible teaches people to wait until marriage for sex?**

DIG IT

Ask someone to read Exodus 20:14. Share with the teens the Old Testament view of sex and marriage using material from the What God Calls Good and Desire sections above. Ask **Why do you think God has such strict standards governing sex and marital relationships? Are the views of the Bible out of date or asking too much? How might your friends at school answer that question? Educators? Entertainers? Parents?**

Read Hebrews 13:4. Ask **What does it mean to honor marriage? What benefit comes to a person who honors marriage? The marriage bed?**

Have someone read Matthew 5:27-28. Ask **Why do you think Jesus stressed the internal thought life of a person rather than focus solely on committed actions?**

Similar to the commandment regarding murder, this prohibition of adultery is framed negatively, however, it should not be thought of (or spoken of) as simply a prohibition. Both the commandment in Exodus and the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount have a picture of what a right relationship looks like. These teachings are aimed at steering people away from acts that are harmful. It is important to know what these teachings are trying to produce. Ask **What do you think this commandment would look like if it were expressed positively?** For this exercise see the What God has Called Good section printed above.

It is important for teens to have answers to the why questions. God wants us to save sex for marriage for a reason. The act of sex is designed to unite two persons in the deepest intimacy possible. It is not just a physical act! Our society that focuses on "the now" often views sex as a mere physical engagement between two people for the purpose of pleasure. This is a serious distortion and degradation of sex. It is not an act that will leave someone unaffected nor will it be easily forgotten. When someone has sex outside of marriage, he or she is giving to another what belongs to his or her future spouse.

Distribute Handout #9.1, God's Call to Sexual Purity, a study of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. You have several options on how to use this worksheet. You might go through the worksheet as a class. Or consider dividing the class into small groups for discussion of the worksheet with each group presenting a brief report to the class. You could divide the class by sex, the boys with a man leader and the girls with a woman leader. Select the option that best fits your group, the one that will encourage the greatest interaction with the scripture. Save the discussion of Proverbs 4:23 for the closing section.

After going through the worksheet, ask **What are the largest areas of temptation for teens?** (Sex before marriage, pornography, etc.) **Why does the Bible instruct us to avoid these potential pitfalls?** As you discuss the practical aspects to these teachings be careful to use positive and redemptive language. Teens have heard different teachings on sex. They may not have heard positive teachings from the church. Allow the students to see the wonderful plan of God for marriage and how the commandments are designed to protect that plan. In making a positive presentation, you might mention three key elements: God created sex, sex is a good thing, and God has a plan for human's sexuality.

TAKE OUT

Read Proverbs 4:23. Ask **How can we "guard our hearts" from the onslaught of sexually charged commercials, TV shows, movies, and songs?** Each student should write the responses to that question at the bottom of Handout #9.1. After the list of responses is complete, ask the teens to circle one thing on the list that they will do this week to guard themselves and maintain sexual purity.

Close in prayer.

God's Call to Sexual Purity

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 4:23

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.

What does God desire for us?

- If we are to be the people that God desires us to be, what must we avoid?
- In our culture, how do you see the "passionate lust" Paul mentions in verse 5?
- What can a person do to "control his own body" (verse 4)?
- How can a person learn to do this?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

What are some ways that a person is guilty of sexual sin against another person?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8.

How is it that to reject the call to sexual purity is a rejection of God?

Read Proverbs 4:23.

What are some ways we can guard our hearts?