

INFIDELITY IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This work is a reflection on the causes, effects and solutions of infidelity in Christian marriages. Adultery or marital infidelity is a social vice which has become major cause of failed marriages among today. The problem of adultery is as old as Biblical times and that was why God, clearly and distinctly, prohibited it in the Decalogue. Observations have shown that there is a sudden rise in cases of marital infidelity. While this is not limited to Christian couples, this study focuses on Christian marriages because Christians are expected to get a good example for the world to follow. The work begins with an introduction and clarification of relevant terms. It proceeds to discuss the institution of Christian marriage, highlighting its essential properties and ends. Next it discusses the problem of adultery and exposes us to biblical teachings on the subject. It discusses the causes of marital infidelity as well as the effects. The study recommends practical steps that can help Christian couples avert the temptation of adultery and the study concludes. While this work is not exhaustive, it is hoped that it will make a little contribution towards engendering good Christian homes.

Keywords: Adultery, Christian marriage, marital infidelity.

Introduction

“Thou shalt not commit adultery”, as found in the Book of Exodus of the Hebrew Bible, is considered the sixth commandment by Roman Catholic and Lutheran authorities, and the seventh by Jewish and most Protestant authorities. Today, due to modern society’s tendency to euphemize evil, adultery is camouflaged with such terms as ‘fling’, ‘affair’, ‘entanglement’, ‘away match’, among others. There has been an alarming rise in cases of adultery even among Christian couples. While adultery is not a novel vice in human society, as attested to by cases in the Bible which is one of mankind’s oldest history books, there appears to be a sudden upsurge in this immoral practice. This unhealthy trend has been attributed to different causes, but whatever the reasons, marital infidelity is a major cause of divorce in society today. What constitutes adultery is not plainly defined in this passage of the Bible, and has been the subject of debate within Judaism and Christianity. The

word fornication means illicit sex, prostitution, idolatry and lawlessness. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Adultery is an injustice. He who commits adultery fails in his commitment. He does injury to the sign of the covenant which the marriage bond is, transgresses the rights of the other spouse, and undermines the institution of marriage by breaking the contract on which it is based”.¹ It is in a bid to find a solution to this societal problem that this work is done. This work shall, therefore, and expose the Church’s teaching on Adultery, while underscoring the causes and negative effects of Adultery on Christian homes. It shall also propose practical steps Christian couples can take to avert or reduce the temptations of adultery.

Contextual Analysis of Terms

- i. **Adultery:** Following the Merriam Webster Dictionary, “Adultery is a willful, voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person’s legitimate spouse or partner”². Adultery in itself can be seen as act of infidelity to matrimonial bond/covenant of a couple.
- ii. **Marriage:** Marriage is from the Latin word ‘*mater*’ meaning (mother), and ‘*monium*’ meaning (occupation), formulating the word “*Matrismunus*”, which was translated into “the occupation of the mother”. The use of the word “*mater*” stemmed from the belief that the infant depended more on the mother than on the father.³ Marriage is traditionally understood as a legitimate, legal union between a man and a woman. Being legitimate entails contracting the marriage under the law with tradition guiding it. This is why in every society, irrespective of the custom of religion, there are rites that ratify the marriage covenant. In Christianity, it is pertinent to know that marriage must be backed by a law or custom.

Christian Marriage

Marriage is generally understood as the union of one man and one woman for the purpose of mutual companionship and generation of offspring.⁴ Hence, *Gaudium et Spes* 48 describes marriage as “the intimate partnership of life and love which consists between a man and

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2381

² Merriam Webster Dictionary, “Adultery”, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>, accessed 04.06.2023.

³ Rosas, Roberto. *Matrimonial Consent in Canon Law Juridical Aspects*, Vol. XLIII, Puerto Rico, 2009, 421.

⁴ Anthonia Ojo. *Lecture Notes on Christian Marriage* (Good Shepherd Major Seminary Kaduna, 2021).

a woman, total and perpetual, which is established by the irrevocable personal consent by which the spouses mutually bestow and accept each other and which by its very nature is ordained for the procreation and education of children." Marriage is a relationship defined and ordained by God. The Canon Law sees marriage as legal union between a proper man and a proper woman. It says that marriage is a covenant where two persons give and take each other by exchange of consent as husband and wife.⁵ It is the union of man and woman which is entirely God's plan. It is also a natural institution under which a man and a woman become legally united in a permanent relationship, for at creation, God said "it is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). This matrimonial covenant is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. God blessed them saying "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28).⁶

The Church teaches that, by this injunction, God made marriage a means of perfecting the spouses and a means of propagating the human race. Marriage, therefore, flows from the very nature of man divided into two complementary sexes, male and female. God is the author of marriage and has endowed it with various benefits and with various ends in view. Marriage, therefore, is a divine institution, for it is God who has endowed marriage with its benefits and purposes. Christian marriage is a sacrament instituted by God and subject to divine law, which basically presupposes the following: it must be a union of opposite sexes; it must be a permanent union; and it must be an exclusive union. Also, Christian marriage is a sharing in that union of love between Christ and the Church. It is the reflection of the love relationship between the heavenly bridegroom, Christ and his bride, the Church. As Pope St. John Paul II puts it, "The communion of love between God and his people, a fundamental part of the revelation and faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and woman".⁷ This is also clear from the Catechism that: "Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church..."⁸

⁵ Code of Canon Law. 1055.

⁶ Patricia Lamourex and P. Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life*. (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2011)

⁷ *Familiaris Consortio*, 12

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1617

Essential Properties of Marriage - Unity and Indissolubility - Canon 1056.

Unity and indissolubility are the two essential properties of marriage. These flow emphatically from the sacramental character of marriage, since marriage does not only fully represent Christ's union with the Church, but as a sacrament creates so intimate a supernatural bond that the parents are taken up into the mystery of redemption in a unique and specific way. When this sacramental marriage is consummated, the marriage acquires a new strength and perfection.⁹

i. Unity

The sexual love between a man and a woman, when carried out in the fullest sense, and in accordance with human dignity, tends of its nature towards exclusiveness and irrevocability. The love of the spouses is naturally exclusive such that it can only exist in absolute honesty if both partners give themselves to one another wholly and unconditionally. Unity as a property of marriage means that marriage is between one man and one woman only. Such a marriage is called monogamy as opposed to polygamy. This means that every form of polygamy (polygyny or polyandry) is contrary to the unity of marriage. According to *Familiaris Consortio*, "This (polygamy), in fact, directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women, who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive.¹⁰" As partnership of life and love, marriage is a very intimate union of mind, heart, and body. Thus, couples obtain some basic rights and responsibilities from the valid marriage they enter into. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the man and the woman, who are united in holy matrimony "help and serve each other by their marriage partnership; they become conscious of their unity and experience it more deeply day by day".¹¹

ii. Indissolubility

Marriage in Christian perspective is indissoluble. Indissolubility of marriage simply means that the union is a life-long union. In fact, the nature and purpose of marriage itself requires it to be an indissoluble bond. It is rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the partners and in the fact that they are no longer two but one body (cf. Gen. 2:24).

⁹ Peschke, K. H. *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in The Light of Vatican II*, Vol.1. Revised Edition. (Alcester: C. Good life. 1993) p. 3

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II *Apostolic Exhortation: Familiaris Consortio*, (Nairobi: Pauline, 1981) 71

¹¹ Austin Flannery (Ed.). *Second Vatican Council, Vol 1, Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, (Mumbai: Ambassador Publications), 1998, 48.

Pope Pius XI gives a vivid description of this when he says: “The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons and the good of the children demands total fidelity from the spouses and requires an unbreakable unity between them”.¹² Marriage cannot be dissolved (no divorce). Only the death of one of the spouses can validly end a validly contracted marriage. The indissolubility of marriage is immutable. It is divine law that marriage is indissoluble. As expressed by Scripture “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). This indicates that a man and woman having become one flesh, adultery or sexual relations between such a married man or woman with someone outside their marriage is a grave sin.¹³

Ends of Marriage

The good of marriage, referred to in Can 1055, 1 as “the good of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children is traditionally referred to as the ends of marriage. While the 1917 Code classified these as primary and secondary ends of marriage,¹⁴ these two are affirmed by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council who upgraded the importance of the personal good of the couple to the same level as the procreation and upbringing of children. The two have been combined by the Council as complementary ends or good of marriage without the traditional classification into primary and secondary ends.¹⁵

i. The well-being of the Spouses.

Marriage is ordered for the well-being of the spouses. The 1983 code does not consider this as secondary but presents it as equal, complementary and integral to the good of procreation and the upbringing of offspring. Marriage is considerably, a most personal and intimate relationship, and marital consent is an act of the will by which the spouses mutually give and accept each other by an irrevocable covenant.¹⁶ The initial mutual attraction between a man and a woman of marriageable age usually produces love and blossoms to the exchange of an irrevocable consent of marital union. That love, embedded in the hearts and actions of man and woman, ultimately results in the procreation and bringing up children. The conjugal love brings the partners together and this leads to a free and mutual giving of themselves to each other, which is experienced in tenderness and action, and which permeates the whole of their lives. Marriage is

¹² Pope Pius XI. *CastiConnubii*, On Christian Marriage, (Nairobi: Pauline, 1930) 516 - 517

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Cf. Canon 1013, 1

¹⁵ Austin Flannery (Ed.). *Gaudium et Spes* 48

¹⁶ Cf. Canon 1057, 2

essentially a blessing for the spouses themselves. It is a way to perfection.¹⁷

ii. Procreation and upbringing of Children

The second end of marriage mentioned in the Code of Canon Law is the procreation and education of children. Procreation refers to the generation of children through a process that is biological through human sexuality. It was God's will, when He created man and woman that marriage should be fruitful and His reward for them was "the wealth of children", as called in the Old Testament.¹⁸ The Bible tells us in Gen 17:1-7 that the wealth of children was one of the promises of God to the Patriarchs. Therefore, it becomes a sacred duty or obligation imposed on married couples, that on their part, they should cooperate with God in fulfilling their marital obligation according to divine law. By marriage, the spouses cooperate with God in the procreation of children. The Second Vatican Council states: "Children are the outstanding gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to the parent's welfare".¹⁹

Attached to the begetting of children is the obligation to bring them up through education in the values and cultures of the earthly city in which they live, but also in the love and fear of God. In the Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach: "As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family.... The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute."²⁰

The Problem of Adultery in Christian Marriages

The concept of Adultery, in its literal sense, has been defined as a consensual physical association between two individuals who are not married to each other and either or both are married to someone else having a living spouse. The actual definition of adultery may vary in different jurisdictions but the basic theme is sexual relations outside wedlock²¹. Adultery, also known as infidelity' or 'extra-marital affair', is

¹⁷ Ibid 49

¹⁸ Patricia Lamourex and P. Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life*. (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2011)

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50

²⁰ Austin Flannery (Ed.). Second Vatican Council, Vol 1, Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 1975) 2

²¹ According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Adultery means, sexual relations between a married person and someone other than the spouse. Written or customary prohibitions or taboos against adultery constitute part of the marriage code of virtually every society. Indeed, adultery seems to be as universal and, in some instances, as common as marriage. See, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/6618/adultery>, accessed 25.11.2022

certainly a moral crime and is regarded as a sin by almost all religions. The dictionary meaning of 'adultery' connotes voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person other than his or her spouse.²² The word 'adultery' actually derives from combining a number of Latin terms into one. It comes from the Latin word *adulterare* which means "to alter, to corrupt". *Adulterare* in turn is formed by the combination of the words *ad* ("towards"), and *alter* ("other"), together with the infinitive form *are* (thereby making it a verb). It also has an Abrahamic origin, though the concept predates Judaism and is found in many other societies. Though the definition and consequences vary between religions, cultures, and legal jurisdictions, the concept is similar in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Hinduism also has a similar concept²³.

The Catechism states as follows: "Adultery refers to marital infidelity. When two partners, of whom at least one is married to another party, have sexual relations – even transient ones – they commit adultery".²⁴ Historically, adultery has been considered to be a serious offence by many cultures. In English the word adultery has the idea of one person moving towards another person in order to make a new personal arrangement. Moreover, as seen in the above etymology, in some cases the Latin term *adulterare* conveys the meaning of "to pollute". That is, the act of taking something that is pure, and contaminating it. When we say that someone has committed adultery, we are simply stating that a person has corrupted his or her marriage by introducing a third party. Thus, the marriage has been altered, changed, and polluted. The English description of the word 'adultery' is quite graphic, but since the Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew we would be wise to consult the meaning of this term there.

Adultery in the Scriptures

Both the Old and New Testaments condemn adultery in severe terms. It is considered as gravely sinful. This is clearly stated in the Decalogue: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14), and reiterated further: "You shall not covert your neighbors' wife (Ex. 20:17). The Book of Leviticus prescribes extreme corporal punishment for those found guilty of adultery thus: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death" (Lev. 20:10). In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for adultery is *nā'ap*. Although it has different meaning, for example, it can take

²²"The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English"; Sixth Edition (Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

²³ 'Adultery'. www.britannica.com, accessed 22.05.2023.

²⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2380

literal or figurative meanings, and even describe those who are married or betrothed who are unfaithful or to state that a person has, as we say, “cheated” on their spouse²⁵. One of the earliest appearances of *nā’ap* in the Old Testament is in the reading of the “Ten Commandments” (Ex. 20:14). God states clearly, “You shall not commit adultery.” This command is cradled between the “shall nots” of murder and stealing. This may indicate the severity of adultery in the eyes of God (Ex. 20:13, 15, