

## Why Shouldn't We?

**Tom** I'm sorry we're a bit early pastor, but for once Amanda was on time and so was the bus!

**Pastor.** That's no problem. Come in both of you. Christine will join us in a moment, but we've had Philip home from school all day and she is just giving him his medicine.

**Amanda.** Oh I'm sorry. What's wrong with him?

**Pastor.** Nothing serious, just a hacking cough and a strong dose of feeling very sorry for himself. In our family when the six year old coughs we all feel unwell.

**Tom.** He seems to have a pretty tough Dad.

**Pastor.** Not really, but with Philip, unlike his sisters, we always have to be careful that he's got nothing worse than a touch of 'stopathom.'

**Amanda.** What's that?

**Pastor.** I'll leave you to work it out together later! Great result on Saturday wasn't it Tom? Just what we needed to keep at the top of the division.

**Tom.** Brilliant! I've never seen anything like that goal five minutes from the end. Did you see the way . . .

**Christine.** Hello you two. I hope you've been congratulated on your engagement. It was great news.

**Pastor.** Well no. We hadn't got that far; we were just talking about the match on Saturday.

**Christine.** Typical!

**Amanda.** Oh, don't worry, I had it all Saturday evening. I think I could recite every move in that game. On Sunday I told Tom that if he mentioned it once more I'd . . .

**Pastor.** Perhaps you'd better not tell me the rest. Anyway, we really are pleased for you both. Congratulations.

**Tom.** Thanks.

**Amanda.** Yes, and thanks for your card. We had a great party on Saturday evening once Tom and the other blokes stopped talking about the match.

**Pastor.** Then perhaps we had better change the subject. I expect you have both come to discuss the wedding date?

**Tom.** Well, yes and no.

**Christine.** That sounds mysterious.

**Amanda.** Oh, it's nothing really you see . . .

**Tom.** . . . We've decided that we can't get married just yet because Amanda needs to finish her course and I would prefer to get my training behind me first.

**Amanda.** We've talked about it with our parents and they all agree.

**Tom.** So we can't fix a date for a wedding just yet.

**Pastor.** That's fine. It all sounds very sensible to me. So, what's the visit for then?

**Amanda.** We just wanted to talk over our relationship. You see . . .

**Tom.** . . . We really do love each other and we get on fine. It's just that we think we ought not to get married too quickly.

**Pastor.** So you said. But having just got engaged, I don't think you came here to tell us that you love each other and get on well. So what's the problem?

**Tom.** Oh, there's no problem really. Well, yes there is, and we wondered if you had any advice. It's just that sometimes we find things go wrong and, well . . .

**Amanda.** . . . What Tom really means is, can you tell us how best to handle our relationship. He explains football better than things like this.

**Tom.** Amanda!

**Amanda.** Sorry.

**Pastor.** I'm glad you've come to talk about this because it is a very important subject. Where is your problem exactly?

**Tom.** Amanda means the way we behave together in the group.

**Pastor.** All right, let's start there. Can we just make a few comments about engagement first of all? Engagement is an old tradition that I'm afraid is becoming less fashionable today, with so many couples choosing to live together before they get married.

**Amanda.** If they get married.

**Pastor.** True. Anyway, you are wise to take the step of engagement because it focuses the mind on marriage in a new way. Engagement is the first step to the final commitment. You are learning to live with a commitment but without the final commitment. This one you can break, the next one you must not.

**Christine.** Engagement is also a time to get to know more about each other with your eye on the future. Your relationship now has a definite goal and purpose. It is also very important that your friends and relatives know where you are going, and can see that you are travelling in that direction together.

**Pastor.** So engagement makes planning easier because everyone expects you to be planning. That kind of commitment draws you closer. It's a very exciting time.

**Tom.** I don't think we had thought of engagement quite like that, but what you say makes sense.

**Pastor.** Now let's discuss how you can best handle your relationship in front of other people, because that's obviously one area you are concerned about, and rightly so. After all, in Ephesians 5:3, Paul tells us we must not give 'even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity.' Though you have a close relationship, try to avoid excluding other people. Now is not the time to be leaving the youth group. That will cut you off from many of your friends and especially your single friends. Remember, you now have something many of your single friends ache for. Don't add to their pain by leaving their company. Keep in the group.

