

## SESSION THREE: SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

### Opening Prayer

*Loving God, guide us this week as we try to understand how our sexual behavior affects you and other people. Show us through your Word how to keep from hurting each other and how to be faithful stewards of your gift of sexuality. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

### Jumpstart

#### An Inventory of Sexual Morals

Rate the sexual activities on the chart below based on your own morals. This is not a test, but it should help you figure out how you feel about sexual issues. Please be honest – you do not have to share this with anyone else, although you may if you want to.

Activity	A bad thing	Sort of a bad thing	Neutral or mixed feelings	An okay thing	A good thing
Masturbation					
Oral sex outside of marriage					
Manual genital stimulation of another person outside of marriage					
An individual or a couple privately viewing adult pornography					
An individual or a couple privately viewing child pornography					
Sexual intercourse by two unmarried persons					
Adultery					
Married person having sex with a prostitute					
Unmarried person having sex with a prostitute					
Same-sex sexual interaction within a committed relationship					
Same-sex sexual interaction outside of a committed relationship					

### Discussion Questions

- ? Do you find it hard to think about these things? Talk about them? Why or why not?
- ? How is your view of these actions affected by whether someone else is hurt by them?
- ? How much are your views shaped by your family? Society? The church? The Bible?

### ***It's Greek to Me***

**porneia** (por-NAY-a) = illicit sexual intercourse

As used by Paul and other Christian writers, *porneia* may have several different meanings so it may be translated differently, depending on the context. *Porneia* can mean sexual relations:

- between unmarried persons (in this case it is usually translated as “fornication” or “unchastity”)
- for profit (here it is translated as “prostitution” or “harlotry”)
- outside the bonds of marriage (then it is translated “immorality” — there is another word for adultery).

*Porneia* can also be used figuratively to describe the worship of idols, or the defilement that comes with eating meat sacrificed to idols (we considered this issue in Session Two).

### **Paul' View of Sexual Misconduct**

Sexuality is powerful stuff. It can make us feel incredibly close to another person and even reflect our closeness to God. At the same time sexuality can be used to hurt or abuse other people, just as we sometimes hurt God. In the book of Hosea, God tells the prophet to marry a prostitute and then orders him to take her back when she has cheated on him. In the same way, God continues to love the people of Israel (and us!), even when they betray and offend God. We might define sexual misconduct, then, as a misuse of God's gift of sexuality that hurts another person and/or offends God.

Apparently the Corinthians were having trouble deciding what counted as sexual misconduct because Paul addresses several specific situations in

his letter to them. In reading these passages, remember that sexual immorality in the ancient world was almost always defined as a violation of someone's property (and property could mean their wife, their daughter, or their own body) OR it was about purity and cleanliness. This fits with the definition of sexual immorality in the previous paragraph: taking someone else's property hurts them, and impurity was believed to be an offense to God. See if you can detect Paul's understanding of sexual immorality as you read the following passages from 1 Corinthians.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5**

Paul addresses a situation in which a member of the Corinthian church is living with his father's wife. However, it's not clear if the father is still in the picture or if he has died. The word *porneia* shows up in verse 1: “It is actually reported that there is *porneia* among you.” In addition to the other meanings of the word, this situation also suggests something kind of kinky. Paul doesn't use the word incest, but a relationship between a man and his stepmother was forbidden by the Jewish holiness code that defines the boundaries of incest (Leviticus 18:8) and was also considered incest by Roman law.

### **Discussion Questions**

- ? If the group is using different translations of the Bible, compare the different ways *porneia* is translated in verse 1. What do you think the word means in this passage?
- ? Who is being hurt in this situation?
- ? What does Paul seem to be more upset about – the way the man has sinned, or the fact that the community allowed it to happen?

2 The meaning of verse 5 is unclear, but probably means that the man should be kicked out of the church. If that's what Paul means, how fair do you think his judgment is? What else might this verse mean? How would you handle the situation?

**Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 6:9-11**

Paul offers two lists of the kinds of sinners the Corinthians should avoid in order to keep from disrupting the community. In chapter 5, he warns against immorality among members of the community, contrasting that with the immorality found in the "outside world." In chapter 6 he addresses lawsuits

Corinthians were filing against each other in the Roman courts and urges them to settle disputes among themselves. In 6:9-11, he lists several sinful acts, noting that some of the Corinthians themselves did these things before they became Christians. His reference to baptism in verse 11 relates to sexual immorality in two ways: first because baptism is supposed to wash away our sins, and second because it makes us part of the Christian community, where our actions will affect other people.

