



Adultery

## ADULTERY

DAVID M. CARDER

(Hosea 1)

People faced with adultery struggle with some of the most painful of human emotions: abandonment and betrayal, as well as anger and despair. Although adultery strikes at the heart of the marriage covenant, forgiveness and healing are possible, and broken marriages can be and are being restored.

### RISING FREQUENCY

General estimates of human behavior suggest that as many as one man in two and one woman in four have had extramarital affairs. There have been several major changes in our culture which have impacted marital faithfulness. Many individuals did not have their own emotional needs met as they were growing up, and they approach marriage with painful emotional deficits that they subconsciously hope will be filled by their spouses. These individuals may enter marriage needing, and then demanding, more affection, attention, and affirmation than any one person can give.

In the changing work environment, men and women frequently work and minister in close contact with each other, which can lead to emotional and physical intimacy. Marriages are often stressed with the pressures of the careers of each spouse. Excessive and unrealistic work demands can cause burnout, anxiety, and depression for the individuals involved. And finally, an increasing number of Christians are falling victim to individuals with a history of sexual infidelities.

Other factors such as a family history of physical and sexual abuse, an early exposure to pornography, as well as a family history of alcoholism can contribute to marital infidelity. Certain marital styles seem to increase the risk for marital unfaithfulness. *Intimacy avoidant* is a marital pattern where the spouses pick on each other and criticize each other in order to

keep emotional distance in the relationship. *Conflict avoidant* is a pattern, in which emotional distance is created because neither spouse wants to discuss marital disappointments and unhappiness. As a result, both spouses settle for a less than fulfilling marital relationship. Both marital styles fail to nurture the individual spouses and leave the partners vulnerable to looking outside the marriage for their emotional needs to be met.

Stressful circumstances like the death of a loved one or a serious accident or illness can also cause a marriage to be vulnerable to infidelity. Other stressors that can create vulnerability are family transitions, such as a pregnancy or the last child leaving home, and life changes such as relocation or a change in employment.

### HEALING PROCESS

Healing is possible after infidelity. Increasing numbers of couples are braving the path of healing and restoration of their marriages. To begin the healing process, both spouses will need to understand what caused the infidelity in the marriage. This will require a long, thoughtful look at the marital pattern that has developed, as well as what each person has contributed to the marital breakdown. Difficult though it is, each spouse should focus on his or her own issues as opposed to criticizing and blaming the other person for the problem of infidelity.

Like rebuilding a wall brick by brick,

a couple can begin to rebuild trust in each other by telling each other the truth and by being accountable to each other. It is vital for each person to keep his or her word. If one spouse promises to do something, he or she needs to follow through and do it. Finally, trust can be rebuilt by using gestures of affection and nonsexual touch to express caring and affirmation.

Later in the healing process, both spouses will need to take time for restoring and enriching the marriage. The restoration process involves identifying and reestablishing what was good about the marriage before the adultery. The enriching process involves learning and implementing new skills and behaviors to strengthen the relationship.

### **HELPING FRIENDS**

At some point, you may also need to support a friend going through recovery from adultery. First of all, two of the best gifts that you can give your friend are to pray and to listen. Resist the impulse to "fix" your friend's marriage or to prejudge whether or not your friend should get divorced. He or she must make that decision.

Don't take a role in your friend's relationship where you are the go-between. Encourage both people in the relationship to talk with each other. Don't work harder at making this marriage work than your friend is working at it. This is your friend's marriage and your friend needs to work at saving it.

Be aware that being close to someone who has experienced infidelity can "rattle" your own marriage. The other person's experience can make you painfully aware of issues you are failing to deal with in your own marriage. This can be a great opportunity to work on "affair proofing" your relationship by beginning to spend time, energy, and even money on it. Most of us marry because we want to be more con-

nected to our spouse. We want to spend more time together, to give and receive more affection. The demands of daily living can often drain energy out of these responses. Here's a chance to renew them.

Most of all, pray daily for each other and for your relationship, and don't give up working on your own marriage.

### **CONCLUSION**

Remember that if your spouse has been unfaithful, or if you are helping a friend who is struggling with infidelity, you are not alone. Many Christians have experienced restoration in their marriages after adultery has taken place. Although the process can often take a long time, healing and recovery are possible through the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, healing, supporting, and helping spouses forgive one another and rebuild their marriage on a solid biblical foundation.

### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of adultery include:

- Exodus 20:14, 17
- Proverbs 6:32; 28:13
- Matthew 5:27-32; 19:3-10
- Romans 13:14
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

---

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on adultery at Proverbs 5:1-23 on page 806. See also the personality profile of the woman caught in adultery on page 1384.

---

- 8 Remove your way far from her,  
And do not go near the door of her  
house,
- 9 Lest you give your honor to others,  
And your years to the cruel *one*;
- 10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth,  
And your labors go to the house of a  
foreigner;
- 11 And you mourn at last,  
When your flesh and your body are  
consumed,
- 12 And say:  
“How I have hated instruction,  
And my heart despised correction!  
13 I have not obeyed the voice of my  
teachers,  
Nor inclined my ear to those who  
instructed me!
- 14 I was on the verge of total ruin,  
In the midst of the assembly and  
congregation.”
- 15 Drink water from your own cistern,  
And running water from your own well.
- 16 Should your fountains be dispersed  
abroad,  
Streams of water in the streets?
- 17 Let them be only your own,  
And not for strangers with you.  
Let your fountain be blessed,  
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
- 19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe,  
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
- 20 And always be enraptured with her love.  
For why should you, my son, be  
enraptured by an immoral woman,  
And be embraced in the arms of a  
seductress?
- 21 For the ways of man *are* before the eyes  
of the LORD,  
And He ponders all his paths.
- 22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked  
*man*,  
And he is caught in the cords of his sin.
- 23 He shall die for lack of instruction,  
And in the greatness of his folly he shall  
go astray.

## DANGEROUS PROMISES

- 6 **My son, if you become surety for your  
friend,**  
If you have shaken hands in pledge for a  
stranger,  
You are snared by the words of your  
mouth;  
You are taken by the words of your  
mouth.
- 3 So do this, my son, and deliver  
yourself;  
For you have come into the hand of your  
friend:  
Go and humble yourself;  
Plead with your friend.  
Give no sleep to your eyes,  
Nor slumber to your eyelids.

## KEY PASSAGE



Adultery

## ILLICIT ATTRACTION

(5:1-23)


The Bible does not speak against sexual fulfillment—in fact, sexual delight and marital love are exalted in the Song of Solomon. The Bible does, however, speak against sexual sin. One of the warnings that runs through Proverbs is to avoid the immoral woman. The warning implicitly acknowledges the power and attractiveness of illicit sex at certain times in life. Adultery is a great tragedy, for it has severe consequences. People risk all that they have built over a lifetime—marriage, family, ministry, respect, honor—when they commit adultery. Sexual sin can be very appealing, almost an overwhelming temptation.

The way out is to rejoice in one's marriage and to be satisfied with one's spouse's love (5:18, 19). Sexual fulfillment is always depicted in the Bible as within the boundaries of marriage. To violate that commitment will lead to pain, grief, and self-destruction.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adultery on pages 1128, 1129. See also the personal-profile of the woman caught in adultery on page 1384.

## AN ADULTERESS FACES THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

<sup>53</sup>And everyone went to his *own* house.<sup>a</sup>

 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>2</sup>Now early<sup>a</sup> in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup>Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, <sup>4</sup>they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught<sup>a</sup> in adultery, in the very act. <sup>5</sup>Now Moses, in the law, commanded<sup>a</sup> us that such should be stoned.<sup>b</sup> But what do You say?"<sup>c</sup> <sup>6</sup>This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>7</sup>So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up<sup>a</sup> and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."<sup>8</sup> And again He stooped

down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience,<sup>a</sup> went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. <sup>10</sup>When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her,<sup>a</sup> "Woman, where are those accusers of yours?<sup>b</sup> Has no one condemned you?"

<sup>11</sup>She said, "No one, Lord."

**7:53** <sup>a</sup>The words *And everyone* through *sin no more* (8:11) are bracketed by NU-Text as not original. They are present in over 900 manuscripts. **8:2** <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *very early*. **8:4** <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *we found this woman*. **8:5** <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *in our law Moses commanded*. <sup>b</sup>NU-Text and M-Text read *to stone such*. <sup>c</sup>M-Text adds *about her*. **8:6** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text and M-Text omit *as though He did not hear*. **8:7** <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *He looked up*. **8:9** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text and M-Text omit *being convicted by their conscience*. **8:10** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *and saw no one but the woman*; M-Text reads *He saw her and said*. <sup>b</sup>NU-Text and M-Text omit *of yours*.

## PERSONALITY PROFILE



Adultery

## THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY: SIN NO MORE

(JOHN 8:1-11)

An odd scene greeted Jesus one day in the temple. As He was teaching, a commotion began as the religious leaders dragged before Jesus a woman caught in the very act of adultery. The religious leaders told Jesus that Moses' law demanded her death. Actually, the law demanded death for *both* the man and the woman, not just the woman (Deut. 22:22). Why the woman alone was brought is unclear; it is clear, however, that the leaders were interested in trapping Jesus into saying something for which they could condemn Him. For Jesus not to condemn her would be to go against Moses' law; yet these leaders doubted that Jesus would give the order to have her stoned. So they asked, "What do You say?" and then all involved awaited His answer with keen anticipation.

The unfolding scene pictures both condemnation of sin and redemption of sinners. Jesus did not condemn the woman, but neither did He let her off the hook. As the guilty leaders left, one by one, realizing that they were not without sin, the woman surely was incredulous at what Jesus had just done on her behalf. Jesus had saved her life, but He wanted to do more than that. When the woman answered Jesus' question saying that no one had condemned her, He answered, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Jesus offers forgiveness to all sinners. The sin of adultery is extremely painful—betraying trust and leading to broken hearts and lives. Those caught in the web of adultery—real or merely fantasized—need to get out as quickly as possible. The excitement is not worth the ultimate price. Jesus can give people the strength to avoid the temptation, to flee the sin. He says to those willing to repent and turn away, "Go and sin no more."

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adultery on pages 1128, 1129. See also the key passage note at Proverbs 5:1-23 on page 806.

And  
denn y  
<sup>12</sup>The  
am the  
shall  
of life

JESUS C  
<sup>13</sup>The  
bear wi  
true."

<sup>14</sup>Jes  
I bear  
for I  
going;  
from a  
cording  
judge  
if I do  
ment is  
not alor  
the Fath  
<sup>17</sup>It is  
your la  
true. <sup>15</sup>  
and the  
Me."

<sup>19</sup>The  
ther?"  
Jesus  
My Fath  
have kn  
<sup>20</sup>The  
as He r  
hands o

JESUS P  
<sup>21</sup>The  
ing awa  
your sin



had a  
Fathe  
(10:3  
Topic

- 5 Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the  
hand of the hunter,  
And like a bird from the hand of the  
fowler.<sup>a</sup>

#### THE FOLLY OF INDOLENCE

- 6 Go to the ant, you sluggard!  
Consider her ways and be wise,  
7 Which, having no captain,  
Overseer or ruler,  
8 Provides her supplies in the summer,  
And gathers her food in the harvest.  
9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard?  
When will you rise from your sleep?  
10 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to sleep—  
11 So shall your poverty come on you like a  
prowler,  
And your need like an armed man

#### THE WICKED MAN

- 12 A worthless person, a wicked man,  
Walks with a perverse mouth;  
13 He winks with his eyes,  
He shuffles his feet,  
He points with his fingers;  
14 Perversity is in his heart,  
He devises evil continually,  
He sows discord.  
15 Therefore his calamity shall come  
suddenly;  
Suddenly he shall be broken without  
remedy  
16 These six things the LORD hates,  
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:  
17 A proud look,  
A lying tongue,  
Hands that shed innocent blood,  
18 A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that are swift in running to evil,  
19 A false witness who speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among  
brethren.

#### BEWARE OF ADULTERY

- 20 My son, keep your father's command,  
And do not forsake the law of your  
mother.  
21 Bind them continually upon your heart;  
Tie them around your neck.  
22 When you roam, they<sup>a</sup> will lead you;  
When you sleep, they will keep you;  
And when you awake, they will speak  
with you.  
23 For the commandment is a lamp,  
And the law a light;  
Reproofs of instruction are the way of  
life,  
24 To keep you from the evil woman,  
From the flattering tongue of a seductress.  
25 Do not lust after her beauty in your  
heart,  
Nor let her allure you with her eyelids.  
26 For by means of a harlot  
A man is reduced to a crust of bread;  
And an adulteress<sup>a</sup> will prey upon his  
precious life.  
27 Can a man take fire to his bosom,  
And his clothes not be burned?  
28 Can one walk on hot coals,  
And his feet not be seared?  
29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's  
wife;  
Whoever touches her shall not be  
innocent.  
30 People do not despise a thief  
If he steals to satisfy himself when he is  
starving.

