

Can God Restore a Marriage Ruined by Adultery?

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 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 describes adultery, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of the grave.”

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, 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: “When sin is finished, it brings forth death” (James 1:15b). Often, the only way out of adulterous and destructive relationships is to do what is right regardless of feelings, to experience the pain of discipline rather than the pain of regret. 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 genuine repentance and forgiveness takes place. 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 those 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. Love 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 (cf. 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 this new relationship. This should not surprise us: James 1:22 says that we live in deception when we hear the word but fail to obey it.

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 rather 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. Isaiah 59:2 says our iniquities separate us from God, and our sins hide His face so that He will not hear. Repentance, real repentance, makes restoration possible. Many are sorry they got caught; sorry their reputation and life are ruined; sorry they are miserable 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 that 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.

There is hope: Don't give up; look up. There are consequences for past mistakes, but it's better to live in God's arms redeemed rather than to live broken outside of His will. Which way will you run? {eoa}

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