Adultery: Causes and Cures

by Dr. Jerry Stettheimer

How does the Lord inoculate us against infidelity? Is there an antitoxin that He provides that neutralizes the toxic effects of dissoluteness? What are the long-term effects of immorality?

These are questions that are pertinent and timely given our present society.

The intended audience is Christians who are caught in the web of infidelity and desire to be free. Also in mind are Christians attempting to help individuals or families struggling with adultery. Some observations may be insightful for non-Christians yet the treatments do not necessarily apply. The information present in the booklet on sex is a prerequisite to this booklet. The information presented will be of no importance to those who consider immorality a great pastime.

Some who have experienced first hand the betrayal of a spouse wonder why the Lord refuses to intervene, or at the very least strike the offending mate dead. The Lord does not stop the headlong rush into sin. Surely, however the Lord places roadblocks and warnings in one’s path to warn one away from the impending destruction. One must really be serious about sinning in this manner to do it. Adultery is not accidental, nor something you just fall into unless the Lord is angry with you.

A basic understanding of the companionship needs of the man and the wisdom nature of the woman helps to explain some important things about the marital relationship. It also points to problems that occur when others are brought into the relationship. No one can have two sexual relationships without damaging one. Consider that in God's Word you do not find one example of marriage, which included more than one woman in which peace reigned. The Lord accepted the relationships, but the consequences were always present.

Causes

Sex gives one a unique knowledge of the other person. Sex is a function that bonds two together. Each time this occurs with a different person the capacity for a deep relationship becomes weaker. Neither male nor female can serve more than one mate. Even when God allowed it (Abraham, Jacob, etc) the consequences were extreme. Jacob took two wives in one week. I doubt he ever had another day of peace. Sarah forced upon her husband a sexual relationship with her handmaid. The children from that union continue to war even today.
One cannot be unfaithful in marriage or, have multiple marriages without paying a heavy price. This is one of the central problems that occur in blended families. They just do not mix. What allows a mixture in a marriage (like adoption) is the correct authority structure. In re-marriages, the authority structure is always confused. Ask any one who has been in a previous marriage to tell you about it, and the first words will usually indicate some of that confusion. For instance, how do they refer to the previous mate? People tend most often say their 'ex.' What exactly is an "ex-mate"? Do we refer to prior pregnancies in this manner? Am I ex-pregnant? Thus, even our language suggests the confusion surrounding prior marriages. Confusion leads to anxiety and insecurity, which are rampant killers of new marriages. Or is it more appropriate to say repeat marriage, or perhaps next marriage.

There are other reasons why multiple marriages are a bad idea. The man makes himself very vulnerable to the woman he has sex with. Her knowledge of him has the potential to destroy him. Ironically, by engaging in multiple relationships, the man hopes to weaken his fear, and dilute the strength of the woman's power over him. I suspect much of the distrust between men and women may be traced back to a man's subconscious awareness of his vulnerability to the woman. These warnings are spelled out in Proverbs chapters five, six and seven.

As startling as it may seem those who misuse, and abuse sex have no real knowledge of sex. Since sex was created by the Lord not Satan, true understanding must flow from the source. Certain things are known about God and may be trusted. God does not reveal his truths to the evil one, nor in the hands of the evil one will one discover the paths of life. One must seek knowledge of sex from its Creator, not its perverter. God is the source of all knowledge. I do not think for a moment that He would trust such knowledge to such wickedness. He would give it to the person who in marriage needs and desires such wisdom.

Satan knows he cannot duplicate this sense of pleasure and contentment. Thus, he masks the purpose of sex by focusing on the outward appearance of the woman entangling the man in a web of lies. These lies lead to sexual addiction, for the imitation lacks the satisfaction of the real thing. The real thing is fulfilling companionship. Because Satan's substitute does not work, it is sought many times in hopes of attaining that which it promises, but fails to deliver. Satan perverts good and delivers as a substitute an immoral act incapable of providing a real sense of companionship. Rather it provides just the opposite--a deep sense of emptiness and loneliness making one hunger and yearn even more intensely.

