

Appendix 3

Notes on Adultery

By Helen Laidlaw

Definitions of 'adultery'.

Chambers Dictionary 1966

"Violation of the marriage-bed. Unchastity generally."

Oxford Dictionary 2001

"Voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse."

Writings: 3 types of Adultery
4 degrees of Adultery

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"There are **three TYPES** of adultery, simple, double and triple.

Simple: that committed by a bachelor with another man's wife or by an unmarried woman with another woman's husband.

Double: that between a husband and another man's wife or the converse of this.

Triple : that between blood relatives.

There are **four DEGREES** of adultery.

Adultery in the **first** degree is due to ignorance, when it is committed by those who are not old enough or are unable to consult their intellect, so as to refrain from it.

Adultery committed by these people is a mild offence.

Adultery in the **second** degree is due to lust, when it is committed by those who can certainly consult their intellect, but are unable to do so at the time for circumstantial reasons.

Adultery by these persons is imputed, depending on whether their intellect afterwards approves or disapproves.

Adultery in the **third** degree is adultery approved by reason, when committed by those who convince themselves intellectually that it is not a sinful evil.

Adultery by these persons is a serious offence and it is imputed depending upon how far they are convinced of this.

Adultery in the **fourth** degree is adultery approved by the will, when committed by those who regard it as allowable and accepted, not deserving any consultation of the intellect on the subject.

Adultery committed by these persons is an offence of the most serious kind, being imputed to them as intentional evil, and weighing on them as guilt.”

Adultery is considered as different from *fornication* in that it supposes the marriage of one or both of the people involved.

In some cultures, adultery is still rigorously condemned and punished. Just recently there was an outcry about a woman being condemned to being ‘stoned’ because of alleged adultery. But it seems as though the condemnation and punishment is because the ‘adultery’ is considered a violation of the husband’s **rights**. In many instances the ‘wife’ is considered the property of the husband and adultery is identified as ‘theft’. In other words, the wife could be guilty of “adultery” but never the husband.

Quote from paper on ethics/divorce on the net:

“In the Bible adultery is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. The most famous prohibition is the seventh commandment, ‘You shall not commit adultery’ (Exodus 20: 14) Adultery is usually understood as a violation of property rights. In the Bible, women were treated very much as possessions and although they had

rights these were restricted. In terms of marriage a woman belonged to her husband and it is against this background that issues of adultery are discussed. Although men and women were equally capable of committing adultery it is only the women who can commit adultery against her husband. This is because she is breaching his property rights. A man had sole rights over his wife's body and adultery was punishable by death."

In Greek/Roman times there were stringent laws against adultery but once again they discriminated against the wife.

In 1857 the English Parliament passed a law by which a husband could obtain an absolute divorce on account of simple adultery in his wife while the wife could only be freed from her adulterous husband when his infidelity involved cruelty "as would have entitled her to a divorce *a mensa et toro*."

How prevalent is adultery?

A survey by the National Opinion Research Centre (University of Chicago) found 25% of men had been unfaithful and 17% of women. Whatever the figures it would seem that adultery is much more common than we would like to admit. Has the fact that adultery has become commonplace altered our perception of it?

Interestingly, a recent study has concluded that one fifth of 25-34 year olds have had more than ten sexual partners but **they believed in marital faithfulness** - 78% of this group believed that having an extramarital affair was wrong.

(This compared with 69% of 45-54 years olds).

According to another survey by Newsweek magazine this is not just a problem with non-Christians and it quoted that as many as 30% of male Protestant ministers have had sexual relationships with women other than their wives.

How much influence do films and T.V. programmes have on our attitude to adultery? e.g. "The English Patient" received twelve Oscar nominations including best picture of the year for its depiction of an adulterous relationship. "The Prince of Tides" received seven Oscar nominations. "The Bridges of Madison County" relates the story of a farmer's wife who has a brief affair with a photographer.

The term 'adultery' is often softened to such terms as: fooling around, sleeping around, flings, affairs and dalliances. Suggesting that adultery can be guilt free and harms no one.

Adultery destroys marriages and families and often leads to divorce and public sentiment against adultery is actually very strong. Yet although we consider adultery to be wrong and know that it can be devastating many people still believe myths such as:

"Adultery is about sex"

"Adultery is about character"

"Adultery is therapeutic"

"Adultery is harmless"

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"The real destroyer of marriage is a love of adultery. This involves a disregard of the trust and intimacy that has been shared in marriage in such a way that there is a willingness to hurt the partner. Any real marriage has involved the opening of thoughts to each other at the most intimate level. It has built a trust in the joy they have in each other and what they feel together. The love of adultery wants to destroy that trust and joy. It can exist without the act of adultery if depraved enjoyment and behaviour satisfy its lusts, or if there is a deliberate wish to abandon the partner so that no real trust or intimacy remains.

Such a destruction of a marriage destroys the basis of love from which the partner has lived perhaps for many years. It breaks up the structure of desires and consequent thoughts that has been the whole nature of that person. The trauma it induces is very great indeed for it leaves almost a vacuum in the mind and life of the sufferer. It is against these cases that the Gospel makes its strictures on adultery and speaks of divorce. The incident of the woman taken in adultery in John's Gospel makes clear that it is not so much in the act of adultery that the Lord sees such a complete destruction of marriage as in the love of adultery that destroy a trusting partner.

What the Lord then says of divorce is really a statement of the condition the marriage has been brought to. It is commonly used to discuss whether a man and a woman

*may break a marriage in the external sense. Its real point is that the marriage has ceased to exist in any inner sense. Obviously we cannot judge whether that is so in any particular case. If one of the parties tells us it is so, then clearly counselling should be attempted If one of the partners is in such a state as the love of adultery, it is clear that he or she cannot form a true marriage. **If later there is repentance and the love of adultery is rejected by a life of service to God then that person may again be able to enter into a true relation**". Again we cannot judge.*

A lack of *spiritual* commitment in marriage seems to go with an 'easy' attitude about adultery.