



# Adultery... Far Worse Than You Might Think

It is safe to say that hundreds of millions of people around the world know of someone who has either committed adultery or has experienced the trauma caused by a spouse's marital unfaithfulness. Sadly, adultery has become part of the fabric of life in countries and cultures across the globe.

In spite of its prevalence, however, the complete sinfulness of adultery remains largely overlooked and even camouflaged by supposedly less offensive terms such as "having an affair" or "stepping out" or "sleeping around." As a result, adultery is often glamorized, legitimized, and/or fantasized by those who, sadly, are spiritually deluded, self-centered, unloving, and relationally short-sighted. These characteristics make one vulnerable to Satan's diabolical and spiritually numbing plan to cripple people, families, and relationships through adultery.

The goals of this study are:

- to present clear, biblical teaching on adultery;
- to identify some of the many sins that accompany adultery;
- to reveal the typically incomplete confession of adultery by the guilty participants;
- to review consequences of adultery, some of which last a lifetime; and
- to help you realize that there is more—much more—to adultery than the physical act of sexual infidelity.

In contrast to adultery's destructive aftermath, this study will also provide biblical assistance to those reeling from the impact of adultery's betrayal by:

- recognizing the primary evidence that demonstrates an adulterous spouse has truly repented;
- confronting a primary challenge faced by an adulterous spouse who repents;
- noting two of the greatest challenges a betrayed spouse faces;
- emphasizing the importance of prayer and scripture memory in adultery's aftermath; and
- providing hope to become a "covenant couple" once again.

## GOD'S STANDARD FOR SEXUAL PURITY

Scripture condemns all sexual immorality, of which adultery is but one aspect. The following verses show that sexual sins can be expressed externally (physical acts) and internally (self-centered desires). Followers of Christ are to flee both types of sinful expression.

**1 Corinthians 6:13b**, ...The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

**Galatians 5:19-21**, Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Ephesians 5:3**, But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

**Colossians 3:5**, Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-8**, For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;<sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,<sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;<sup>6</sup> that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.<sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

## IS ADULTERY MERELY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT?

Marriage is a covenant of companionship between a male and female that allows them to leave former family

relationships in order to experience a one flesh relationship with one another as husband and wife.

**Genesis 2:24**, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (*see also Ephesians 5:31 and Matthew 19:5*)

**Malachi 2:14b**, ... the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Adultery is faithlessness against this sacred covenant that is fostered and subsequently fueled by incalculable self-centeredness.

For Christians, this one-flesh relationship uniquely represents the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the church.

**Ephesians 5:31-32**, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”<sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

In today’s world, adultery is typically viewed as nothing other than sexual intercourse between a male and female, at least one of whom is married to another person. If adultery, however, is perceived solely as a physical act, its devastation should be relatively simple to deal with. To begin with, the adulterous spouse could request forgiveness for committing the sinful sexual act. When the betrayed marriage partner grants forgiveness, the estranged couple would supposedly resume their “restored” marriage and get on with life as a result of a marital recommitment.

The major flaw in such a recovery solution is that it fails to realize that adultery involves much more than a sexual act. It is also a betrayal of a sacred covenant and a violation of one’s oath to be faithful. Additionally, adultery is *always* linked to other sins. If this sinful linkage is overlooked, any remedy for marriage restoration will often prove to be superficial since it disregards the need for repentance of all related sins. This simplistic restoration attempt also fails to address the consequences of adultery that impact other people and areas of life.

As with any aspect of life and relationships, God’s Word provides never-failing, totally sufficient truth to deal with adultery and its consequences, as well as recovery from its devastation.

#### **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ADULTERY?**

God specifically forbids adultery in the Ten Commandments.

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

God also indirectly addresses adultery through the sinful desire of coveting.

**Exodus 20:17**, You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; *you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife*, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s. [*emphasis added*]

Adultery has the potential to greatly damage the relational and spiritual welfare of families, communities, and countries. In the Old Testament, God categorized adultery as a capital offense, a punishment on the same level as murder!

**Leviticus 20:10**, If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

#### **ADULTERY IS COMPARED TO IDOLATRY**

God’s Word teaches that adultery goes beyond the physical aspect of sexual sin and, in a spiritual sense, is a picture of idolatry. Idolatry breaks one’s covenant with God. This is the pinnacle of spiritual bankruptcy.

Baker’s *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, “Since idolatry substituted another for God, it violated the people’s holiness and was parallel to adultery; hence the frequent use of negative sexual imagery for idolatry, especially by the prophets.”<sup>1</sup>

**Ezekiel 23:37**, For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.

**Hosea 3:1**, And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”

#### **ADULTERY AND IDOLATRY ARE BOTH ACTS OF SELF-CENTERED, FAITHLESS TREACHERY**

The similarity between adultery and idolatry is seen clearly in Jeremiah chapter 3. In the following passage, notice the common descriptions (*in italics*) for both of these vile choices.

**Jeremiah 3:6-10**, The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: “Have you seen what she did, that *faithless* one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the *whore*?<sup>7</sup> And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me,’ but she did not return, and her *treacherous* sister Judah saw it.<sup>8</sup> She saw that for all the *adulteries* of that *faithless* one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her *treacherous* sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.<sup>9</sup> Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing *adultery* with stone and tree.<sup>10</sup> Yet for all this her *treacherous* sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.” [emphasis added]

Even though adultery and idolatry can both be described as faithless, treacherous whoredom, this evil is not greater than God’s mercy. God’s mercy is demonstrated by His gracious forgiveness and continued help to anyone who repents of even the worst of sins. This reality is seen in subsequent verses in Jeremiah 3. (*The importance and demonstration of authentic repentance before the Lord and others will be reviewed later in this study.*)

**Jeremiah 3:11-13**, And the LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.<sup>12</sup> Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, ‘Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever.<sup>13</sup> Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD.’”

Adultery, like idolatry, is a matter of choice. The people of Israel willfully abandoned their unique, holy, and divinely ordained covenant with the Lord. In its place, they embraced defilement, faithlessness, and the sensual gratification of harlotry. As a result, the worthy (Creator and Redeemer) was replaced by the unworthy (stones and trees), and God’s sacrificial love was abandoned for their own self-centered lust.

Similarly, adultery is an abandonment of commitment to one’s marriage companion that results in moral and spiritual defilement. This defilement comes through a self-oriented, sensual gratification that is chosen in place of one’s marriage covenant.

God’s Word teaches that adultery is not mere “sleeping around” or “having an affair.” God equates adultery with “whoredom.” Such wording spotlights the immorality of adultery and emphasizes the self-indulgence and faithless betrayal that are characteristic of this treacherous sin.

### **JESUS EXPANDED THE DEFINITION OF ADULTERY**

Jesus emphasized that adultery also includes illicit desire. In other words, a person commits adultery within one’s self before any sexual act occurs with another person.

**Matthew 5:27-28**, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

From a practical standpoint, no one has ever committed physical adultery before committing mental adultery (adultery of the heart), defined by Jesus as “looking with lustful intent.” This lustful intent can occur instantly with great emotion or grow with intensity toward sexual gratification over a period of time.