**Amanda.** We've always tried to do that, and we don't plan to change.

**Pastor.** Good. Then there's another thing and I would put it like this: each of you must keep your distance from others. There's too much casual hugging and kissing going on among some Christians today and that often leads to flirting. Some think it is all harmless, but any flirting is dynamite - it can blow your relationship to pieces. Now you are engaged you must set the pattern for your future relationship; if one or the other of you flirts now, the chances are that you will continue to do so after you are married. So, keep your distance from others.

**Amanda.** I don't think we have a problem there either.

**Pastor.** No, I don't think you have; at least, I haven't noticed anything like that about either of you, but it needs to be mentioned so that you are on your guard. Another thing I am sure you have under control is that there should be no kissing and cuddling in public. It makes your love for each other cheap. Some physical expressions of love are private affairs. Don't forget that this is another area where you can so easily cause offence . . .

**Christine.** . . . To say nothing of hurting your single friends. Be sure that you bear them in mind. Some find it embarrassing, others find it annoying, and for some it is very painful.

**Pastor.** Please don't think that we are getting at you two personally; you seem to handle your relationship very well in public. I notice you are not always together when you are at church, and you mix and chat with others. Some of our young people are not as thoughtful in this way, but I've never felt any need to challenge you on the way you handle your relationship in public.

**Tom.** We do talk about this together, and we try not to offend anyone by our behaviour. That's not really our problem. It's when we are alone together that we feel under pressure.

**Pastor.** This is a real difficulty today and I'm glad you are thinking seriously about it.

**Tom.** We love each other very much and we just long to be together - really together.

**Amanda.** Tom mean that at times we are very tempted to show our love for each other by sleeping together. We know that kind of thing is wrong, but it's very hard to fight against, and we thought you could help with some advice.

**Pastor.** I'm glad you felt able to share the problem, and it is best if we can talk very frankly about it. First of all, Amanda said that for you to sleep together would be wrong, but let's examine that for a moment because not everyone would think it wrong would they?

**Tom.** No, the blokes at work would laugh at me if they heard us talking like this and I don't think my dad would bother too much either. He's dead against church and all that.

**Amanda.** My parents would be horrified, because they've always taught me it's wrong to have sex outside marriage. But most of the girls at college would be like Tom's friends at work. When I left school there were only three of us in the class who dared to say we were still virgins.

**Pastor.** So the pressure comes from your own age-group at work and college. What else puts you under pressure to have sex together?

**Amanda.** Advertising and films, books and magazines, and the newspapers. They all seem to accept casual sex as normal.

**Tom.** You can't even walk down the street without seeing massive adverts for condoms, so that you are made to feel that it's all very trendy and you're a bit odd if you don't. It's just the way people talk and behave, they think nothing of it.

**Pastor.** So why do Christians still say that sex outside marriage is wrong?

**Tom.** I'm not sure. Maybe it isn't wrong so long as you love each other and promise to be faithful to each other for always.

**Pastor.** Perhaps we should remind ourselves what marriage is according to God's plan. It's clear that marriage is more than just having sex or even just living together; it is a relationship that is intended to be a life-long commitment. Certainly this is how Paul sees it in 1 Corinthians 7:39 when he states that: 'A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.' In other words, marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman for life. Anything else is referred to in

the Bible as immorality if it's a sex relationship outside marriage, and adultery if it's a sex relationship that violates a marriage bond. That's why Hebrews 13:4 tells us that, 'Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure.'

**Tom.** But does marriage have to be the kind of thing our society says it is? I mean, can't it be just two people agreeing to live together faithfully for life?

**Pastor.** Let's test that one by the Bible, Tom. Right at the beginning God described marriage this way in Genesis 2:24, 'A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.' The word 'wife' is just the word for 'woman'. In fact there is no special word for wife in either the Old Testament or the New Testament - it is just 'woman'.