It is quite simple. After the sex act, the man is drawn frightenly close to the person. This happens because God created the yearning for companionship in man's spirit. The strength of these feelings equals that experienced in any addiction. Addiction proceeds from the mind or heart. Addictions diminish the yearning for companionship as found in the marital relationship. The yearning for companionship is sewn into the fabric of mans spirit, and is a kin to the experience of worship. The fear man experiences in the sex act accounts both for
the desire for immoral relationships (because closeness is not required) and explains why sex outside of marriage is so different from sex in marriage. For the women the chief fear in sex is that the man will possess her, consume her, own her, and not honor his debt to her.

Outside of marriage, man has sex with a woman for much the same reason a dog urinates on every tree or car in the neighborhood. It enlarges his domain. The woman is promiscuous because she desires to destroy man. She innately knows that promiscuous sex is destructive, destructive physically, in that one may acquire all manner of disease, destructive emotionally because intimacy is impossible and it is destructive spiritually since God's Word expressly says that adultery will get one the hot place. The foolish man fails to recognize that this behavior robs him of his wealth, health, and heritage.

Moreover, the result of immorality for the man is anger towards the woman. This anger may be displaced to another object, but it is rooted in the sexual relationship. Examples stretch over six or more thousand years of biblical history to name a few as representative; Lamech, Hagar, Lot, Sarah, Isaac, Esau, Samson, David, Judah, Tamar, Moses, Absalom, Hosea, Herod, Herodias, and the list goes on.

Why is illicit sex a source of anger? (Illicit sex as used here means sex outside of marriage, or unpaid or perverse in marriage). Because it is like stealing, and there is no outlet for the emotions experienced. While when one has premarital sex with the future wife, it is problematic, it hardly compares with the devastation of multiple sex partners. The latter leads to each sex partner having a stake or claim on a part of the sinner’s soul which he or she can sell or trade to Satan.

The man owes a debt to the woman he has sex with in marriage or out of marriage. The woman senses this. If the debt is unpaid in marriage then bitterness accrues with the wife. Lack of payment in non-marital circumstances is rarely allowed for any significant period of time.

The debt may be paid at the discretion of the woman in one of the following ways. First, it may be paid physically. One example of this is the man sees that the woman is fulfilled sexually. It may be paid for materialistically, that is through money or gifts. It may be paid for emotionally, that is by meeting needs of affection or other emotional needs of the woman. It can be met spiritually. A positive example of this would be character training. A negative example would be in taking possession of another's soul.

Now immorality never pays the full debt incurred. The failure to pay the debt in full results in an outstanding unpaid debt. Satan has a stake in that wherever there is an unpaid debt, he may step in, and buy out the debt and become the lien holder.
Men tend to not take the indebtedness seriously. A woman takes it very seriously, and will extract her price by one means or another, even if it means selling the debt to Satan. How does she do this? One method is bitterness. The other is cursing the man; a curse that is without cause has no effect. However, one that does have cause will bring harm, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Examples can be seen in sexually transmitted disease, mental and emotional illness, and spiritual weakness. One should not assume these are the only consequences. Ultimately, immorality utterly destroys the individual.

Proverbs outlines the stages of adultery. The first stage is a state of mind. This state of mind is ignorant of consequences and oblivious to the laws of God; a person looking for a good time bored with the routine of every day life hoping to hide transgression under the cloak of darkness. This person knows what he is seeking, and the search is observable by others. It is observed in the eye, in the dress, facial expressions, non-verbal language and the dress of the predator. The person does not have to be a prostitute. It can be a bored housewife or a man just looking for a good time.

Often the path to adultery begins with the little things, such as the normal every day kindness of another, which we focus on and compare with the behavior of our spouse. Here are some sample statements given by clients in this initial state.