The steps from mental adultery to physical adultery have produced worn pathways of shame and emptiness throughout history. Perhaps the most well-known scriptural narrative in this regard is King David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). While walking on the palace roof one evening, David saw Bathsheba, a beautiful married woman, bathing. He inquired about her and then sent messengers to bring her to his house, where he committed physical adultery with her. To make matters even worse, Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, one of David’s trusted military men. Trying to cover up his adultery, David orchestrated the murder of Uriah in a futile effort to hide the sin. When the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to expose and rebuke David’s adulterous behavior (2 Samuel 12), David did repent and was forgiven by the Lord. The consequences of his sin, however, were both immediate and long term. God’s immediate judgment involved the death of the child born out of the adultery, and His long term judgment declared there would be perpetual hostility and division among those in the lineage of David. This narrative shows that adultery produces consequences that can never be foreseen.

### **THE TWO BATTLE LINES OF MENTAL ADULTERY**

King David had no idea of the consequences that began with a look of lustful intent, but his folly should warn others about this downward spiral. When you understand the connection between sight, emotion, thoughts, and physical adultery, then *what you look at* and *what you think about* become the two battle lines on which the war against mental adultery is won or lost.

**Psalm 101:3a**, I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless . . .

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5**, For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

**Philippians 4:8**, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**Colossians 3:1-3**, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

**James 1:13-15**, Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

When believers comprehend the words of Jesus regarding adultery in Matthew 5:27-28 (printed previously), many will realize they have committed mental adultery even though they have not committed physical adultery. Mental adultery (looking with lustful intent) is secretive, but it is crippling to a believer’s spiritual growth and relational development. Sin rarely, if ever, occurs in a vacuum (not influenced by other sins and not affecting anyone or anything). Perhaps not realizing this crippling characteristic of sin, many believers who currently would not consider participating in physical adultery continue to commit mental adultery with little hesitation.

With mental adultery in focus, pornography takes on a much greater significance than merely looking at sexually oriented pictures. For those who are married, involvement in pornography is actually adultery of the heart.

See [\*Pornography Destroys the Ability to Love\*](#)

## **THE SOURCE OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY**

Jesus not only gave a wider definition of adultery to include “looking with lustful intent” but also revealed the source of sinful thoughts and actions. The source of all sin is within each of us, in our heart.

**Mark 7:20-23**, And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

In the above verses, notice that both evil thoughts and sexual sins defile a person. If you view physical adultery biblically and are committed to guarding yourself from engaging in that sin, you should have a similar commitment to guard yourself from engaging in the secret sin of mental adultery.

In passing, also note that many of the sins mentioned above in Mark 7:20-23 also accompany adultery. For example, it is impossible for adultery to occur without the companion sins of coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, pride, and foolishness. (*The often overlooked reality of adultery’s “accompanying sins” will be examined later in this study.*)

## **THE USE OF GOD’S WORD TO COMBAT ADULTERY**

A believer’s reliance on Scripture to guard one’s heart and mind against committing mental or physical adultery cannot be over-emphasized.

**Psalm 19:7-11**, The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

**Psalm 119:11, 16, 24, 165**, I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you . . . I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word . . . Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors . . . Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

**Proverbs 6:23-24**, For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, <sup>24</sup> to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

**Hebrews 4:12**, For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Those who regularly participate in mental or physical adultery have departed from faithful obedience to the Word of God. They may read it or listen to sermons from it; but they don't consistently live by it. This characteristic is expected from unbelievers, since they have little or no understanding of Scripture. On the other hand, when professing believers depart from God's Word by giving lip service to its truth instead of loving obedience, they become easy prey to sin's deception and resultant entrapment. When a believer departs from God's Word, that person trusts in natural wisdom, lives according to fleshly desires, and no longer honors Jesus who died to release us from sin's bondage.

**Romans 6:10-14**, For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup>Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup>Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

### **MANY SINS ACCOMPANY ADULTERY**

People who neglect or depart from God's Word will, as a result, be susceptible to committing any number of sins. Many of these sins are associated with adultery. For example, notice the following passage in Proverbs 6 that lists the "sins of abomination" that the Lord hates.

**Proverbs 6:16-19**, There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: <sup>17</sup>haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup>a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, <sup>19</sup>a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Adultery is typically accompanied by at least four of the seven abominable practices mentioned above, specifically "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, a heart that devises wicked plans, and feet that make haste to run to evil." Other verses describe these sins in the context of adulterous behavior.

*(haughty eyes)* **Job 24:15**, The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me'; and he veils his face.

*(lying tongue)* **Proverbs 5:21**, With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.

*(a heart that devises wicked plans)* **Proverbs 23:27-28**, For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well. <sup>28</sup> She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind.

*(feet that make haste to run to evil)* **Proverbs 7:11-12**, She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; <sup>12</sup> now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.

Adultery is dramatically expressed in lying and stealing. The initial lie of someone committing adultery involves a denial of one's marriage vow to be faithful for "as long as we both shall live." Subsequent lies are used to cover up the many aspects of on-going adultery, such as inappropriate conversations, misuse of time, one's whereabouts, financial expenditures, and relational interests. Stealing is also basic to adultery since a married person gives away one's body to another when one's body has been pledged and is reserved only for one's marital companion (1 Corinthians 7:2-5).

**1 Corinthians 7:2-5**, But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. <sup>3</sup>The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup>Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (emphasis added)

Referring again to Proverbs 6:19, adultery is sometimes the backdrop for a person to be a "false witness who breathes out lies" by, for example, using the perceived failures of one's spouse as a supposedly valid excuse for being unfaithful. Adultery is also a predictable catalyst for "discord to be sown among brothers" as adultery continues or the aftermath of adultery begins to unfold. In other words, adultery can contribute to the fruition of six of the seven sins God considers an abomination to Himself.

In fact, adultery can even lead to murder ("hands that shed innocent blood"), as we see in the scriptural narrative regarding King David and also in news headlines and court cases around the world.

If sins associated with adultery are described as "abominations" in Proverbs 6:16-19, can adultery be any less depraved?

Adultery is an entwining of *lust* (I desire), *coveting* (I deserve), and *pride* (I demand), the three primary roots of all sinfulness listed in 1 John 2:16. Adultery is not possible without this self-oriented trio of sins working together to produce brokenness and heartache for those impacted by marital unfaithfulness.

**1 John 2:16**, For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (*New American Standard Bible*)

It is also obvious that adultery is the exact opposite of biblical love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13. Often, partners in an adulterous relationship will tell each other, “I love you” ... but when compared to the biblical definition of love, that phrase could not be further from biblical truth.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup>Love never ends.

See [True Love is Not Based on Feelings](#)

In addition to being unloving to other people, a person who commits adultery shows a lack of love for the Lord by not obeying God’s Word.

**John 14:15**, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

**1 John 5:3**, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Based on verses referenced to this point in our study, a person who commits mental or physical adultery can be described as a self-oriented covenant breaker who lives a lie, practices deceit, and disregards what is best for family and friends. A person committing adultery also proves to be untrustworthy, lustful, foolish, senseless, wicked, covetous, and unloving.

Worse than all these detrimental characteristics, however, is the fact that a person committing adultery has little or no hatred of evil, and that reality indicates there is also no fear of the Lord (Proverbs 8:13, 16:6).

**Proverbs 8:13**, The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil . . .

**Proverbs 16:6**, . . . by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.

Consequently, when one does not fear the Lord, then that person does not and cannot possess true wisdom, as the following verses reveal.

**Proverbs 1:7**, The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

**Psalms 111:10**, The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Anyone who commits adultery lacks understanding. That person cannot avoid inevitable personal consequences nor anticipate the agonizing heartache that others impacted by adultery will experience.

**Proverbs 6:20-35**, My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.

<sup>21</sup> Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck.

<sup>22</sup> When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.