**Tom.** So that could support what I'm saying.

**Pastor.** Except that in Genesis 2:24 for example, and in Matthew 19:4-6 where our Lord backs up the verse in Genesis, the context is about leaving parents, uniting together and never being separated; this implies that society must be able to tell who belongs to whom. The whole Bible assumes this. There was no point to the 'certificate of divorce' referred to in Matthew 19:7 if there was not a legally binding marriage in the first place. So what we call 'the social contract' of a marriage, that is the public recognition of a man and woman living together in 'marriage', is a very important part of the relationship. Why do you think this is?

**Amanda.** I suppose it gives protection to each partner from being casually abandoned by the other who may just get fed up with them.

**Pastor.** That's right. The commitment of a marriage recognised by society means that a man, for example, can't just turn out a woman and leave her destitute with five children. Marriage, rather than just living together or having casual sex, provides some kind of security and protection enforced by society.

**Christine.** Of course there are other reasons for marriage aren't there? God wanted to teach his people that love and commitment are two sides of the same coin. If we are not prepared for commitment, we should not pretend love. The physical union of 'making love' is the deepest and most intimate experience that can ever exist between a man and woman; that's why God intends its enjoyment to be in the context of a secure and caring relationship of trust. Unfortunately the phrase 'making love' is used far too cheaply today. You cannot make love if you have not made a commitment. Making love and having sex are a world apart. In the sight of God marriage is the highest example of love and commitment, and that's why he uses marriage as an illustration of his own relationship to his people both in the Old and New Testaments. In Jeremiah 3:14 for example, God describes himself as married to Israel as a husband to a wife.

**Amanda.** You said earlier that God calls any sexual relationship outside marriage either immorality or adultery. Is that right?

**Pastor.** Yes it is. Listen to this verse in 1 Corinthians 7:2, 'Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.'

That word 'immorality' is actually the word from which we get 'pornography'. God describes all sex outside marriage as immorality. In Romans 13:13, Paul tells his readers that they are to be what he calls 'daytime' Christians, and that they are not to live in the night-time of spiritual darkness as they once did. He then illustrates their old life by a series of tough words, including 'sexual immorality' and 'debauchery'. The word translated 'sexual immorality' is different from the word 'immorality' in 1 Corinthians 7:2, and it originally meant 'a place to lie down', in other words, 'a bed'. When we talk about a couple 'going to bed together', that's exactly the kind of phrase Paul had in mind here. It's a polite way of describing having sex. Paul says: 'No sleeping around', 'no going to bed together'. That other word 'debauchery' can be translated 'licentiousness', a habit of satisfying sensual - mostly sexual - desire. Debauchery is pleasing ourselves sexually outside of marriage, whether alone or in company, and whether perverted or not. That's a summary of what the Bible teaches elsewhere as well - and it's pretty clear isn't it?

**Tom.** Yes it is, and it's also pretty heavy.

**Pastor.** Not really Tom, though I know it may run counter to the way our world thinks and behaves today. In fact God sets out the pattern of marriage not because he wants to make us miserable, but because he wants us to be happy. A loving sexual relationship is one of God's great gifts to men and women. But like all God's good gifts, it can be so easily spoiled. That's why God puts a safeguard round it and says it must be between one man and one woman within the security of a life-long commitment to each other; a commitment and security recognised by society. That's what we call marriage.

**Amanda.** So you are saying that for a couple in our position to have sex is wrong, even if we really do love each other and plan to get married.

**Pastor.** Yes, but it's not just what I say, it's what God says; and for the good reasons we have seen. Let's think about this further. To have sex before marriage spoils the delight of anticipation. It's a bit like a child who discovers a birthday present before the day; the real event becomes a let down. Also, you may never marry each other. Remember, engagement has an escape clause; if it isn't working you can both get out. But if you have already had sexual intercourse with each other you have both done something you can never undo. You have spoiled yourselves, and another committed Christian may think twice about going out with someone who has become cheapened in this way. Then again, to have sex now, even if you do get married, will leave you with a guilty conscience; and no marriage should begin in guilt.