The lists in chapters 5 and 6 name similar sins and most of them correspond to Jewish laws in Deuteronomy. Here's how they match up:

References in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13	References in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11	References in Deuteronomy
Sexually immoral – <i>porneia</i> (5:9, 10, 11)	Fornicators – <i>porneia</i> (6:9) Adulterers – <i>moicheia</i> (6:9)	Promiscuity, adultery (22:21-22, 30)
Greedy (5:10, 11)	Greedy (6:10)	No real match
Robber (5:10, 11)	Thieves (6:10) Robbers (6:10)	Kidnapping, slave-trading (24:7)
Idolater (5:10, 11)	Idolaters (6:9)	Idolatry (13:1-5; 17:2-7)
Reviler (5:11)	Revilers (6:10)	Malicious false testimony (19:16-19)
Drunkard (5:11)	Drunkards (6:10)	Rebellious drunken son (21:18-21)

**\*A Note on Homosexuality\***

1 Corinthians 6:9 lists two additional sins that are not included in chapter 5: *malakoi* (often translated "male prostitutes") and *arsenokoitai* (often translated "sodomites"). These verses have often been used to condemn the practice of homosexuality. (The Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates the two words together in verse 9 as "homosexuals.") As you consider these passages, though, you should keep some things in mind. First, the meaning of the Greek terms is unclear. *Malakoi* means "soft," and, depending on the context, it could refer to masturbation, the passive member of male

same-sex intercourse, being effeminate (which is how the King James Version translates it in 6:9), male prostitution, or any man who is not respectable. Likewise *arsenokoitai* is never used in a context that makes its meaning clear. If your study group is using different translations, compare the various ways these terms are translated. Whatever the meaning of the two terms, it is important to remember that Paul and other ancient writers had no concept of homosexual or bisexual orientation, which is becoming a more common way to understand sexuality today. Because the ancient world assumed that everyone was heterosexual, any same-sex behavior was considered unnatural. These warnings may also refer to temple prostitution, a practice in some pagan rituals that involved orgiastic sexual encounters with male or female prostitutes, or even young boys. Corinth was one of the cities in which this occurred, and Paul would have been appalled by such sacrilege.

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### **Discussion Questions**

- ? Do you think Paul is addressing issues of property or purity in these two lists?
- ? How often do you encounter these problems within your community? How do you deal with it?
- ? What does it mean to say church members have been “washed . . . sanctified . . . justified” by Christ (6:11)? How should being baptized make a difference in the way we act?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-8, 14**

In chapter 10, Paul tells the Corinthians to learn from the past and not make the same mistakes the Israelites did.

**Background Check: Take a look at Numbers 25:1-9 where the Israelites assume a plague that struck them was God’s punishment for Israelite men having sex with foreign women and worshiping their gods.**

Recalling the traditional link between idolatry and sexual immorality (*porneia*), Paul warns that the ancient Israelites weren’t the only ones who faced such temptation. Paul realized that the Corinthian Christians were easily tempted by the pagan culture that

surrounded them, including idol worship and the temple prostitution that often accompanied it. Because sexuality can be so powerful, believers may have been tempted to reject God in favor of the gods their lovers worshiped or to make sex itself an idol.

### **Discussion Questions**

- ? How strongly does this passage seem to condemn sexual immorality and in what circumstances?
- ? How do you feel about the belief that God punishes us for our sins with disease or other misfortune?
- ? How would you explain the connection between sex and idolatry in the ancient world? In our world today?

### **What Does it Mean for Us?**

We have looked at several different passages that talk about sexual immorality and how it relates to the larger community, other sins, and idolatry. Think now about the sexual world that we face today and whether these issues are still important. Think about how we might hurt others by violating or taking their “property,” how our actions could disrupt our community, and how our

society idolizes sex. Look at the following questions together.

**?** Looking back at the sexual inventory in the Jumpstart, how do Paul's comments affect your view of these activities?

**?** How much do you consider whether your sexual choices violate someone else's property? What might property mean in today's context?

**?** In determining your own sexual behavior, how often do you consider the effect your actions might have on your friends and others in your community?

**?** What are some of the ways that our society idolizes sex?

## **Closing**

Close the group session with prayer for this time of study together, including any issues of praise or concern that group members want to share. Then sing together the first verse of "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

We are one in the spirit,  
We are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the spirit,  
We are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that our unity  
May one day be restored.  
And they'll know we are Christians  
By our love, by our love,  
Yes they'll know we are Christians  
By our love.