<sup>23</sup> For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,

<sup>24</sup> to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

<sup>25</sup> Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;

<sup>26</sup> for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life.

<sup>27</sup> Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?

<sup>28</sup> Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

<sup>29</sup> So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.

<sup>30</sup> People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,

<sup>31</sup> but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house.

<sup>32</sup> He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.

<sup>33</sup> He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

<sup>34</sup> For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.

<sup>35</sup> He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts.

## NO SIMPLE SOLUTION TO ADULTERY'S AFTERMATH

When you become aware of the characteristics of an adulterer, when you learn of the many sins associated with adultery, when you realize adultery's blatant disregard of biblical love, and when you realize an adulterous person's disregard of God Almighty, then you can understand why this treacherous betrayal cannot be remedied simply by stopping sexual misbehavior and renewing marriage vows. Instead, one who has committed adultery must become aware of the grievous sins committed against a holy God as well as one's lifetime companion, one's partner in adultery, and, when applicable, the co-adulterer's lifetime companion. An adulterer must also realize that adultery creates disillusionment, confusion, and emotional distress in the lives of other friends and family members.

A person who commits adultery can deal biblically with the magnitude of adultery's aftermath only by repenting before the Lord and relying on God's adequate and sufficient resources to institute personal Christ-like changes in every aspect of life. Those not committing adultery but who stagger from adultery's devastation also need help from the Lord. Biblical direction and encouragement from committed followers of Christ are often welcomed by those having to deal with adultery, one of the greatest trials of life.

## PRACTICING ADULTERY IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH SALVATION

Persistent adulteries (with many sinful partners) or adultery that persists (with one sinful partner) can be an indication that a *professing* believer may never have had a spiritual new birth (1 John 3:8-10). The severity of sin is not an indication of whether or not one is a believer in Christ. Rather, persistent sinfulness that is legitimized, embraced, and excused throughout one's entire life—practicing sin as a way of life—is the hallmark characteristic of a non-believer. Adultery is but one possible indication of purposeful and deliberate on-going sinfulness.

**1 John 3:8-10**, Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

The possibility of a *professing* believer not having an authentic belief in Christ should be considered if that person unhesitatingly continues to pursue adultery in spite of clear admonitions from God's Word. Such behavior may indicate a lack of understanding of divine truth. A notable characteristic of an unbeliever is the *consistent* inability to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). On the other hand, such purposeful belligerency could also be obstinate disobedience by a wayward, self-oriented believer, which invites the discipline of the Lord (Hebrews 12:5-6).

**1 Corinthians 2:14**, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

**Hebrews 12:5-6**, And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

If a *professing* believer willfully continues to sin or gives excuses for not dying to self in order to live for Christ, then concerned believers should help that person examine the reality of an authentic walk with Christ. This action is often part of the church discipline and restoration process.

**2 Corinthians 13:5**, Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

See [Church Discipline and Restoration Process](#)

As a starting point, the foundation of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection with regard to spiritual life should be reviewed. It should be apparent that any *professing* believer who continues in willful sin cannot legitimately claim to be following Christ (John 8:34-36; Romans 6:1-2, 12-13).

**John 8:34-36**, Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin (*in an on-going manner or as a way of life*) is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (*explanation added*)

**Romans 6:1-2**, What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? . . .

**Romans 6:12-13**, Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your

members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

A believer in Christ might cease following the Savior for a period of time. By God's grace, however, believers who sin in such a shameful manner, and subsequently repent, will eventually acknowledge their sins (1 John 1:8-10). Authentic repentance brings a believer back to "running the race" (Hebrews 12:1-2) and obeying God's Word out of love for Jesus (John 14:23-24).

**1 John 1:8-10**, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

**John 14:23-24**, Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup>Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

Whenever Christ-like character development is needed, then God's transforming power is linked to a believer's wholehearted commitment to Christ and subsequent obedience to God's Word. This divine plan for change will produce lasting results over a period of time. Simply stopping sexual sin and renewing marriage vows hold no such promise. Almost anyone can stop sexual sin for a period of time, renew marriage vows, and remain unchanged!

See [You Can Change ... One Step at a Time](#)

#### **INCOMPLETE CONFESSION WITH REGARD TO ADULTERY**

More often than not, adultery is mistakenly viewed as a "stand alone" sin. This shortsightedness affects the confession of a participant in adultery, diminishes the spectrum of forgiveness which family members and friends are to extend, and neglects the areas of life that should be addressed by an adulterous person and those helping him/her toward spiritual and relational restoration.

When a person confesses the sin of adultery, typically the only sin mentioned is sexual unfaithfulness. What about all the other sins that were also committed in the course of marital betrayal? If an accurate confession of adultery is to be made, all associated sins and steps involved in this downward spiral of relational treachery should be confessed as well.

Often, those committing adultery will find it more difficult to confess the many sins that have contributed to their unfaithfulness than it is to confess the sin of physical adultery. However, the more complete the confession, the more an adulterous person demonstrates a personal awareness of neglecting God and betraying one's life companion. Additionally, when a confession deals with every aspect of adultery—from its beginning stages to its devastating fruition—then a more comprehensive plan for restoration can be developed.

*In light of the importance of an accurate and complete confession of adultery (and any other sin), see [Confession—The Ultimate Test of Truthfulness](#)*

#### **PREPARATION FOR A COMPLETE CONFESSION OF ADULTERY**

Fellow believers who have a vital walk with Christ can encourage and help an adulterous spouse to be restored to the Lord and, hopefully, to one's marriage companion (Galatians 6:1-2). As fellow believers provide biblical counsel and assist in the development of a complete confession, the healing provided through the confession of sins can also be realized (James 5:16).

**Galatians 6:1-2**, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

**James 5:16**, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

To avoid potential stumbling blocks for those involved in the restoration process, a female believer counseling alone should meet only with another woman (or women). Similarly, a male believer counseling alone should meet only with men (Romans 14:13, 19). A Christ-honoring couple who love God (1 John 5:3) and one another (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a) can also help a couple deal biblically with adultery's aftermath.

**Romans 14:13, 19**, Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother ... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

**1 John 5:3**, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.<sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.<sup>8</sup> Love never ends.

*NOTE: A complete confession that reveals sexual unfaithfulness along with all associated sins should not be expected from a person currently practicing adultery or from a person who will not repent of past adulterous behavior. Such a person will not initially tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." In fact, this person cannot do so.*

See [Telling the Truth is Naturally Impossible](#)

*On the other hand, a person who has committed adultery and wants to confess will always confess sexual infidelity. A complete and truthful confession that exposes all other sins associated with adultery, however, is impossible apart from an authentic commitment to the Lord. This commitment will include a period of significant biblical self-evaluation that results in a wholehearted practice of following Christ by obedience to Scripture. As the Holy Spirit works in the repentant person's life there is an expectation of conviction of other sins, many of which were related to adultery. These sins should be confessed at an appropriate time.*

The appropriate time for a more complete confession from an adulterer to his/her spouse is determined largely by two factors:

- (1) the readiness of the adulterous person to give as complete a confession as possible and
- (2) the willingness of the betrayed spouse to grant biblical forgiveness (*see NOTE below*).

Not only is a complete confession often difficult to accomplish, but the willingness to grant biblical forgiveness can be a significant challenge as well.