6:5 <sup>a</sup>That is, one who catches birds in a trap or  
snare 6:22 <sup>a</sup>Literally it 6:26 <sup>a</sup>Literally a man's  
wife, that is, of another

#### SOUL NOTE



**Fresh Water (5:15–23)** This beautiful metaphor describes the joy of marital fidelity. To “drink water from your own cistern” pictures the marriage partners belonging only to each other, “enraptured with” each other’s love. By contrast, to become enraptured by another, to turn to adultery, may feel exciting at first, but will end up being “bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” (5:4). God’s Word clearly teaches that married people should keep their vows and remain committed to each other. Adultery is embracing a false love—it will hurt everyone involved. **Topic: Adultery**

and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.

<sup>9</sup>"Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. <sup>10</sup>I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. <sup>11</sup>I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. <sup>12</sup>And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. <sup>13</sup>Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. <sup>14</sup>Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD.

#### JERUSALEM'S HARLOTRY

<sup>15</sup>"But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. <sup>16</sup>You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on

them. *Such* things should not happen, nor be.

<sup>17</sup>You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. <sup>18</sup>You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. <sup>19</sup>Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord GOD.

<sup>20</sup>"Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. *Were* your acts of harlotry a small matter, <sup>21</sup>that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire? <sup>22</sup>And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood.

<sup>23</sup>"Then it was so, after all your wickedness—'Woe, woe to you!' says the Lord GOD—<sup>24</sup>that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. <sup>25</sup>You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be

#### SOUL NOTE



**God the Jilted Groom (16:8-14)** This passage about God's love for Jerusalem despite the nation's idolatry pictures God as a jilted groom reminding His bride of all that He has done. If it seems strange to think of God as a scorned lover, it shouldn't. How often do we reject Him to follow our own desires and impulses, only to return later begging for forgiveness? We can find great comfort in the fact that our heavenly Father can empathize with the pain of someone who has been betrayed by a loved one. Knowing that He understands can help us trust Him in our own hurt and pain.

**Topic: Adultery**

#### SOUL NOTE



**The Beauty Myth (16:15)** Though "harlot" refers to Jerusalem, and the "harlotry" to spiritual idolatry, the passage also teaches about trusting in the wrong things. The city trusted in its beauty and fame; so do many people.

Trusting in one's own beauty or sex appeal can lead to all kinds of problems, including sexual sin. Devastated relationships, poor self-image, and life-altering diseases are just a few of the lingering effects of sexual sin. God did not give us rules regarding our sexuality to spoil our fun; He did it to enhance our pleasure, to provide a guilt-free, worry-free way to express physical love. **Topic: Sexual Sin**

them. <sup>25</sup>Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

**THE BEATITUDES**

**5** And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. <sup>2</sup>Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

- “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed *are* those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> Blessed *are* the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.
- <sup>7</sup> Blessed *are* the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> Blessed *are* the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.  
Blessed *are* the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.
- <sup>10</sup> Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**BELIEVERS ARE SALT AND LIGHT**

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?

It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. <sup>16</sup>Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

**CHRIST FULFILLS THE LAW**

<sup>17</sup>“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. <sup>19</sup>Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called

least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

**MURDER BEGINS IN THE HEART**

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘*You shall not murder,*’<sup>a</sup> and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother *without* a cause<sup>a</sup> shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. <sup>23</sup>Therefore if you bring

<sup>5:21</sup> <sup>a</sup>Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17  
<sup>5:22</sup> <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *without a cause*.

**SOUL NOTE**



**In the Heart (5:27)** Quoting from Exodus 20:14, Jesus reminded His listeners of the commandment against adultery. Then He said that looking at another person lustfully is committing adultery in one’s heart. Jesus explained that thinking about an act is the same as doing it, because actions begin with thoughts and desires. Since lust and adultery are first embraced in the mind and heart, believers should try to avoid situations that cause temptation. **Topic: Adultery**

your gift to your brother. <sup>24</sup>leave your eye. For and then cover your adversary’s way with his to the judge officer, and surely, I say out of there

**ADULTERY IN**

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said of old,<sup>a</sup> ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ I say to you that whoever looks lust for her with her eye, you to sin. for it is more your member body to be hand cause from you; if one of you whole body

**MARRIAGE IS**

<sup>31</sup>“Further divorces his of divorce. divorces his immorality<sup>a</sup> and whoever divorced com

**JESUS FORBID**

<sup>33</sup>“Again those of old shall perform say to you. heaven, for earth, for it



believers God’s pe