

A Study Of Moral Issues: Adultery

Introduction. Averaging several studies together, around 20% of people in the United States have had a sexual relationship with someone other than their spouse. Now, unless we take a strong stand with the forces of truth against the sin of adultery, there will be serious results. Condoning unscriptural relationships will decimate God's institution of the home (Genesis 2:24) and it will have a leavening effect in the church today just as it did in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:6). Perhaps the most serious ramification is that one who is guilty of adultery and who dies in such a condition will be lost (Proverbs 6:32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8). There is a vast difference between "entering in" and being "cast out" (Matthew 25:21-30).

Considering the high stakes, however, we will not "shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27), nor will we "become your enemy by telling you the truth" (Galatians 4:16).

I. A Definition Of Terms

- A. Both "fornication" and "adultery" are used in the Bible for immoral sins, with "fornication" normally a more inclusive term, covering sins such as homosexuality and premarital sexual relations. "Adultery" refers to unlawful sexual relations between two people, with at least one of them or both of them being married to someone else.
- B. The Bible identifies four distinct areas of sin described by the term "adultery."
 - 1. One of these, spiritual adultery, deals with the Christian's lack of faithfulness to Christ, the husband of the spiritual bride (2 Corinthians 11:2; James 4:4). The person who flirts with worldliness and cheats on Christ by association with religious error is guilty of this sin.
 - 2. The other three types of adultery deal with mental and physical conduct and may be committed by either men or women and by both Christians and non-Christians. One may be guilty of the thought of adultery, the act of adultery, or the state of adultery. These three conditions are certainly related, and one may lead to another; nevertheless, each is a distinct type of sin and must be so considered if we are to understand what God expects in repentance.

II. The Thought Of Adultery

- A. Adultery may be committed in one's heart without any physical contact (Matthew 5:28; 15:19). This type of sin may be committed without any other person ever knowing about it; in fact, unless the thoughts are expressed in words or lead to overt actions, only God and the guilty one will know of the sin.
- B. Conclusions regarding the thought of adultery can easily go to extremes. On one hand, it might be suggested that what one thinks is his own business and does not matter; on the other hand, some might conclude that to look in any manner toward the opposite sex is sinful. The sin occurs in the form of a lustful look, especially when the lust is such that only the lack of convenient circumstances prevents further immoral actions. To look on one of the opposite sex with appreciation for attractiveness does not constitute sin. In addition, to consider

one's qualities as a possible marriage partner would not be evil. It is when one has a lustful look and inappropriate desires that sin is committed.

C. Contributions to overcoming this type of adultery:

1. A Christian needs to control their thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8). If they cannot, this often leads to the development of emotional affairs.
 - (1) Married people are not immune to the human need for close, meaningful relationships. But sometimes, those relationships feel more like intimate companionship. If left unchecked, those relationships can develop into emotional affairs and then into physical affairs.
 - (2) There are several red flags of emotional affairs:
 - (a) You daydream about him or her.
 - (b) You look forward to seeing him or her.
 - (c) You want to tell them news first.
 - (d) You share intimate emotions and problems.
 - (e) You believe he or she understands you more than your spouse.
 - (f) You keep secrets and cover up.
 - (g) You give gifts.
 - (h) You spend more time alone with them.
 - b) A beautiful formula is given by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:1-2. If each man could look at each woman as a mother or sister, and each woman could look at each man as a father or brother, purity would control the thoughts.
 2. Lasciviousness encourages the thought of adultery, and God will not hold the one guiltless who promotes evil thinking.
 - a) Those who are careless in appearance may lead others astray in their thoughts, and some even display themselves in appearance and actions in an effort to seduce (Ephesians 4:19; Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 2:9).
 - b) The man is specifically warned of the thought of adultery and the woman is especially encouraged to dress modestly; nevertheless, every male or female should be aware that evil thoughts are wrong, and concerned about any appearance or action which might cause these thoughts.
- D. As for repentance, if an evil thought has been expressed to others, public repentance is needed, but if it is committed in such a way that no one knows except the guilty party and God, God will forgive when one is truly sorry for his thoughts, asks for forgiveness, and determines to keep future thoughts pure.

III. The Act Of Adultery

- A. Lustful thoughts and desires are condemned, yet the sexual appetite is a part of normal life. Understanding this, God instituted a plan for the appropriate satisfaction of the sexual desires (Matthew 19:4-5; 1 Corinthians 7:1-2).
1. This shows that the sexual union in marriage is a beautiful concept; however, it also proves that any such relationship outside of marriage is sin (Hebrews 13:4). It is the act of adultery (cp. John 8:4). This is different from the thought of adultery in that a physical union is involved.
 2. Desire for love and companionship are to be fulfilled with one's own mate and with no other person (Proverbs 5:18-20). Any premarital or extramarital sexual act is sinful.

- B. A general lack of respect for the sanctity of the home has developed in our culture. Many have come to believe the fulfillment of the sexual desires with any consenting adult to be acceptable.
 - 1. Cohabitation has increased by nearly 900 percent over the last 50 years. More and more, couples are testing the waters before diving into marriage.
 - 2. Two-thirds of couples married in 2012 shared a home together for more than two years before they ever walked down an aisle.
- C. Because of this, we are confronted with a huge task of promoting a respect for the human body as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), and upholding the sacredness of the home (Genesis 2:24). Many problems will be solved by helping young people understand God's blueprint and by guiding them to patiently seek out a suitable mate at a mature age.
- D. The act of adultery is a serious sin, but forgiveness can be received. The improper action must be ceased and contact with the other person ceased. It may mean changing jobs, congregations, or towns, but that will be the only way to control that desire for another person. Repentance would also demand at least expressing contriteness to any other party involved and to those who know of the sin, and of obedience to God's laws for forgiveness for the Christian and the non-Christian.
- E. If you decide the affair was a huge mistake, you will also likely realize how much you have lost. This epiphany may turn you into a much better spouse (Ecclesiastes 9:9). In a study done by Bill Mitchell, 70-80% who willingly confess to infidelity recover and enjoy a stronger marriage in time. An affair does not have to mean the end.

IV. The State Of Adultery

- A. In addition to the thought of adultery and the act of adultery, sin is committed when two people who should not be married in God's sight enter into a legal marriage relationship. Because it is increasingly easy to obtain a divorce from one and a license to marry another, the extent of the problem is greatly magnified. Two people, although accepted by the government as husband and wife, are living in a state of adultery if they have not been joined together by God.
- B. God's approval is given for a single person to seek out a good mate. The normal expectation is for a man to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife (Matthew 19:5). Because death is a severing factor, the widow or widower may be scripturally married to another eligible person (1 Corinthians 7:39). It is God's desire that two people married to each other continue in that sacred relationship until death (Matthew 19:6; Romans 7:2-3).
- C. It is not God's will that anyone divorce his mate and be married to another (Malachi 2:16). However, Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 say that a faithful person may put away an unfaithful partner on the grounds of adultery and then be married to another eligible mate.
 - 1. Any marriage to a second living mate without God's approval constitutes the state of adultery. According to these passages, if a divorce takes place for any other reason than fornication, a remarriage by either party would be a state of adultery. If a putting away is for the reason of adultery, the guilty party

cannot remarry without it being adultery. The only person involved who could consider remarriage is the innocent partner of an unfaithful mate, and all factors involved should be seriously considered even then. The innocent party in such cases should try to be forgiving and work to overcome the difficulty if at all possible. There is so much to lose in a divorce.

2. If one has contributed to or encouraged unfaithfulness by failing to be a loving husband or wife, it is dangerous to conclude that person is innocent (cp. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5).
 - a) Furthermore, to overlook or forgive unfaithfulness at one point in life and then use it as a smokescreen for some other problem at a later date does not fit the possible case for remarriage in these verses.
 - b) There must be the putting away on the grounds of fornication, at least in the sight of God, before there can be any scriptural consideration for remarriage. When one of the parties involved in a marriage has a living mate of a previous marriage, except that person be the innocent victim of a fornicator, the union is a state of adultery.
- D. The state of adultery is a sin for which there is forgiveness; however, the requirements for that forgiveness are not easily met.
 1. Colossians 3:5-7 says that someone can live in the sin of adultery, and there is no way to repent without ceasing the sinful relationship with no intention of committing it again (Matthew 21:28-29).
 2. Heartaches are involved, and feelings may keep us from being objective, but we have to accept God's teachings. It is very hard in cases where children have been born to an adulterous union (Ezra 10:44; cp. Deuteronomy 7:3-4). The dissolving of a sinful union does not free a father or mother from responsibility to the children involved.

Conclusion. Affairs are not all they are cracked up to be. Liberally-minded people believe that the sexual revolution changed marriage and made affairs an innocent and inevitable part of the sexual landscape. They are wrong. An affair will change you and your relationship. Listen to the counsel of God and learn self-control (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). This is the mark of a faithful Christian.

The best cure for the sin of adultery, and the easiest way to overcome it, is to prevent its occurrence. We need teaching, especially to young people while the problem can be avoided. Involvement in moral activities should be encouraged, occupying the mind with virtuous thoughts and desires. Avoiding environments which suggest wrong thoughts and actions is critical. Additionally, efforts must be made to have happy homes. If each husband will try to be the best possible husband, and each wife will try to be the best possible wife, rendering due benevolence (1 Corinthians 7:3-4), the natural desires will be satisfied, and no one will need fulfillment in forbidden areas. The home can then be respected as God has ordained, the world will see its great value, and the sin of adultery can be successfully overcome.