**Christine.** One other very important fact is that any sexual intercourse runs the risk of unwanted pregnancy. No matter how careful you might be, Amanda may get pregnant and then you have to marry in a hurry, before you have fully tested your love and commitment. The alternative is that you break-up immediately, which would leave Amanda to have the baby without its father, or to go for an abortion - and that is by far the worst possible option. None of this can compare with the joy that a young couple share with their families and friends when the wife is expecting her first child.

**Pastor.** In addition to all this, don't forget that when God warns us that a particular course of action is wrong, there are nearly always penalties for breaking the rules. Broken hearts and lives, and broken health and happiness, are some of the penalties for living a life of sexual selfishness and so-called freedom. I'm afraid the media are leading millions of young people astray when they keep on about safe sex. The implication is that so long as you take precautions about catching Aids then any sex is all right. That is a dangerous deceit. There is no such thing as safe sex outside of marriage. On the other hand, there are few things more joyful and liberating than the secure freedom of sex within a loving marriage bond.

**Amanda.** That all makes a lot of sense, but it's often very hard to keep to the rules isn't it? Especially when the world around us doesn't seem to care how people live.

**Pastor.** Of course it is Amanda. But we mustn't let the world dictate our morality. Early on you wanted some advice on how to handle your relationship in the group, and we've dealt with that. But that's not really your problem is it? The real issue is this whole matter of going too far.

**Tom.** Yes. I suppose so.

**Amanda.** You know it is Tom.

**Tom.** OK, it is.

**Pastor.** Perhaps we can offer a few guidelines for you. The first and most obvious thing is that you must be careful where and when you spend time alone. Obviously the most dangerous place is Amanda's bed-sit. If you really can't cope, and think you are heading for the danger zone, then perhaps you ought to ban yourselves from being alone together there.

**Tom.** But that's a bit unrealistic isn't it?

**Pastor.** No more unrealistic than you kidding yourselves that you can control the situation! Let me put it to you this way. I'm not suggesting that you have any intention of going too far, but if you have a meal together and then sit down to watch television, where do you sit? My guess is that you sit on the bed because there's no room for a settee in a bed-sit like Amanda's. You watch a tv soap with a fair bit of sex in it, or a video that you weren't too careful in choosing. Ten thirty comes around very quickly and you've got to be remarkably disciplined to get off home Tom. That's just my guess - but it isn't too far from the truth is it?

**Amanda.** No.

**Pastor.** So, if you think it's unrealistic to put a self-imposed ban on Amanda's bed-sit, then what about a curfew at a certain time? And be very careful what films you watch. Another important rule for you is 'no drinking together'. I don't know your views on alcohol, but to drink together in Amanda's room makes it much more likely that you will end up having sex together. Alcohol, even a little, muddles your mind and deadens your conscience.

**Amanda.** We do pray together you know; and we read our Bible before Tom leaves - well most times, anyway.

**Christine.** Strangely, that may be no help at all. There's a very fine line between a deep spiritual relationship with a man and a woman and getting physical. By all means keep studying the Bible and praying together, but not in a situation where you are vulnerable.

**Pastor.** There's another aspect to the bed-sit that you should both consider. I don't know when you leave Tom . . .

**Tom.** . . . Pretty late sometimes.

**Pastor.** Have you stopped to consider what other people may be thinking? Some of the girls in the block also have boyfriends who stay late, or all night. Everyone assumes what they are doing; like it or not that's the way the world thinks today. So, how are you seen to be any different from the rest? Remember Paul's clear rule in Ephesians 5:3, 'Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.' One other thought on Tom's claim that I'm being unrealistic when I talk of a ban on the bed-sit: How unrealistic was our Lord in Mark 9:43 when he said, 'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off'? Also, what do you think Paul means by 'Flee from sexual immorality', in 1 Corinthians 6:18, and 'Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness', in 2 Timothy 2:22? Obviously he didn't mean us to run away when we've done it, but to run away when we can see it coming. In other words what the Bible says about temptation to sin is: 'Get out before it's too late - whatever the cost.'

