

Is adultery a type of sexual immorality?

Adultery (sex outside of the covenant of marriage [Ex 20:14¹]) is a sin punishable by death (Lev 20:10–12). Modern laws do not reflect God’s values (Ac 5:29); so, some are confused about right and wrong (Is 5:20). Nevertheless, the law is written on one’s heart (Ps 40:8); so, he is without excuse (Ro 1:20). Though men wink at sin, God does not (Ps 50:21, Mal 3:6). God is not mocked— whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Ga 6:7).

The apostle Paul wrote:

He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Ga 6:8).

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness (1 Th 4:3–7).²

Marriage is one man, one woman (Ge 2:18–24), in covenant (Mt 19:6) for life (Ro 7:2, 3). God gave marriage for the believer and the unbeliever alike (Heb 13:4). Marriage should reflect Christ’s love for his church (Eph 5:25).

Adultery is a work of the flesh (Ga 5:19). It: produces moral insensibility (Pr 30:20; 2 Co 12:21), makes one poor (Pr 29:3), corrupts a land (Hos 4:1–3), excludes one from Christian fellowship (1 Co 5:1–13), merits God’s judgments (Heb 13:4), brings death (Pr 2:18, 19), excludes one from God’s kingdom (1 Co 6:9, 10) and ends in hell (Pr 7:27; Re 21:8).

Jesus said:

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man (Mt 15:19–20A)³.

¹ adultery, illicit sexual relations with someone other than one’s marriage partner. Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In Harper’s Bible dictionary (1st ed., p. 13). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

² 1 Thess 4:6 defraud his brother. The context, which remains unchanged throughout vv. 1–8, demands that this refer to all the destructive social and spiritual implications of illegitimate sexual activity....avenger. This means it is God who ultimately works out just recompense for such sins (cf. Col 3:4–7; Heb 13:4). MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 1847). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

³ The adulterer/adulteress is defiled (Deut 24:4, Jer 3:1, 1 Co 7:15). “...The reason given is that she had been defiled and to take her back would be an abomination to Yahweh....A further reason is that such an act would bring guilt upon the land. The idea that unchastity defiled the land is found in several other passages in the Old Testament (e.g. Lev. 18:25, 28; 19:29; Num. 5:3; Jer. 3:2, 9; Hos. 4:3)....[Some] think they were concerned with natural revulsion against such a reunion. Thompson, J. A. (1974). Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary (Vol. 5, p. 267). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. No unclean thing will enter heaven (Re 21:27).

Unfaithful men (Pr 20:6) who abandon their family⁴ have denied the faith⁵ and are worse than an infidel (1 Ti 5:8).

Forgiveness is available for the adulterer when he repents (2 Sa 12:7–14, Lk 17:3, Jn 8:1–11, 2 Co 5:17, Heb 11:31) though natural consequences for the sin may remain (Eccl 10:2, Jn 10:10).

⁴ A family is a married couple with or without children—a divine creation (Ge 1:27, 28) founded on: monogamy (Ex. 20:14), unity of parents (Ex. 20:12), lead by the husband (1 Co 11:3–7), subordination of children (Eph 6:1–4) and a common concern (Lk 16:27, 28). Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). Nelson's quick reference topical Bible index (p. 222). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

A betrayed and abandoned wife must remain trustworthy (Pr 31:11, 12) and chaste (Ps 24:4, Tt 2:5) toward her husband until death (Ge 24:58, 60, Ro 7:2, 3). John Piper writes: "...The mark of a disciple is that they receive a gift of continence." Piper, John: Divorce & Remarriage: A Position Paper. May 5, 1989: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-remarriage-a-position-paper>

⁵ Re 2:13. So 2 Tim 3:5. Tt 1:16. 2 Pe 2:1. 1 Jn 2:22, 23. Jud 4. Re 3:8. See Mt 10:33.