See [Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility](#)

*NOTE: If the betrayed spouse is an unbeliever, then understanding and granting biblical forgiveness is impossible, since an unbeliever cannot understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). If the betrayed spouse is a believer who indicates an unwillingness to forgive an adulterous companion, then further teaching and encouragement by fellow believers should be offered with regard to obeying God's Word concerning forgiveness.*

*In either of the above situations, a repentant adulterer may be willing to state a complete confession to his/her spouse, but the spiritual readiness of a spouse to hear such a confession has not developed. As a result, a complete confession may have to be postponed. In fact, a complete confession may never be stated to a betrayed spouse due to persistent unbelief in Christ or on-going unwillingness by a believer to grant forgiveness. Since Proverbs 15:23 reminds us that "a word in season is good," a complete confession spoken at the wrong time is problematic at best and detrimental at worst. This reality does not mean that a marriage cannot be restored to some level, but a marital restoration linked to both spouses being fully committed to Christ and God's Word will be delayed.*

*Part of the motivation for a complete confession is not only for an adulterous person to acknowledge the wide spectrum of past sinfulness, but it also provides opportunity for the betrayed spouse to grant Christ-honoring forgiveness. Simply going through the motions of a complete confession when the betrayed spouse is either an unbeliever or an unforgiving believer will produce an incomplete outcome that may be even more troublesome than the present situation.*

*Even if a complete confession is not stated to one's spouse, an adulterous spouse claiming to be a believer should confess adultery's associated sins to at least one other believer of the same gender for purposes of restoration to the Lord and the development of a practical, biblical plan for all of life.*

See [Personal Communication that Requires Wisdom and Prayer](#)

A complete confession, heard by the offended spouse and/or another believer, can be a significant step that furthers a restored walk with Christ by a professing believer who has committed adultery.

**Proverbs 28:13**, Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

**James 5:16a**, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

A complete confession also allows the offended spouse who is a believer in Christ to experience the spiritual reality of granting Christ-centered forgiveness. Authentic repentance that is met by gracious mercy powerfully demonstrates the difference that Jesus makes in one's personal and family life.

See [\*Merciful Justice—Thankful Response to Christ's Love\*](#)

## CONSEQUENCES OF ADULTERY

Many consequences of adultery are mentioned in Proverbs, chapters 5 through 7, but that list is certainly not exhaustive. Also, the consequences revealed in Proverbs will occur whether the sexual instigator is male or female. The aftermath of adultery is far-reaching, and its effects can last a lifetime. As with any sin, God will not be mocked. Adulterers and all others who live according to self-centered desires will "reap what they sow" (Galatians 6:7-8).

**Galatians 6:7-8a**, Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption . . .

The consequences of adultery immediately impact the marriage that now has a broken covenant.

- The one flesh relationship of a husband and wife is physically expressed by sexual intercourse. Adultery, however, is an affront to the one flesh relationship of a husband and wife, since it is a betrayal of the marital covenant. A person can experience the physical aspect of being "one body" with any sexual partner but cannot have a "one-flesh" covenantal relationship with anyone except one's spouse (Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:16).

**Genesis 2:24**, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

**1 Corinthians 6:16**, Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."

- With regard to the two verses above, one commentator points out, "The words spoken by God were first spoken of marriage, and are here applied to an unholy union. Paul does not place the two on the same plane but only points out that in this one respect they are similar."<sup>2</sup> Basically, the simple act of joining bodies sinfully is inconsistent with the biblical reality of the intimate unity in marriage.
- When adultery occurs, the marriage bed is now defiled, and the adulterer is under God's judgment (Hebrews 13:4).

**Hebrews 13:4**, Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

- The possibility of a divorce becomes a reality (Matthew 19:8-9).  
**Matthew 19:8-9**, He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery.
- Meaningful aspects of a marriage may become unimportant. For example, the wedding anniversary date may be meaningless, along with pictures, gifts, wedding rings and other items associated with the wedding day. Special memories or celebrations and even holidays that involve family gatherings may be purposefully put aside as well.
- Questions that previously seemed improbable are asked and, for believers, Christ-honoring answers are sought. *The following are just some of the questions that can be encountered in adultery's aftermath.*

### From the betrayed spouse (a professing believer)

Did I do anything to contribute to this horrible situation?

Should my adulterous mate confess to me all the details related to the adulterous conduct?

How can I know if my spouse has truly repented or is remaining deceptive and dishonest?

Is there any beneficial reason for me to communicate with my spouse's partner in adultery?

If I inadvertently meet the partner in adultery in everyday life, what should be my response?

Is it possible to be loving to an adulterous mate? If so, how, especially when I have no desire to do so?

Is it unloving or not honoring to Christ not to sleep in the same bed with my adulterous spouse?

How can I draw closer to the Lord when my thoughts return constantly to the horror of adultery?

Should my adulterous spouse have freedom to travel alone and meet with other people?  
 Who should have open communication with my adulterous spouse and who should not?  
 May fellowship resume with some of our friends, and what are the parameters of interaction?  
 What level of accountability is appropriate for someone who has proven to be untrustworthy?  
 How much information should be shared with our children about their adulterous parent?  
 How can I know that my adulterous mate is telling the truth now and from this point on?  
 How can I be sure if I should stay in this marriage or pursue a divorce?  
 How should I respond to the many reminders of adultery that surface in everyday life?  
 What assurance do I have that my spouse is not communicating with the adulterous partner?  
 What communication guidelines with others should be instituted for me and my spouse?  
 What steps can I take to stay in our home when I am sickened to be around my spouse?  
 Are there legal steps to get custody of the children and move away from my spouse?  
 When I talk with my friends, are there aspects of the adultery that should not be mentioned?  
 Is there a prayer plan or specific verses that provide help and comfort after adultery?  
 I still love my spouse. What are the best ways to demonstrate this?  
 How is it possible for the beauty of marital sex ever to be restored after this defilement?  
 What if my spouse will not agree to be tested for a sexually transmitted disease (STD)?  
 If my spouse has a STD, what do I have to do to be tested and receive medical treatment?  
 How can I demonstrate that I have truly forgiven my adulterous spouse?  
 If my spouse will not repent, how do I participate in the church discipline and restoration process?  
 Whom should I talk to about my situation and whom should I not talk to?  
 Since I don't know what to do next, where in the Bible can I find specific guidance?  
 How can I be sure that my adulterous spouse has discarded all memorabilia (notes, clothes, gifts, everyday items) associated with adultery?

#### From the couple

What can be communicated to those who ask us about the adultery and our future plans?  
 Who can provide biblical counsel to help each of us grow in Christ after this marital catastrophe?  
 Should legal matters (divorce, child custody) be explored and is this helpful or harmful?  
 How can we raise and discipline our children as needed when we are no longer a united couple?  
 Which fellow believers can be contacted to provide biblical help when things seem hopeless?  
 Where in the Bible does it say what can be done with a marriage after adultery has occurred?  
 Is it better to move apart and decide months later about marriage and/or family restoration?  
 If our marriage is restored, should we move out of the area to have a fresh start?  
 If we can't move away, how should our parameters of daily life and our relationships change?  
 Should we leave our current church (or job, school, employment, etc.) in an effort to "start over?"

#### From the adulterous spouse (a professing believer)

Am I truly born again, or have I been mistaken about my own salvation?  
 Should I confess details of my sin as I remember them or wait to state a complete confession?  
 Should I try to contact my partner in adultery by myself and ask for forgiveness?  
 If my adulterous counterpart contacts me, what should be my biblical response?  
 If I have contracted a sexually transmitted disease (STD), should I or the doctor inform my spouse?  
 If my confession is so horrific that my spouse is unable to hear it all, do I try again later?  
 How should I respond in daily activities when my spouse wants nothing to do with me?  
 What can I do to convince my spouse that I want to stay in our marriage?  
 What is my response when I recognize my spouse's continuing anguish over my sin?  
 If my spouse files for divorce, how should I respond when I don't want a divorce?  
 What can I do to let other believers know I need help to be restored to Christ and my mate?

What can I say to family members to express my sorrow for what I have done?  
 Should I get my mate's approval before I speak with anyone about my adulterous behavior?  
 How can I stay in a marriage in which I am "damaged goods"?  
 Is it even possible to lovingly approach my spouse sexually without creating difficulties for both of us?  
 What steps should I take to be in fellowship again with other believers? Is this possible?  
 Should I travel to the grocery store or run errands without my mate's knowledge?  
 To try to save my marriage, am I to do everything that my spouse tells me to do?  
 How is it possible to show love to my spouse after what I have done?  
 Should I ask my mate to watch me discard memorabilia associated with my adultery?  
 What am I to do if my spouse refuses to forgive me?  
 What if I want to contact my adultery partner to see what is happening on that side?  
 What can I do to assure my spouse that I am not pursuing anyone for adulterous purposes?  
 Can I know for sure that the Lord will restore my marriage?  
 If my mate does not want me anymore, should I file for divorce?  
 What results can I expect if I eventually decide I don't want to stay in this marriage?  
 What if I do not want to stay in this marriage and even want to pursue my adulterous partner further?

If answers were written to all of the above questions, hundreds of pages would be necessary to cover all contingencies. In fact, there are dozens more questions that are not listed but could be asked. Just think of the many questions that other friends and acquaintances would have! The reason to list questions like those above is not to answer all of them in this study but to demonstrate that many new challenges of life and marriage result from adulterous behavior.

Adultery is one of the greatest trials in any married person's life but, as in every challenge, God has a plan by which a believer can overcome the power of sin, die to self, grow in Christ, and bring glory to the Lord. This plan can be realized as a believer relies on God's power, prays from a Christ-centered perspective, and obeys God's Word, especially with regard to demonstrating biblical love no matter what the circumstances.

*For a biblical understanding of the purposes of trials, see [Trials...God's Pathway for Growth and Grace](#)*

You can have steadfast confidence in the complete trustworthiness and sufficiency of Scripture to deal with every aspect of life and relationships. All the answers to every possible question related to adultery and its aftermath are available in the Bible, and purposeful study will reveal biblical answers and Christ-honoring responses.

The consequences of adultery not only impact a married couple but also create significant challenges for other family members and friends.

- For example, the obvious question arises, "Will there be a divorce?" That question is confusing and often "world-shattering" for children whose daily life is linked with an adulterous parent. That question also produces discomfort among adult friends and family members who assumed most, if not all, of their relationships with others were safe and secure.
- The unimpeded fellowship that once characterized any group (especially one comprised of believers) will inevitably be altered when an adulterous person is discovered in the group.

Often, adulterous partners have a common set of friends. Some of these friends may be believers in Christ, and others may not be Christians. Both types of friends, when made aware of the adulterous situation, will respond differently. The interaction among a circle of friends is usually altered permanently as a result of adultery between members of the friendship group.

Typically, family and friends do not know how to respond to a person who has committed adultery, and neither do they know what steps to take with regard to the betrayed spouse. Some friends may have their own "skeletons in the closet" with regard to adultery and do not want to be involved with someone else in adultery's aftermath. Other friends and family members may have a sense of betrayal in light of the deceptive lifestyle of someone close to them and will not resume unimpeded fellowship until this betrayal of friendship is dealt with.

Other friends and family members may withdraw from fellowship because of extreme sorrow, and others may ease away from on-going fellowship because of extreme anger. On the other hand, others may respond by

weeping when they talk with a couple impacted by adultery. Others will commit to pray, some will phone, some will write, some will volunteer to help with daily chores or child care, some will invite the aggrieved couple to dinner, and others will admit they don't know what to do but will privately reaffirm their love to the couple whose marriage has been devastated by adultery.

Since the discovery of adultery within a relational network can engender various responses from many individuals, it is impossible for relationships to be the same as they were before adultery was discovered in the fellowship. By God's grace, many of these relationships will eventually come to honor the Lord and be an encouragement for others to grow continually in Christ. Adultery is committed privately, but its aftermath has public ramifications that can last for decades.

Thankfully, believers have God's grace, the abiding presence of Jesus, the guidance of God's Word, and the comfort and power of the Holy Spirit to help them be overcomers in the aftermath of adultery. Even though Satan is a destroyer, believers can rest in the promise of 1 John 4:4, "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

- Besides impacting relationships that can be observed externally, there is an unseen battle that occurs in the hearts (minds) of those affected by adultery. The three major tests in this regard are **Memory**, **Reminder**, and **Imagination (M.R.I.)**. *The following is based on pages 5-6 of [Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility](#)*

The betrayed spouse as well as a repentant adulterer are especially vulnerable to losing a consistent, Christ-like focus because of the potential anguish related to **m**emories, **r**eminders, and **i**magination associated with adultery. These mental challenges are areas in which concerned believers can prayerfully encourage those impacted by adultery to stay focused on Christ.

**1 John 5:3-5**, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup>For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

**Hebrews 12:1-2**, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. *(emphasis added)*

**Memories** related to adultery can resurface and be significant hindrances for a believer to practice biblical forgiveness. These memories often focus on painful situations that were accompanied by significant emotions and/or distress. For example, a betrayed mate might remember when his adulterous partner vehemently denied any wrongdoing in a relationship with the person who later proved to be a partner in adultery. Other memories involving suspicious or strange messages, missing telephone bills, absences not accounted for, missed or inexplicable cancellation of appointments, unanswered phone calls, unexplained gifts, and schedules that were not followed are all memories that can resurface at unexpected times. Also, an adulterous spouse who repents can experience sorrow and feelings of guilt whenever memories resurface of personal, overwhelming self-centeredness that resulted in lies, purposeful deceit, and sexual betrayal.

**Reminders** of past sins can be triggered by situations in everyday life, and their appearances often are unexpected.

*To minimize unexpected reminders of adulterous behavior, a person can eliminate some of them in advance. For example, any reminders of adultery such as clothing, pictures, memorabilia, letters, or gifts should be discarded. Any locations, events, stories, or songs that are associated with adulterous life should be avoided.*

*Some reminders of past sins, however, are out of anyone's control and can surface without notice. Because of their unexpected occurrences, reminders that are associated with adulterous behavior are especially troublesome to those recovering from adultery's treachery. Since the world has such a casual perspective toward adultery, a person impacted by marital betrayal is bombarded with persistent references to adultery in pictures, humor, movies, music, books, daily news, television shows, and conversations of others. These everyday reminders of marital unfaithfulness present some of the most significant hurdles to overcome in order to maintain growth in Christ.*

*\* One of the most impacting reminders of adultery for someone who has committed adultery is to inadvertently encounter the adulterous partner in situations of everyday life. A repentant adulterer must develop a contingency plan of response to this situation prior to such an encounter. This plan must be based on prayer and "departing" (actually fleeing) as quickly as possible with no unique, personalized communication such as "how*

are you?” or other inquiries about common acquaintances, events, or past behavior. The only statement that might be made would be similar to: “I have sinned against you and my (wife/husband), and I do not want any further contact or communication with you. I pray that you will turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and help in your life as I have done. Do not try to contact me any further.” It is not wise to smile or, in any way, to indicate that the relationship could possibly continue in any dimension. The contingency plan must also include noting the location and time of the unexpected meeting as well as reporting this encounter to one’s spouse and others helping to restore one’s marriage. A contingency plan must also include what to do if the adulterous partner will not accept rejection but, instead, will eagerly (perhaps even forcefully) pursue the former adultery partner for purposes of immediate verbal communication. If an adulterous partner physically pursues a former adultery partner who walks away from an unplanned encounter, the person departing may find the only recourse is to cry out verbally for “help” from bystanders. A person repenting from adultery should contact his/her spouse and other believers involved in the restoration process as soon as possible to report any unforeseen contact with a former adulterous partner.

A spouse of an adulterous marital companion should also know how to respond if the corresponding adultery partner is inadvertently met. Remembering God-honoring forgiveness, biblical love, and Matthew 7:12 (So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them), a betrayed spouse committed to Christ and God’s Word would have foundational truth from which to communicate in this awkward, unforeseen situation. A basic guideline is to focus only on the persons that are in the conversation. Questions about or references to spouses of the communicants are not appropriate since perspectives or judgments about others typically concern matters of the heart, a dimension that is accurately known only by God.

**1 Samuel 16:7b**, man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

Imagination related to adultery deals with unknown or imagined possible sin(s) that are mentally linked to known sins. Imagination of this type can create disturbing emotions.

A believer should respond to a **M.R.I. (Memories, Reminders, Imagination)** test by:

- praying for all known persons, who are impacted by adultery, including one’s self,
- giving thanks for personal salvation and for the Lord’s continuing help to grow in Christ,
- rejoicing that every trial is common and can be overcome by relying on the Lord and His Word,
- trusting in the Lord instead of yielding to anxiety, worry, or any other feeling that can inhibit on-going growth in Christ,
- redirecting thoughts away from despair to verses and scriptural promises declaring hope,
- verbalizing or reviewing verses that have been memorized specifically for **M.R.I.** situations,
- moving one’s attention away from sinful situations and back to God’s love and forgiveness,
- removing one’s self from situations, verbal communication, or any person(s) exhibiting an acceptance or casual view of adultery.

The above biblical responses to **M.R.I.** trials are based on the following verses:

**Psalms 118:1**, Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

**Romans 12:2**, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**1 Corinthians 10:13**, No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5**, For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

**Philippians 1:6**, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 3:12-14**, Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

**Philippians 4:6-8**, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**1 Thessalonians 5:22**, Abstain from every form of evil.

- In addition to **M.R.I.** challenges, sorrow can often overwhelm those impacted by adultery and, in turn, affect relationships, health, appetite, work habits, and sleep patterns. Some aspects of sorrow can even last a lifetime. Every facet of daily life and relationships, however, is addressed in the Bible. Believers impacted by adultery can turn to God's Word to learn how to address sorrow in a biblical manner in order to bring honor to Christ and grow in Him.

Refer to [Sorrows that Last a Lifetime](#)

- Sometimes, to protect fellow believers and to better encourage Christ-like growth in all concerned, an adulterous person may be asked to leave the church family/group. This possibility only occurs when both participants in adultery are part of the same church.

This prayerful decision obviously affects the spouse of the adulterous person as well as other family members. This action is considered only after consistent prayer, biblical study, and purposeful evaluation by the spiritually mature believers who have the best interests of the couple and group in mind.

*If you have not heard of this type of decision before or do not understand the scriptural basis undergirding it, please study [Adulterous Church Members ... Should They Stay or Leave?](#) and [When and How to Leave a Church ... Or Not](#), especially pages 10-11.*

- Adultery undermines one's testimony for Christ. The marriage relationship is designed to reflect the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Body, the Church. Take time to review Ephesians 5:22-34, especially verses 31-32 (below), to be reminded of this divinely ordained reflection.

**Ephesians 5:31-32**, Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

By God's design, a Christ-centered husband and wife have a powerful relational platform of loving devotion and commitment to one another from which to live for Jesus and share His Good News with others. In addition, a Christian married couple can vividly demonstrate the sacrificial love and unity that Christ extends to His people, which is a bold contrast to the worldly understanding of love that is rooted in lust and self-fulfillment.

When adultery shatters a marriage, however, the authenticity of a couple's past Christian witness can easily be brought into disrepute. It would be understandable for non-believers to conclude, "Why listen to them? They are no different from anyone else" or "What's the big deal with believing in Christ? It didn't help them all that much."

Part of the evil of adultery is not only that it destroys families, but it also undercuts the validity of the Gospel message. On the other hand, a couple recovering biblically from the horror of adultery can demonstrate Christ-likeness in the restoration of their marriage.

**Colossians 3:12-14**, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,<sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

- Another far-reaching consequence of adultery is that it diminishes the time and effort that believers can invest in ministry and evangelism. When adultery occurs in a marriage, that couple now has to concentrate most, if not all, of their time to deal with adultery's aftermath. Supportive believers also have to commit time to come alongside those impacted by adultery, diverting time and energy from sharing Christ with unbelievers as well as encouraging other believers to grow in Christ.

On the other hand, the efforts expended by those in the family of God to help restore another's marriage exemplify what it means to love others (1 Peter 4:8), restore the fallen (Galatians 6:1-2), and respond to others as they would want others to respond to them (Matthew 7:12).

**1 Peter 4:8**, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

**Galatians 6:1-2**, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

**Matthew 7:12**, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

- Not surprisingly, Satan has other goals in mind for adultery besides the potential dissolution of a marriage and the crippled spiritual vitality of those affected by this sin. Satan uses adultery's devastating results to curtail the Good News of Jesus Christ in every way possible.

## THE PRIMARY EVIDENCE OF AUTHENTIC REPENTANCE

Many of Satan's purposes can be thwarted, even in the aftermath of adultery, by the authentic repentance of an adulterous mate and a restoration of the marriage relationship. In this regard, perhaps the key spiritual question that accompanies revealed adultery is, "Will the adulterous mate truly repent?" If an adulterous person verbally indicates a desire to repent, how can anyone know for sure that an unfaithful marital partner has repented from such devastatingly sinful behavior?

Practically speaking, if the *betrayed* spouse does not recognize repentance in an adulterous mate, then marriage restoration that can honor Christ will be delayed, at best, and made impossible, at worst. By God's grace, an adulterous person can truly repent and begin to demonstrate change right away . . . and every day thereafter. The betrayed spouse, of course, is in a prime position to witness the reality of such authentic repentance.

First of all, remember that almost anyone can "pause" from committing a specific sin for a period of time, especially when consequences are severe. Pausing from a particular sin is not the issue, but the *motivation* to stop committing a particular sin is of critical importance. If the motivation to stop committing adultery is to minimize consequences or even to save one's marriage, then the motivation can easily be short-lived because the hoped-for behavior change is dependent on circumstances or other people. The only sure and lasting motivation is to live for Christ. When motivation for change is not Christ-centered, then what was perceived as "stopping" adultery can revert to being just a "pause" before adultery is resumed, even years later, with the same or a different adulterous partner.

On the other hand, if the motivation behind repentance is to live for the Lord and obey God's Word, then circumstances or other people cannot hinder on-going repentance. Authentic, biblical repentance cannot fail, because the foundation for on-going change is God's Word coupled with His grace, mercy, strength, love, and forgiveness.

Even though a betrayed spouse cannot know the initial motivation of an adulterous mate with regard to repentance, the betrayed can know if one's adulterous mate is truly repentant as time goes on. The usual tendency to evaluate the validity of repentance is to focus on cessation of known sinful behavior. As has been noted, almost anyone can "pause" sinning in a specific area when the stakes are high enough. On the other hand, the primary evidence of authentic repentance is observable, Christ-honoring changes associated with all aspects of daily life and relationships. Authentic repentance that results in a total life change comes only from God's empowerment and transformation at the very core of one's life.

When the Lord changes a person's heart, the repentant person will begin to view *everything* associated with daily life and relationships from a Christ-centered perspective instead of being dominated by self-interest. Practical and observable changes over such a wide spectrum of life cannot occur all at once, but some specific changes will be noted almost immediately. One of the most clearly evidenced changes is often a keen awareness of personal shortcomings in daily life, which a repentant spouse will address by promptly asking for forgiveness.

Changes that are foundational to all aspects of Christ-likeness will become evident in the life of a person who wholeheartedly repents from adultery. For example:

Prayer, Bible study, and scripture memory will become integral to each day's routine.

**Colossians 4:2**, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

**2 Timothy 2:15**, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

**Psalms 119:11**, I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Humbly considering others as more important than one's self will become paramount.

**Philippians 2:3-4**, Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Telling the truth will become a way of life.

**Ephesians 4:25**, Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

God's Word will be applied to daily life when a believer wholeheartedly trusts God instead of one's self.

**Proverbs 3:5-8**, Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. <sup>7</sup> Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

**Psalms 119:165**, Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

In pursuit of Christ-like growth, fellowship with mature believers will be sought.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**, And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Since repentance involves change, and change is a process, a repentant believer can benefit from a biblically based plan that focuses on practical growth in Christ ("putting off" sinful behavior and, in its place, "putting on" Christ-honoring practices).

See [\*You Can Change ... One Step at a Time\*](#)

#### **SOME WORDS OF CAUTION REGARDING REPENTANCE**

Results of repentance do not follow a predictable pattern, so one should not assume that repentance is false when some areas of life seem to change and others are perceived to remain the same for a period of time. Often, one or two behavior patterns will dramatically change toward Christ-likeness, and these observable changes indicate that a person is turning from sin and associated self-centeredness in order to live for Christ.

The results of repentance also do not follow a specific timeline. Authentic repentance will eventually encompass much more than one or two specific sins that are put off initially out of love for the Lord and His Word. As a repentant person dies to self and takes biblical steps to live for Christ, many self-centered aspects of life and relationships will be put aside as Christ-honoring attributes take their place. Even though a betrayed spouse will want "things to be fixed" right away, Christ-like character change in a repentant adulterous person takes time. A betrayed spouse can faithfully pray for an adulterous mate to repent fully while, simultaneously, trusting God that His work of restoration will be completed according to His divine timetable.

#### **THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO AN ADULTEROUS BELIEVER WHO WILL NOT REPENT**

It is not surprising that adulterous *un*believers will continue in sinfulness and do what they feel like doing even though they are creating untold difficulty for themselves and their families. Drug addicts and alcoholics are prime examples of this type of on-going physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational self-destruction. Similar self-destruction is also characteristic of people who persist in sexual expression outside of the marriage relationship.

Unbelievers do not understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14) and remain enslaved to sin apart from believing in Christ for salvation (Romans 6:6-7, 2 Peter 2:19b). Realizing an adulterous unbeliever's lack of spiritual insight and power, a believer should present the Good News of Jesus Christ (John 3:16) in the context of reviewing the difficulties that adultery has precipitated.

**1 Corinthians 2:14**, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

**Romans 6:6-7**, We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For one who has died has been set free from sin.

**2 Peter 2:19b**, . . . For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

**John 3:16**, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

On the other hand, there is a specific three-step approach in Matthew 18:15-17 that explains how to respond to a professing believer who will not repent of specific sinful behavior.

**Matthew 18:15-17**, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup>But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

A believer's failure to repent indicates a profound self-centeredness that lends itself to continued sinful behavior, not only sexually but in many other areas of life. Persistent sin is not only personally detrimental, but it creates even greater difficulties for one's family, friends, and members of the Body of Christ. With some of sin's effects already observable and more anticipated, those in the Body of Christ are to follow God's plan in an effort to restore a fellow believer to Christ-like living. This expression of loving concern is often described as the church discipline and restoration process.

See [Church Discipline and Restoration Process](#)

### **LINGERING GUILT FEELINGS—A MAJOR CHALLENGE FACING AN ADULTEROUS SPOUSE WHO REPENTS**

For an adulterous spouse, repentance is a necessary part of God's plan of restoration. Authentic repentance, however, is often accompanied by an almost overwhelming sense of guilt in someone who has committed adultery. A repentant spouse, however, must deal biblically with this justifiable guilt in order to grow in Christ and be divinely prepared for the potential restoration of one's marriage. With regard to dealing with guilt from a biblical perspective, review:

[Responding to Guilt . . . and Changing Accordingly](#)

As you will discover in the above study, it is illusive, illogical, and impossible to forget one's sins or to forgive one's self as a biblical alternative to dealing with guilt feelings. Please refer to the following studies that deal directly with these two well-known subjects that contradict scriptural truth.

[Forgetting Your Sins . . . What Does the Bible Say?](#) and [The Futility of Forgiving Yourself](#)

When guilt feelings surface, a repentant believer can review promises from God's Word such as the following verses. These, and many others, are spiritually beneficial to memorize for daily use.

**Psalms 103:10-14**, He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup>For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup>As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. <sup>14</sup>For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

**Matthew 5:4**, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

**Romans 4:7-8**, Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

**Romans 8:1**, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>*And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* (emphasis added)

**2 Corinthians 5:17**, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

**Philippians 1:6**, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

**Colossians 2:13-14**, And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup>by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

**1 John 1:9**, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

### **FORGIVENESS AND LOVE—MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR A BETRAYED SPOUSE**

What should a betrayed spouse do in order to respond biblically to an adulterous mate? In a nutshell, a betrayed spouse

should concentrate on three critical aspects of following Christ. The first is to be ready and willing to grant forgiveness. The second is to grant and maintain forgiveness from the heart. The third is to faithfully demonstrate Christ-honoring love as a way of life.

See [\*Forgiveness—Granting It and Maintaining It\*](#) and [\*True Love is Not Based on Feelings\*](#)

Love and forgiveness are foundational to God's relationship with His children (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, Colossians 2:13).

**John 3:16**, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**Romans 5:8**, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**Colossians 2:13**, And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Divine forgiveness provides the pattern for believers to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).

**Ephesians 4:32**, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Divine love also sets the example for believers to follow in loving others (Ephesians 5:2, 1 John 4:7).

**Ephesians 5:2**, And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**1 John 4:7**, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Since biblical love and biblical forgiveness are vital to one's understanding and practice of following Christ, the following studies are provided for review and application:

[\*Loving an "Unlovable" Mate\*](#)

[\*Are You a Loving Person?\*](#)

[\*Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility\*](#)

[\*God's Word Speaks—Forgiveness & God's Love\*](#)

#### **PRAYER: EVER-PRESENT COMMUNICATION WITH GOD ALMIGHTY**

When significant challenges occur, there is an impetus to pray. When problems of life become almost overwhelming, prayer—sometimes treated as an option—becomes a necessity. As a believer grows in Christ, prayer will become more spontaneous, more meaningful, more worshipful, more thankful, more dependent, more persevering, and even more necessary. Predictably, a couple that overcomes the devastation of adultery to develop a Christ-honoring marriage will be as spiritually dependent on prayer as they are physically dependent on breathing.

See: [\*Prayer—A Viable Option or an Absolute Necessity\*](#) and [\*A Prayer Pattern to Help Structure Your Life\*](#)

When one's marriage is the focus of prayer, the most pressing concern is, understandably, the anticipated answers to prayer. Hindered by limited wisdom and boundless emotion, we often want God to answer our prayers quickly and according to our perspective. Yet, God answers prayer in a greater dimension than anyone can comprehend (Ephesians 3:20-21).

**Ephesians 3:20-21**, Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

In His loving sovereignty, God's answers to prayer bring Him glory. His answers to prayer show His gracious consideration of the request. His answers also demonstrate His loving care for the person voicing the request, the people who are the focus of the request, and others affected by the request. Believers in any trial are to trust the Lord and pray with persistence and in faith.

See: [\*God Always Answers Prayer but Not as We Think\*](#)

#### **SCRIPTURE MEMORY: THE EVER-PRESENT WORD OF GOD**

Both the betrayed spouse and the repentant spouse can enhance spiritual growth in Christ by memorizing Bible verses that deal with God's love, grace, mercy, restoration, and forgiveness. Verses that focus on other aspects of one's walk in Christ are also of great value.

Every married person, no matter what the condition of one's marriage, can benefit from having memorized verses available as a reminder of God's goodness and faithfulness. Scripture memory is a practical way for God's Word to be immediately available in daily life. Many potential memory verses are listed in this study. Other meaningful verses are discovered in personal Bible reading and public teachings. Scripture memory is not difficult, as the following article reveals:

See: [\*The Easy Way to Memorize Scripture\*](#)

For a more comprehensive study associated with memorizing Scripture, see:

[\*Memorizing Scripture . . . For a Change\*](#)

## **BECOMING A "COVENANT COUPLE" AGAIN**

Due to the shattering effect of adultery on a marriage relationship, the adulterous spouse and the betrayed spouse must initially face much of adultery's repercussions individually. This does not mean that each must face adultery's consequences alone. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are always available to help, comfort, and strengthen each partner in a shattered marriage. God's Word provides guidance in all situations of life. Prayer is also vital to deal with adultery's aftermath in a biblical manner. From a human perspective, each marriage partner who desires to grow in Christ will typically want to meet with maturing fellow believers of the same sex for prayer and biblical counsel. Typically, a couple working to restore their marriage will seek other couples who can encourage them as well.

As the betrayer and the betrayed advance along individual paths of Christ-honoring change, there will be times in which their paths must cross for purposes of verbal communication. Initially, these "crossings" will simply deal with on-going matters of everyday life that every married couple encounters (meals, childcare, household chores, daily responsibilities outside the home, health issues, meeting and job schedules, etc.).

A significant meeting will focus on an adulterous spouse's confession of adultery and the many sins associated with marital betrayal. In response, the betrayed spouse will, by God's grace, grant forgiveness. The results of this initial "confess/forgive" meeting would be enhanced by the presence of at least one spiritually mature couple with a vibrant faith and Christ-honoring marriage. Any Christ-honoring married couple can be an instrument of God's grace by praying with and for the struggling couple and can review promises from God's Word that speak to comfort in trials and the blessings of biblical obedience.

See [\*God is Faithful and Trials ... God's Pathway for Growth and Grace\*](#)

Typically, other "confess/forgive" meetings between marriage partners impacted by adultery will occur as often as needed as either spouse confesses daily transgressions and the other grants forgiveness. Also, an adulterous spouse may, from time to time, remember previously unconfessed sins associated with adulterous behavior and will ask for forgiveness. These on-going, often spontaneous, times of communication also provide a foundation for discussions that deal with practical aspects of daily life. Because of their spontaneity, on-going meetings of a couple recovering from adultery will, for the most part, be private and part of everyday life. At some time, there will be truthful and open communication about sexual relations and its purpose to express the growing love each has for the other.

A couple relying on God's power and provisions to restore their marriage will share scriptural insights with each other along with meaningful verses discovered in personal devotions. They will pray with one another, encourage one another by mentioning Christ-like changes recognized in each other, and lovingly serve one another in practical aspects of life. They will prayerfully support and reassure one another when their love is expressed sexually, realizing that this divinely ordained expression can, in itself, create a significant challenge in light of its similarity to previous sinful involvement outside of the marriage relationship.

A couple, recognizing the benefits of fellowship in the Body of Christ, will take steps to meet periodically with other couples whose marriages exalt Christ. These "couple meetings" are primarily for purposes of prayer, Bible study, biblical counsel, fellowship, and practical encouragement, all of which bring honor to Christ.

Adultery is one of the greatest traumas that a marriage can encounter. Yet, if a couple will wholeheartedly commit their lives to Christ and live according to God's Word in adultery's aftermath, their marriage can be resurrected from a relational ash heap to a relationship that displays God's glory. Even though some consequences of adultery can never be erased, a husband and wife who have struggled through adultery's repercussions to experience and give the love of Christ to one another are battle-tested in spiritual warfare and are living examples of God's redemptive grace.

God's perfect plan, however, is that a husband and wife never experience the nightmare of adultery. Instead, the Christ-

like growth in their individual lives is to blossom through their marriage relationship so that the love and unity with one another will reflect the relationship of Jesus and His Church.

## SUMMARY

1. Adulterous behavior, which may not even involve sexual relations with another person, is a disavowal of the marriage promise to keep and cherish the marital covenant of companionship.
2. Any perception that a person has with regard to wholeheartedly following Christ and obeying God's Word while in an adulterous relationship is delusional and contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. In reality, a person in an adulterous relationship is living according to fleshly desires and following Satan's plan to destroy marriage relationships.
3. A Christian couple's witness for Christ is severely hampered, sometimes for many years, when either partner becomes entangled in adultery.
4. The numerous sins that *always* accompany adultery have to be addressed if a person who has committed adultery is to be restored to right relationships with God and others in every area of life.
5. Adultery produces some consequences that can never be reversed. Sin inevitably produces horrendous results, and various aspects of life and relationships will always carry the scars inflicted by sexual infidelity.
6. People—marriage partners, family members, friends and often an entire church—who are devastated by adultery's consequences can continue to follow Christ wholeheartedly and, by God's grace, can confidently proclaim His goodness, mercy, forgiveness, and love while in sorrow.
7. In spite of the horror and consequences associated with adultery, God's promises of "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20) and "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28) provide hope for everyone impacted by adultery.
8. All individuals affected by adultery who faithfully continue to abide in Christ and obey the Word of God will receive the blessings of the Lord (John 15:7, James 1:25).

**John 15:7**, If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

**James 1:25**, But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Adultery is far worse than you might think. God's grace, forgiveness, and restoration, however, are all much greater than you can imagine. Nothing can separate us from God's love, and what He has purposed for one's spiritual benefit—even out of tragedy—He will accomplish. Pray that the horror and devastation of adultery will never be visited on you, your family members, or your friends. If this catastrophe does occur, however, know that God can still be glorified as His children rely on His power and His Word to bring them to a place of confidence and overflowing thankfulness for His continued work in their lives.

---

1. Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical theology: <http://www.studydrive.org/dic/bed/view.cgi?number=T361>

2. J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 901.