

Avoiding The Affair

Introduction. If you were to see a large, red sign on a ramp going onto a freeway that said, "Do Not Enter," would you resent or appreciate it? I would not want to go up a ramp heading into traffic the wrong way. Yet, many people look at God's commandments that say, "Don't do this," and say, "I cannot believe God would not let me have any fun." But God is trying to protect our lives and our souls. As we look at the beauty of marriage, there is one key sin that God forbids. And yet, despite that fact, millions of marriages are destroyed by it. This prohibition is found in Exodus 20:14: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Adultery will always be a major problem in every culture. Our culture even mocks the word! When was the last time you heard the word "adultery" on television or read it in the newspaper?

The National Opinion Research Center determined that only about 4% of married people had sexual partners other than their spouse during a one-year span. Overall, infidelity has been practiced by only 21% of men and 13% of women. Tom W. Smith, of the NORC, said, "There probably are more scientifically worthless 'facts' on extramarital relations than any other facet of human behavior." Although these results are heartening, if we taught drug education the way we teach sex education in school, we would be passing out needles, saying, "We know you are going to do it, so we will teach you how to do it right." We need to strongly emphasize fidelity.

Someone might say, "Everybody is doing it, what is the big deal?" First, it is a big deal because adultery defies God. We give our children a number of reasons for not engaging in premarital and extramarital sex. We tell them that a pregnancy might occur, they might contract AIDS or some other disease, they might embarrass themselves or their family, it can change the course of their life forever, etc. All of these reasons are true, but the number one reason for telling our children to abstain from sex outside of marriage is because God condemns it. Joseph, in Genesis 39, was a slave in Potiphar's household and Potiphar's wife was coming on to him. Finally, she grabbed him one day and said, "Come lie with me." The young man knew who the sin was really against (Genesis 39:9).

Second, it is a big deal because it defies marriage. God is the Creator of the sexual gift. He is the one who made us male and female and designed for us the beauty of intimacy. But, as with all of His marvelous gifts, God puts parameters around them for their beneficial use. God says, "I have given you the sexual drive. There is nothing evil about it when it is properly controlled and expressed within marriage; when used outside of marriage, it is destructive and wrong" (1 Corinthians 6:13, 16, 18; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4).

Third, it is a big deal because it destroys families. Nothing annihilates and leaves more moral shrapnel in the family than adultery. Most of the time, it ends the marriage, it alienates the children, and it creates wounds that never heal. Even in a best case scenario, it crumbles all trust, trust that was a lifetime in the making and will never be what it once was. Now that we have seen why adultery is such a big deal, we are going to look at some ways to prevent adultery. You need to commit what we say somewhere in your home and in your heart.

I. *Commit To God's Standards*

- A. Adultery is never an option. There are no circumstances under which it is right, nor is there justification for it. If anybody had any rationale for entering into an affair, it was Joseph. He had every excuse in the world. He could have said, "I am young and my hormones are raging. My mother is dead, my father overindulged me, and my brothers hated me. Everybody in Egypt is doing it. She wants it and I have been abused because nobody loves me."
- B. Instead he said, "I am not willing to sin against my God." He was committed to God's standard (Psalm 119:9). Solomon wrote more of his proverbs about adultery than any other subject (Proverbs 5:15-23). If you really want to protect your marriage, you need to say again to your mate, "I have decided that regardless of any decision that you may make, by the grace and power of God, I will never be unfaithful to you."

II. *Consider The Potential Consequences*

- A. It is good to remind yourself occasionally of the devastation and the destruction that can be caused by sexual sin (Proverbs 6:32-33; 7:15-18, 24-27).
- B. The cost of maintaining, repairing, and restoring your marriage, no matter what it takes, is always less than the cost of adultery. If you do not believe me, go back and ask David. Do you think he would have carried through with his urge for Bathsheba if he had known the cost (2 Samuel 12:10)? There is no way he would have purposefully lost the child (2 Samuel 12:18), Amnon (2 Samuel 13:29), Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:25) because of the rebellion in his own life. Adultery is not love, it is selfishness.