John, several years ago, was a client who was locked into a marriage with a selfish, self-centered wife, who was consumed with her own attractiveness. In the beginning, John tried to be giving and hold on to the biblical principles his parents had taught him. But the first indication of a breakdown in his moral judgments came when he was observed 'admiring' every female coming into his line of sight. He talked about how innocent this was and how all men do it. As time pasted, he started talking incessantly about a girl at work, which seemed to be very helpful. She would listen to him talk about his unfulfilling marriage. His complaints about his wife increased, compliments decreased and his praise of Judy escalated. John, his family, Judy and her family quickly became aware of the high price of this mutual attention.

It takes a considerable amount of energy to engage in the emotional requirements of the pre-adulterous state. On the one hand you have the emotional desires toward the new friend which are somewhat fulfilling while on the other anger and hostility towards one’s spouse grow with accusations of the spouse’s unfitness for not meeting needs. Significant time spent engaging in this new relationship robs one’s family of valuable time, emotional, mental, and physical presence, and ones spiritual involvement. So, from the onset the investment made in the new relationship takes away from the old.

Warning signals from friends are ignored. Soon communication between the two is accomplished in every secret dark conceivable manner, at work or at home, at midday, or midnight. There is no more peace. The person involved in this kind of relationship tends to become highly irritable for no apparent reason. Often their
behavior seems irrational or purposeless. Time once spent with family members is now spent with one’s lover. Relationships deteriorate, at home, at work, in the community, and in the church. When the hunt begins it is much like watching a moth flying close to a flame. The attempt is to get as close as possible without being burned. Few escape unhurt.

The actual attempts at lovemaking create a huge chasm. Notably most experience this as a milestone in life, a dividing point, a great divide. Once the sexual relationship occurs the couple becomes aware that all things are different. The betrayal affects virtually every relationship in life, parents, friends, even enemies, but most importantly, one’s relationship with the Lord changes dramatically. To some, these changes can be very exciting. The excitement even becomes addictive. To others, the guilt is overwhelming, and the trite saying 'the agony and the ecstasy,' takes on a whole new personal meaning. Once this chasm has been crossed no one will escape unhurt. Even if a spouse has deliberately pushed the mate into the relationship, just to get rid of them, the consequences for everyone is overpowering.

Perhaps the two most destructive consequences of illicit sex are disease and pregnancy. Amazingly, both are strong attractions in adultery. Note please the tremendous spread of sexually transmitted disease. One might say, “no one wants a sexually transmitted disease.” But the reality is that the offenders do want to be infected. Both want to have children in these unions. The modern age, with all of its preventive medicine, is unable to halt the intense desire for infection or pregnancy. The powerful overwhelming need for infection and pregnancy when immoral is far greater than the desire for protection. This is warned about in Proverbs. Chapters four through seven warn about his powerful desire. Just a couple of examples will suffice. In Proverbs 5:10-16, Solomon warns of three powerful consequences. The first is financial. The immoral person will experience others taking his wealth. Second, immorality will consume the flesh, and even in the process one will reject the warnings. Third, verse fifteen reveals the desire for pregnancy and many illegitimate children.

This drive for infection and pregnancy is all consuming. Even in an age when so many means are available to prohibit both pregnancy and infection, they continue to occur at an alarming rate.

The next stage is the aftermath. What takes place afterwards? Many whose marriages survive are prone to say 'I will never do that again.' They have discovered some of the most intense emotional pain possible. Though serious about never getting involved again, he or she is making a promise, which may not last. What the person knows at the time is that the cost was far beyond what was anticipated. Remembrance excruciating pain lapses and once again longs for the forbidden pleasure. Their spouse on the other hand learns first hand the price of forgiveness.
The innocent party, if they survive the storm, has some very difficult questions to ask and decisions to make. Questions like: Will it happen again? What do I do? Can I ever trust again? Should I get a divorce? What about the children? But most importantly: What would Jesus do?

More frequently these days you see bracelets on the wrist of teens, and on occasion adults with the initials "WWJD." When asked what does it mean, most will readily say that the phrase stands for, "What Would Jesus Do?" They know, but they really do not know. Just be aware that this phrase began in 1896 when it was created by Charles M. Sheldon in his little devotional book "In His Steps." This book has been translated into twenty-one different languages and sold millions of copies. Some say its success was encouraged by the failure of the author to copyright it, others suspect even more powerful reasons. The full saying by Sheldon was, "What would Jesus do if He were in my place?" This is the question many innocent mates find themselves asking.

