

Adultery of the Heart *By Patrick Doyle*

Adultery is the byproduct of someone being completely self-consumed. No one ever gets into a situation of adultery instantaneously. It happens gradually as we harden our heart toward God until we reach the point of breaking our marriage vow. God said to Moses, "Okay. I am going to allow this divorce because of the hardness of their hearts." The best antidote and prevention for adultery is intimacy with God. If we remain intimate with God, conviction will reign.

Adultery sneaks up on us. It is a process we rationalize a little at a time. It might look something like this: I am hanging out with a person. I rub shoulders with them and I think, "Oh, that probably was not right, but it didn't hurt anything." And then two weeks later I see them again and I give them a hug, maybe just a second too long and I think, "Well it didn't hurt anything. There wasn't anything wrong. I just hugged her. It is no big deal." So slowly, we build a wall of denial, one brick at a time. Then all of the sudden we have the required hardness to take the next step. It is a rarity where somebody is in love with their spouse today and tomorrow having an affair. More often it's people who never dreamed they would ever be able to do such a thing, church leaders and lay people alike who once said, "Oh, I could never do that." But then over time their hearts harden and they find themselves sitting in my office saying, "I can't believe I did it."

Adultery starts as an emotional attachment, even for guys, although later it may turn sexual. A man finds something from a woman he didn't think he could get anywhere else. It is not an overnight trip for a happily-married man to find himself in an adulterous relationship. It's like the alcoholic on skid row. He didn't have one drink yesterday and today wake up in the gutter. His first toast was not, "Here's to ruining my life." No, he thought, "Oh, this will be nice." He had a good time, nobody got hurt and had no immediate consequence. That's the way it is with adultery – it starts in our head and mind. We begin to fantasize to escape from our current situation. We look around and think, "Oh, isn't he nice? Isn't she nice? Oh, look how nice they are to their friends or

spouse.” It seems so innocent, but in the end it is absolutely devastating. Maybe you currently have that going on in your head; you have thoughts about that person, wishing, dreaming, thinking about being together. It doesn’t have to be sexual; it could be purely emotional. But it’s the beginning of the hardening of your heart.

A hard-hearted person is easily distracted. A popular distraction today is the Internet – chat rooms, porn and dating sites. There is so much opportunity to communicate anonymously. When you’re not looking at someone in the eyes you have the ability to be more open than if you were face to face. People are trying to find what they perceive as satisfaction and love. So a married man or woman starts to have a relationship, whether on the Internet or at work or at the gym. They mistakenly seek satisfaction in someone other than God. Yet they remain a discontented person living with denial, anger and disturbance. Temptations such as adultery become an attractive place to hide from the internal struggles. The answer is finding peace with God and satisfaction in God alone. Peace with God helps remove these impulses to look for fulfillment elsewhere and helps us resist temptation.

While a hard heart destroys the marriage relationship, a soft heart restores it. Soft hearts are the result of intimacy with God. You can’t make it happen. Intimacy is something he grants you as he reveals himself to you. But you can fertilize the soil by spending time alone with God in a quiet place. I think of Jesus saying, “What I am trying to do here is get you to relax and stop being so preoccupied with getting so that you can respond to God’s giving.” (Luke The Message) We need to put ourselves in a place to respond to God. It doesn’t happen by me just reading the Word every day, because I can read the Word for years and reinterpret it into my own belief system. It really is about surrendering myself to God as much as possible and saying out loud. “God, I need you to help me surrender. I need you to help me be dependent.”

Adultery is a self-centered act, like other compulsions such as gambling, working and being religious. Anything we treasure more than God is an adulterous relationship. I have known guys who love their families but are never home because they are working,

some of them in ministry. I tell them, "You can't neglect one responsibility for another. Your family should not be separated from your work because your work is a means God has given you to care for and nurture your family." So the adulterous affair is a compulsion born out of a lack of peace. It dominates life and becomes an idol. The scripture says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Do we treasure that phone call or e-mail or that person more than we love God or love spending time with family? If so, we have crossed the line, even if there has been no physical contact. If you are having thoughts or having an affair, I want to encourage you to please, find somebody who is safe and tell the story, confess. There is a myth that honesty should not hurt. No, honesty has a price and it always will. But the price you pay today for honesty is so small compared to the price you will pay for the lies a year from now or six months from now. The price for dishonesty is far greater than you can imagine.

Adultery has reached epidemic proportions in the church because there is no fellowship. We don't "bear one another's burdens." Every man needs a safe to talk about what is really going on. Confession is part of what maintains a soft heart. God set it up this way for a reason. We need to confess ungodly thoughts, attitudes and desires not once a month, not once every quarter but every single day. If we don't get them out in the open they become secret and become the foundation for developing hardness. We need to be in the light and have living-in-the-light relationships. Most men do not get below the surface. Men lead separate lives at church, work, home and on the golf course with their buddies. No one knows what our fingers are in and so secrecy and darkness breed hardness. You have to get in the light. If you don't, you will pay a price. Please do not continue in the vain of an adulterous relationship. If you are having one, stop it. If you are thinking about one, chain yourself to something that doesn't move and call somebody you trust. But get it out in the open! And churches and pastors, please, with grace help restore these people who have been broken.

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