

2 Huge Stumbling Blocks That Sabotage Reconciliation After Adultery

Author's Note: Due to the popularity of this series, we are re-running the episodes. You can watch my message on divorce and re-marriage live this Sunday at .

The Bible describes the intoxicating power of passion associated with lust and adultery. Misdirected passion deceives, misleads and influences ... we walk in darkness, stumbling ... unable to see what we stumble over. This description well explains why so many caught in sexual sin describe a sense of confusion and a disconnect from God. Adultery moves us from the altar to the courtroom—transforming a couple, once deeply in love, into bitter enemies. Hopes and dreams for the birth of a child, now twisted, become a nightmare for innocent children. Adultery is selfishness at its core.

How sad that sexual appetites often devour our own children as well as ourselves. Proverbs 9:17-18 (NKJV) describes adultery: “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

Adultery hardens the heart toward spouses—those who were once loved and cherished now feel insignificant and discarded. Children often feel to blame for not being good enough, not trying hard enough. God help our selfish hearts! It would seem, that for loving parents, the thought of this horror would bring sexual sin to a sobering halt.

Sexual sin's ultimate goal is to destroy the marriage: “Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15b). John 10:10a (MEV) adds, “The thief does not come, except to steal

and kill and destroy.” Often, the only way out of adulterous and destructive relationships is to do what is right regardless of feelings. Feelings can be unstable and deceptive, but obedience to scriptural truths can be trusted.

The pain of adultery can make us bitter, or it can make us better—ultimately, it’s our choice. God can restore if the person is willing to admit they are wrong. True repentance is unconditional and takes full responsibility for wrongs done. A truly repentant person is desperate to be forgiven, to focus on what they have done rather than placing blame or responsibility on others. Don’t misunderstand: Both spouses have work to do, but this comes later.

Two areas often prevent reconciliation:

1. Complete separation never occurs. Reconciliation is nearly impossible if complete separation does not occur between the couple involved in adultery. The spouse often feels that this new person makes them feel loved and appreciated, and that may be true, but so did their spouse when they first met. The type of love that God calls us to have does not leave people—people leave it. Deception lies in the fact that we often do not see the full effect of an affair until sin is fully grown. Unrepentant sin brings death to the restoration process—death to clarity, direction and peace (see James 1:14-15).

Sexual sin hardens the heart and closes off forgiveness and brokenness. Again, when we are caught in sin, we are in darkness and we cannot see the things we stumble over. This is deception at its core. We lose the spiritual vision to see truth, believing that God will turn a blind eye or be unconcerned. Worse yet, some even believe that God directed them to the adulterous relationship.

Completely stepping out of the other person’s life to see where God will lead is the only way to clear vision. I often wonder how many marriages are never restored simply because of

pride and disobedience. Many “say” they will stop communicating with the other person, but the truth is that they are afraid to lose the relationship—it’s often a back-up plan. The adulterer is often more concerned about the feelings of the other person than the feelings of their spouse and family.

2. Genuine repentance does not occur. Many are sorry about adultery, but being sorry is not enough. Only genuine repentance opens the ears of God and restoration. Many are sorry that they got caught; sorry that their reputation and life are ruined and so on. The difference between sorrow and repentance is vital because the two can be easily confused. It’s not about “being caught”; it’s about “coming clean.”

It’s possible to be sorry about the consequences of sin, but not truly repentant. A penitent person turns from their sin. They accept full responsibility for their actions without blame, resentment or bitterness. When repentance is genuine, reconciling with those injured is a priority. Forgiveness is sought without conditions. We take full, not partial, responsibility for our actions.

How can a truly broken and repentant person continue in a relationship they know is wrong, a relationship that is destroying their family? They can’t. A person who is genuinely repentant will jump at the opportunity to foster restoration. Actions reveal the condition of the heart. Those who are truly repentant often walk away from the affair. (For those interested in learning more about genuine repentance, the message is available on our website and is entitled: “Hearing and Doing.”)

There is hope. Don’t give up; look up. There are consequences for past mistakes, the answer is to live in God’s arms, redeemed, rather than to live broken, outside of His will. Which way will you run?