III. *Cultivate Your Marriage*

- A. A growing relationship with your spouse will reduce the appeal of an affair. Dr. Willard Harley, a well-known marriage counselor, once wrote, "For years, I would tell people to stay together, work on communication skills, and remember your commitment. I found they

just kept getting divorced on the national average.” He concluded, “What dawned on me in this generation, if marriages are going to be saved, we needed to teach husbands and wives how to meet each other’s emotional needs so that they will be emotionally healthy and happy.” Therefore, the best way to affair-proof your marriage is to meet your mate’s needs. After interviewing thousands of people, Dr. Harley discovered that the top five needs for men (in order) are sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, attractive spouse, domestic support, and admiration. The top five needs for women (in order) are affection, conversation, honesty, financial support, and family commitment.

- B. It is amazing to note that the top five emotional needs for a man do not intersect at all with the top five for a woman. No wonder we have trouble adjusting to marriage! Most men go into a marriage thinking they have married someone very much like themselves. So they set out trying to meet the emotional needs they feel they would like met only to discover their wife is frustrated because she does not have those needs at all. Women do exactly the same to men. Because men’s and women’s needs are so different, many people feel cheated shortly into their marriage. You need to meet your mate’s needs so that they will never have the need to look to anybody else. People want someone to convince them they are still loved, lovable, and very special. One preacher said, “Keep your lawn so green that it makes everybody else’s look brown by comparison.”

IV. ***Control Your Mind***

- A. If I want to affair-proof my marriage, I need to control my mind. No one just falls into immorality.
- B. Although it may seem pretty popular on television, the “one-night stand” really does not exist. Affairs actually develop in a very precise manner.
 - 1. Step one is accepting sinful thoughts into your mind. Your thoughts control your emotions, your emotions control your decisions, and your decisions control your actions (James 1:14-15). Sadly, too many of us have garbage disposals in the kitchens and garbage dispensers in the living room (cf. Romans 16:19; 2 Timothy 2:22). It is sad to find children of God who are wise about everything evil and know very little about what is good.
 - 2. Step two is emotional, non-physical involvement. To assume that all is well between a man and a woman because there is no physical contact is a mistake. If you are a man who finds a woman at work or church offering you comfort, understanding, support, and sympathy, you are on extremely dangerous ground. One married

- woman had this to say about a man she was pouring her heart out to and had fallen more and more in love with: "I just thank God he never touched me. If he ever had, I would have been a goner." She knew that she had emotionally committed herself to him.
3. Step three is physical involvement. Once you have crossed this line, the power of sin is enormous. The major factors contributing to extramarital relationships is physical and emotional attraction (78%), far outdistancing marital dissatisfaction (41%).
 4. Step four is rationalizing the affair. We are all great at deceiving ourselves. People will say, "I just know that God wants me to be happy." No, God just wants you to be obedient. If you are, He will make you happy (Acts 8:8, 39; 13:52; 16:34). People also go into it in a premeditated way thinking, "God will forgive." How big a fool do you think God is? Do you think God cannot see through that? Do you want to stand before God after being so capricious with His forgiveness (Revelation 20:13-15)?

V. ***Contain Other Relationships***

- A. Statistics show that most affairs occur between close personal friends, family members, or co-workers.
- B. Since we have to deal with people daily, how you conduct those relationships is essential. There are several practical steps which can help you contain relationships.
 1. Do not let a member of the opposite sex tell you about their marriage problems. The moment you are sympathetic, they will reach out to you, and you to them.
 2. Watch what you say. It is better to say nothing than to give a wrong signal. You may think it is harmless joking, but the other person may think differently.
 3. Be aware of attraction. All of us have been in settings where we notice there is a spark between you and another person. At that point, you have two choices. You can either fan that flame, or you can douse it. Choose the latter.
 4. Avoid a prolonged stare. In our culture, there is a socially unwritten rule about how long you can catch someone's eye and hold it without it being inappropriate. You are asking for trouble if you flirt and have those prolonged stares.
 5. Avoid a lingering touch. If someone hugs you too long or touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, it is a dead giveaway.
 6. Curtail the opportunities. Do not place yourself in situations where you know you are going to be tempted (1 Corinthians 10:12). Be

careful of business travel, friends in bad marriages, and the workplace. They are all areas of opportunity!

Conclusion. A few hundred years before Christ, Demosthenes wrote, "We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes. So long as a man supported his wife and family there was no shame whatsoever in extramarital affairs."

Adultery is not a victimless crime. If there are people out there you are being tempted by, get away from them. Do not try to hang on or drag out the situation. This may mean changing jobs, changing places where you live, or changing congregations, but do it! Resolve today that you are going to live morally pure for the rest of your life before God.