Jesus has never been in my place with an adulterous mate, one may say. Yes, but that is only partially true, for He did experience betrayal at the hands of two friends, one of whom was very close. So what did He do? What did it cost?

For the first betrayer, it meant death, death by his own hand. We, of course, are speaking of Judas. I suppose some spouses have killed their mates for adultery whether it is physically, emotionally, or perhaps spiritually. Historically, betrayal ultimately cost more than any other sin past, present or future. Betrayal cost the Son of God his life. It was the direct cause of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., God's judgment for the ultimate rejection of His Son, and His grace, and most importantly it is directly related to our salvation.

The second betrayer of Jesus was Peter. Jesus deals with Peter in much the same manner in which he deals with the woman caught in adultery in John 8. He deals with it simply, compassionately, directly. "Go thy way and sin no more." In Peters case it comes in the sentence "Do you love Me, Peter?" Most commentators on John have a field day with the use of two different words for love found in this passage. Perhaps it is much simpler if we understand that it takes two Greek words to explain the powerful concept being spoken of. For the Hebrew word for love is such a powerful all consuming term that it influences both the Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, and the Greek, the written language of the New Testament. All of that is to say betrayal is best met with love. Love is the crucial element in the cure of adultery, not the misfocused, erotic emotions of the moment. Rather, it is the love, which calls one into account for one’s behavior. Love which challenges one to forsake one’s immoral behavior.
Cures

The Lord has placed within people a powerful force which when used properly inhibits the sexual response over a short period of time, with two different people. What I am speaking of now is the normal person who is a Christian who is remorseful about their infidelity. How one can know it exists is by this simple test. If you are being unfaithful do you desire sex with your spouse after your infidelity? Have you wondered why you did not? Now reverse the situation. Did you desire sex with your paramour after sex with your spouse? Is there not a feeling of repulsion at the thought? Where did it come from? It may be identified as guilt however if examined closely one will discover that it originates as a physical feeling, not an emotional experience. Believe it or not, the marriage sexual relationship is very influential in the lives of a married couple. A man is typically repulsed by other women after sex with his wife. It is rare for a person to go and have sex with another person right after sex with one’s wife or husband. The Lord has built into our make up certain barriers, which are difficult to surmount. Wives open doors to other women when she talks to other women about her husband. One should never talk to the same sex person about his or her spouse and the sexual relationship.

Moreover, have you given thought to the type of disease that afflicts those who are unfaithful? I mean besides sexual transmitted disease? You see illicit sex results in illness. This illness begins with the breakdown of the autoimmune system caused by guilt, and anxiety. As physical breakdown starts to occur usually within the first three months of transgression symptoms such as susceptibility to minor illness, colds, flu, and other minor illnesses occur. Allergy problems either begin or intensify. Stomach and bowel problems, blood pressures and other physical difficulties begin. Later more severe illness may set in. Diabetes, cancer, and a whole host of genetically rooted illness start to reveal themselves. Our bodies are now vulnerable because of the breakdown of our system due to anxiety and guilt. Quite a price to pay for a little fling.

The severity of the experience of the faithful mate is often just as great as for the guilty party. This can be explained to some degree, by the fitness principle. For those who marry without premarital promiscuous sex, the experience of infidelity can be excruciatingly painful. This is because the fit to one mate was much closer. The breaking of this link brings intense pain. No one escapes from adultery unharmed.

For the person who has had an unfaithful spouse the element of trust is crucial. How can I trust this person or anyone else they ask? The truth, though painful, is that you cannot. In fact, the trait of trust is forever removed from this relationship. How then can I know or be secure in the relationship again? Is it worth reestablishing the relationship again? The answer is yes, most certainly, under specific conditions. The innocent party must never ever suggest, ask, or demand, the mate promise fidelity. Nor does one accept such a promise. To make such a request is paramount to asking them to gouge out their eyes and it is doomed to
failure. Security can only come from one’s relationship with God. Moreover, he or she can be sure of one’s faithfulness by the manner or relationship he or she maintains with the Lord. If one fails the other will not be far behind.