**Christine.** That includes taking holidays together. It's very dangerous to go on holiday together just by yourselves. However carefully you plan the safeguards - different rooms, different chalets or whatever - the temptations are too great. Sometimes a young couple have tried to persuade us that they can handle sharing a chalet with two bedrooms; but if you think you can guarantee to handle that situation safely for two weeks, then you are either fooling yourselves or not much in love. For the same reason, never spend the night in the same house together when your parents are away. No young couple in love can be sure to handle a situation like that.

**Tom.** We've planned a holiday with Kerry and Geoff this year, and last year we went with a Christian group to Austria, so we've got that one sussed.

**Pastor.** Full marks. That's the best way to holiday before marriage and there are plenty of good group holidays to choose from. Can I turn to another delicate area? Of course any young couple in love wants to express their love, but you must realise that even expressing love by an arm round the waist or a kiss on the cheek is just a beginning. I'm not saying it's wrong, all I'm saying is that it's the beginning of something more.

**Amanda.** You mean we need to agree how far we should go in expressing our love?

**Pastor.** Yes, I mean exactly that. You must have clearly defined boundaries beyond which you know you are trespassing. You see, the kind of relationship we are talking about is like dynamite. If you don't treat it carefully it may blow up without warning; and a situation you can handle today, you may not be able to handle tomorrow.

**Tom.** Where do you think the boundaries should be drawn?

**Pastor.** Well, I can give you one very simple rule that defines a clear boundary: you must avoid any form of undressing and any form of lying down together.

**Amanda.** That sounds very simple: no undressing and no lying down together.

**Pastor.** If you promise God and each other to make that an unbreakable rule, you cannot go too far wrong. The moment you start on one or other of those acts you both know you are in forbidden territory. You must each help the other one to stop. If you don't have rules in your relationship you will never stop until you've blown it. It's no good pretending you can go all the way except for the last step - that is stupid, quite apart from being sinful.

**Christine.** While we're on the subject of showing our love, you should avoid heavy petting. Any form of love-making that deliberately stimulates your sex organs is going too far. Here is another simple rule: 'Don't touch what doesn't belong to you'. We know all this is out of line with the way many young people think and behave today. Unfortunately too many teens and twenties have been brainwashed to think of sex as just another fun thing, like having a meal or going to the cinema; if you enjoy it, go for it. But you are both Christians, and for you God makes the rules - not the world. And his rules are always the best.

**Amanda.** I think we can understand all that you are saying, but it's hard when you really love someone and you want them so much. When we spend an evening together there are times when everything seems to be shouting at us to go on. It doesn't seem to be as sinful then as it is when we are talking with you. That's why. . .

**Tom.** . . .That's why we thought we should come and see you.

**Pastor.** Are you both trying to tell us that you have already gone too far and crossed the boundaries?

**Amanda.** Yes. I'm afraid so.

**Pastor.** All the way?

**Tom.** Yes, we have.

**Pastor.** Can I ask you how long this has been happening - and how often?

**Tom.** Only for a few months - and not often. You see we never intend to. It just, well, sort of happens.

**Amanda.** And then we feel terrible about it. That's really why we're here, because we can't live with ourselves afterwards.

**Pastor.** Did you take any precautions?

**Tom.** No because, as I said, we never intend to do it.

**Christine.** Are you pregnant Amanda?

**Amanda.** No. That's definite.

**Pastor.** I am glad that you both felt able to share this with us and I hope you feel relieved now you've told us.

**Amanda.** Oh we do. Well, I do.

**Tom.** Me too. But I was dreading this evening.

**Pastor.** Of course you were. Now let's try to help you both, but remember, sometimes a doctor has to hurt a bit to heal a lot. First of all, do you both realise that your action has not simply been dangerous and foolish, but sinful in the sight of God?

**Amanda.** Yes, we've always known that, and I'm even more sure of it now.

**Tom.** And the reasons why it's sinful are clearer. It's not just wrong because Amanda's parents would be heartbroken if they knew, or because the church says it's wrong, or because Amanda might have got pregnant, but because the Bible is clearly against it.

