

The Vice of Sexual Immorality

We are living in the midst of a tremendous moral revolution. New systems of belief are springing up everywhere. Most of our society is pleasure oriented. The mood is permissive and daring. There is an attitude of irreverence toward God and toward sacred things. There has been a very definite change from the standards accepted just a few decades ago. Our age is reeking with sexual immorality.

The Bible speaks clearly about the sins of sexual impurity and emphatically condemns them (1 Corinthians 6:9), while at the same time it holds forth the hope that those who have been guilty of practicing immorality can be saved (1 Corinthians 6:11). The seventh Commandment says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). These are God’s negative words of prohibition. The Lord states the positive side in Proverbs 5:18-19 when He says that we should rejoice with the wife of our youth and that her affection should fill us at all times with delight. The key Bible passage on the subject of sexual purity says, “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Why is the sexual relationship only proper within marriage? One answer is that God knew that a physical relationship between a man and a woman might lead to the birth of a child, and God knew that the child would need the loving tender care of a father and mother—and therefore He has given His blessing to the sex relationship only within the family situation of marriage where the children will most likely get that loving care. And thus any sexual activity outside the honorable bond of marriage is immoral and impure. It is a wicked and shameful sin.

1. The Kinds of Adultery

The word “adultery” means “to corrupt, to make impure”—and thus adultery is a broad term that refers to a variety of perversions and illicit activities. Adultery (in its broadest sense) includes any violation of the sanctity of sex. It includes incest and rape and seduction and fornication and lewdness and lasciviousness and unfaithfulness and promiscuity and homosexuality and harlotry and whoredom and a whole realm of related impurities.

a) Physical adultery—is the act of having sexual intercourse with someone other than one’s own married partner. Leviticus 18:20 spells it out plainly: “Thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbor’s wife.” That is physical adultery.

David, in the Old Testament, committed adultery, and while he was forgiven, he carried his sorrow down to the grave. Some of you may have committed the sin of immorality. You husbands may actually have gone to bed with another woman, and have been unfaithful to your wife. Or perhaps some of you wives may have had illicit relations with another man and have been unfaithful to your husbands. Unless you have confessed your sin and righted things with God and man, someday you will find yourself a sinner in the hands of an angry God. God will judge all forms of impurity—fornication, adultery, lesbianism, sodomy, etc. No one can get away with it, no matter how hidden the bedroom is!

b) Legalized adultery—is possible because the laws of many countries permit divorce and remarriage. Divorce is legal for most causes in the U.S.A. But Jesus plainly states, “Whosoever shall put away his wife

and marry another, commits adultery against her” (Mark 10:11). The same words are spoken about the woman who divorces her husband.

It was legal to divorce and remarry in Paul’s day (and in John the Baptist’s day) under Roman law. But John the Baptist plainly told Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother Philip’s wife” (Mark 6:18). In God’s law, the marriage vows unite a man and a woman for life, and only death can separate that union. The remarriage of a divorced person constitutes a state of adultery, and while it is often legal according to the laws of the country, it is sinful in the eyes of God.

c) Mental adultery—is the kind of adultery resulting from the lustful look. It is possible not to touch a woman, and yet at the same time, dwell on books and pictures and magazines and TV shows in such a way that the imagination runs wild. Many dream of sin, and imagine sin, and if granted the opportunity would indulge in sin; all they lack is the occasion of sin.

We must never allow sinful imaginations to accumulate in our minds, any more than we would permit garbage to pile up in the living rooms of our houses. Jesus not only forbids outward acts of filthiness, but He also condemns unchastity of heart. He says that anyone who looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28). The word “looks” speaks of continuous action. Jesus is not talking about the momentary involuntary glance which might arouse a wrong desire, but He is condemning the act of being habitually preoccupied with illicit sex. Most physical adultery is an act that begins with a lustful look.

d) Provoked adultery—is the adultery that results when someone makes it easy for another to commit adultery. In Matthew 5:32, Jesus speaks about divorce and says that one who puts away his wife “causeth her to commit adultery.” Or, some delight in stirring up the passions of others by telling dirty stories, showing filthy pictures, and dwelling upon the unclean. Still others dress immodestly, parading themselves in shorts, transparent, form-fitting clothes—seemingly purposely to accentuate parts of the body to attract the opposite sex.