There is no cure for adultery. That however does not mean a person can not stop, for they can. That does not mean they carry the guilt, for the blood of Jesus washes away sin. No, what we mean is the most that can be said is, "go thy way and sin no more." Adultery, like the sins of betrayal, and murder goes with us to our graves. Hawthorn's idea of the Scarlet Letter is not to far from the truth. Cain carried to his grave the murder of his brother. Peter was always haunted by the betrayal of his Lord. It needs to be made perfectly clear that these sins are forgivable. That is not the point. It is that the violation can never be undone.

Let me give an example from several years ago, What is being described is the beginning of an affair between two people who are “Christians.” Please note that at the time, this individual was saying these things, he was still married. In this case, the spouse had filed for divorce and in fact was ‘in love with another man’ who she later married.

“Thank you Father for giving me Janice. She is something my wife never was; an ideal woman. Just her touch causes me intense pleasure. Thank you for your gift.” Notice please the mixture of worshipfulness toward the Lord, who in this circumstance is given credit for providing a girlfriend. Notice the feelings or worship toward the girlfriend. This perfect couple married the day after the divorce was final, and themselves divorced nine months later. Seems they both found more perfect mates whom they then married. Often in the beginning stages of immorality there are intense religious feelings. These feelings go back to an awareness of God’s creative purposes, which Satan immediately twists into immorality.

**Treatment**

Now let’s address our original question, “Are there inoculations and or antitoxins used by the Lord to warn us away from immorality? The answer is yes there is. Most of us are aware of them but just not used to thinking of them in this sense. I first learned of them from my mother when I was thirteen. I do not even remember the whole conversation now but the pertinent part addressed the heavy perfume prostitutes would use to cover up the smell involved in their occupation.

The next memories revolve around conversations of two roommates I had while in the military. Michael and Brentzel were two typical characters (lacking any moral integrity) of their time. Their conversations involved two main subjects; women and drinking, and they would expound on these subjects at length. Michael, a man of many varied and frequent sexual experiences, would speak of the difference between sex with a woman the first time and thereafter. He would comment on the smell being repelling the first time, more acceptable the next, and
then intoxicating thereafter. Not that Michael had too many relations that went beyond the third or fourth date, but it does speak to an awareness that even the most foolish have.

Years later as a Dallas Police Officer assigned to patrolling an exceedingly high crime area, I was frequently called upon to answer shooting calls or search for fugitives in a house of prostitution. I was struck by the unique and decidedly unpleasant smell of these places. On many occasions, we would walk into a room while people were still having intercourse. The smell was always unpleasant. When I began this study, the Lord brought to mind these experiences with the prompting that this was another and final warning to a person not to continue in iniquity. Scripture touches on this in Proverbs when speaking of the adulteress. The text says “I have decked my couch with coverings, colored spreads of Egyptian linen; I have perfumed by bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.” What were these spices for but to cover up the smell? How come? Someone may ask, is this sensation not experienced negatively in marriage? It is because in marriage the Lord created the experience to bond the couple, to make them one. One’s own smell does not bother oneself, a further indication of the depth of the meaning of phrase, “and the two become one flesh.”

The remedy for adultery is applied most effectively when it is in concert with the persons’ motivational gift. The healer must consider the primary emotional, physical, or intellectual makeup of the adulterer.

The person’s degree of religiosity is another attribute which affects treatment. Sincere piety in an individual affects both the approach and timing of any intervention. Most failures in acquiring repentance of a very pious person can be attributed to lack of consideration given to these two elements. King David is the best illustration of timing and approach in the confrontation of immorality.

Nathan, the friend and prophet of David, waited nearly a whole year before the Lord prompted him to confront David.