**Pastor.** Tom, you bear the biggest responsibility here because you have done something to Amanda that can never be undone - and if your relationship doesn't work out you may have limited her chances of finding a nice fellow in the future.

**Tom.** I know.

**Pastor.** But having said that, you must still see your engagement as a testing time. What you have done must not force you both into an obligation to stay together whatever. If you are not right for each other, there is no value in entering a miserable marriage because of your sinful actions. That only stores up bigger problems for the future.

**Amanda.** Oh but we really do love each other.

**Christine.** We can see that, but have you both told God how sorry you are?

**Amanda.** Yes, often.

**Pastor.** But sometimes we can be sorry without being repentant. In 2 Corinthians 7:8-11, Paul defines true Christian repentance as 'godly sorrow', and he describes the way the Corinthians longed to put right what was wrong. Listen to this: 'Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern . . .'

The danger you both face is that you can begin to think, 'Well, it's not so wrong after all; none of our work friends would think twice about it. After all, we do love each other and we do plan to get married.' Tom and Amanda, never lose that sense of alarm at what you have done, and a longing to keep clean. Don't take forgiveness lightly - it cost Christ his life to forgive what you have done to each other. Now, if you are both really repentant you will be alarmed at what you have done and eager to change things. In other words, all the safeguards we talked about earlier must come into action immediately. If you say, as you said earlier Tom, that some of these suggestions are a bit unrealistic, then I wonder if you are really longing to keep pure in the future.

**Tom.** We really do want to get things right. But we wondered if we've gone too far spiritually as well as physically; perhaps God has no more interest in us.

**Amanda.** If only we could turn the clock back. We've learned from our mistake and desperately wish we could undo the past few months.

**Pastor.** We all have things in our lives that we are ashamed of, but in Romans 5 Paul reminds us that 'where sin increased, grace increased all the more.' In other words, God is always ready to forgive us and make us clean in his sight. That's one of the wonderful things about God's love. According to 1 John 1:9, 'he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' The word 'all' means all - including *your* sin. God wants you both to enjoy a new future. Let me read you a verse from the Bible that is full of assurance and hope. Here it is, in Hebrews 9:14, 'How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!' You see, God wants you to serve him with a clean conscience - but only God himself can give us a clean conscience. Never forget that the cost of your forgiveness, though free to you, was the death of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is only because he took our sin, guilt and punishment on himself, that we can be forgiven.

**Amanda.** All that helps a lot. But one thing is worrying me. You are the only people we have told about this: has anyone else got to know about what we've done?

**Pastor.** Like who?

**Amanda.** Well, should we tell our parents? And will you tell the church?

**Pastor.** The answer to those questions depends upon you. Whether or not you tell your families is your decision; because of your age, you don't have to. But Amanda has already said that her parents would be heart-broken, so perhaps it would serve

no useful purpose and would only hurt them and your relationship with them. On the other hand, it would hardly be a good witness to your parents Tom, would it?

**Tom.** No, because although my Dad wouldn't bother much, he expects a different standard of Christians. But will the church have to be told?

**Pastor.** Again, it depends on you. Open church discipline is for sin that is either scandalous - by which I mean the world knows all about it, or persistent - that is if you refuse to change your action. So, if you can promise that you will never have a sexual relationship together again until you are married, and if you will let Christine and me meet with you regularly for a while to help you to keep your promise and to prepare for marriage, then no-one else need know. But you must be very open and honest with us or we cannot help you.

**Christine.** Our first concern is to help you to get your lives sorted out with each other and with God. That's why we would like to meet with you both each week for a while.

**Tom.** If you can spare the time, we would like that because we have every intention of sorting out our lives, haven't we Amanda?

**Amanda.** I've no doubt about that. We really would like to thank you both for your advice. All you have said will help us to keep our relationship right, but I only wish we had come to you a lot earlier. Still, we can now see more clearly where we went wrong, and how we can start to put things right; and from what we have learnt, we may be able to stop some of our friends sliding into the same situation.