If a person is a partner in a crime, or helps plan a crime, or if he provokes the crime—he stands as guilty as the one who committed the crime—even though he himself did not actually commit the wrong act. Just so, the one who by actions or dress, incites wrong passions in others—is just as guilty of immorality as is the person who is wrongly attracted. For example, the jeans and slacks that the girls wear are often so tightfitting in the right places, that they are clearly immodest and thus provoke adultery in the minds of men. The man who is wrongly attracted, as well as the girl who dresses in a sinfully attractive way—both are equally guilty before God.

These have been various kinds of adultery.

2. The Results of Adultery

Adultery is wrong for a number of reasons. It violates God’s law. It hurts people. It affects future generations. Adultery is a serious sin.

a) Adultery destroys society. Immorality and licentiousness have swept nation after nation out of existence. The sins of impurity brought fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of adultery strikes at the heart of the social order. It strikes at the home, and when the home is

weakened, society crumbles. The Roman Empire and other great nations of the past toppled because sexual immorality ran wild.

b) Adultery brings guilt to the individual. Illicit sex brings feelings of guilt and shame. It robs a person of peace. It makes the conscience hurt. In Psalm 51 we find the Psalmist David seeking God's forgiveness because of the sting of guilt which his adultery with Bathsheba had brought upon him. David reaped what he sowed, because after his escapade with Bathsheba, things were never quite the same. He would gladly have traded the tragic later years of his life, for the innocence he had once known when he was still a shepherd boy tending his father's sheep.

c) Adultery harms other persons. A man who commits certain kinds of sins can say, "This is my own private business." But sexual sins are different; they harm other people. Many say that sex is a function of the body just like eating and sleeping and drinking, and thus it is a bodily demand that must be satisfied. They reason that if one does not satisfy the demand it will cause all kinds of emotional problems. But we must remember that eating and sleeping and drinking are individual actions—whereas sex by its very nature is an inter-personal relationship. More than one person is involved. Therefore, when it is misused, it has far-reaching effects. It harms not only one individual, but also the partner in the act.

3. The Remedy For Adultery

Today every one of us is living in a world full of suggestions to commit sexual immorality. And so each of us needs a defense system that is strong in order to withstand the temptations to become lascivious.

a) Dare to be different from the world about you. Fix it clearly in your mind that Christians should be different. The world around us—unsaved people (perhaps our neighbors, our associates at work, our classmates in school)—we love them; there is much to admire in them; we want them to come out on the Lord's side; we need to pray for them and be kind to them—but those who are unconverted live in a different world and are headed for a different destination. They are slaves to a different master. The way we live, the kinds of company we keep, our manner of speech, and the way we dress—must be different from the sinful practices of the world.

b) Avoid circumstances that may lead to problems. God tells those who seek purity to "flee." We are to "flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to "depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). We must steadfastly avoid any person or activity or occasion which might cause us to fall. Make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1). Stop your ears from all filthy conversation. Limit television viewing. Read nothing that defiles the imagination. Stay out of places and away from people who lean toward immoral activities. If you don't want to do business with the devil, then stay out of his shop!

c) Turn to Christ for the gift of moral strength. One who receives Christ as Master and Director of his life, has One who helps him face temptation, and gives him power to say "yes" to purity and to say "no" to the frightening pull of sin. One who receives Christ, receives also the gift of the Holy Spirit—a Custodian who helps us keep the body pure and clean. We must cultivate a sense of the presence of God, realizing that the eyes of the Lord "are in every place beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). We need to pray often the words of the hymn, "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be."

To those who have trifled with fornication and adultery and homosexuality there is good news. Mary Magdalene had been immoral, but Jesus changed her life. Jesus told the woman who was caught in the

very act of adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.” Jesus never once condoned sins of immorality. He always condemned sexual impurity, but for those who acknowledge their sin, and make the appropriate confession, and break up wrong relationships, and resolve to live a clean life—there is complete forgiveness and total cleansing. You may very well carry scars of your sin down to the grave, but Jesus Christ can save you if you are willing to meet the conditions. Why not turn your life over to Him?

-Harold S. Martin

BIBLE HELPS / Robert Lehigh, Editor / PO Box 391 Hanover, PA 17331 United States of America