Our tendency is to immediately react. But reacting this quickly inspires resistance. This is especially true if the person knows right from wrong. During the initial stages of sin, a person does not feel distance from the Lord. This is critical if one is to be successful in intervening. One waits for the Lord’s prompting not for one’s own feelings. Nathan waited for the right moment. How does one recognize this moment? It is a moment filled with losses and tragedy, for the offender. It might include, but not limited to personal illness, loss of significant family and or friends, and the potential loss of the most important person in this person’s life. Frequently this is months after the sin begins.

Also during this period the sinner will experience intense mood shifts which include euphoria, irritation, anger, and depression. One does not confront in a manner that allows the reaction to be displaced to another. One avoids any interaction which emotionally drains energy or anxiety from the adulterer. These
feelings must be allowed to build with no release. For the most part passivity by as many significant people as possible is important until the proper moment arrives.

Confrontation, when it does come, is followed by as many consequences as possible experienced in as short a time as possible. Confrontation comes usually three to nine months after the onset. If the person is a physical person (motivational gifts of server, giver, or organizer), then it is important to emphasize physical consequences. If the person is an emotional person (motivational gifts of prophet, or mercy), then the consequences need to be emotional. If the person is intellectual (motivational gifts of teacher, exhorter), then the consequences are primarily intellectual and secondarily physical.

Examples of consequences might be rejection or abandonment for the emotional person. Utilization of the five senses (taste, touch, sight, smell, or hearing) for consequences for physical individuals. Intellectual isolation for the intellectual persons is the effective avenue for consequences. The higher degree of religiosity in the offender tends to improve success.

**Consequences**

To step across the line and commit sins of immorality, betrayal or murder marks that person's soul. It breaks the vessel and the purpose the Lord created for that person. Based upon repentance and faithfulness a new purpose is created by the Lord. However, the original purpose is forever gone. David's kingdom was never the same after Bathsheba.

Perhaps the extreme consequences are more understandable when we realize that the root sin involved in adultery is idolatry. Remember that God gave sex to the man as a gift, the companionship being a reminder of God's relationship to the man. The reminder is in a tangible form of the woman. The reminder is a living testimony to God's way with man.

Sex for the man speaks to the most intimate feelings and is akin to worship--worship of God. This is not a new concept. How else would Satan have been able to twist the sexual aspects of man’s being into worship of idols? Most of the ancient religions had some form of sex act as part of the worship experience. Idolatry may be defined as offering worship to anyone, to anything, or any symbol other than the Lord God Almighty. When idolatry is committed, it is destructive to the soul.

The connection between adultery and idolatry is further strengthened when ones realizes that the Bible frequently uses words like unfaithfulness and adultery to describe one’s unfaithfulness to God. How often I have heard my clients describe in worshipful tones the first sexual experience in an affair. That is why particularly for the man sex outside of marriage is idolatry. It seeks to recreate outside the marriage the gift God gave for the confines of marriage. The feelings
in marriage are part of one’s worship—especially thanksgiving to the Lord. Outside of marriage, the man is performing an act of worship on the woman.

It is important to realize that the whole process from onset of sin to return to a modicum of peace is about two years. This period will be very painful for both spouses. The adulterer will experience a maze of conflicting emotions. Attempts to elicit trust by either party should not be made. All demands for fidelity will lead to anger or failure. The couple talking about what has happened and the different feelings encountered can lead to closeness if done properly. At some point the sinner must experience the pain the betrayed experiences.

What about the long term, life long consequences of adultery? What is the outcome? As with any sin when one repents and turns from evil, a new future is created. If the sin and memories are committed to the Lord then eventually the Lord Jesus will take them and turn them into a lasting blessing. Once a blessing is made, the outcome may affect three or four generations in a positive manner. If not surrendered to Jesus, the negative results in terms of sin, embarrassment, anxiety, immorality, may last to the third and fourth generations.

Moses, Peter, and Paul were all three guilty of murder or betrayal. Yet, once these lives were surrendered to God, the blessings to their generation and the generations thereafter overflowed with God’s grace. Tamar, Rahab, David, Solomon, Manasseh and others were immoral and guilty of even worse sins. Yet, it was their repentance, which paved the way for blessing upon blessing to future generations.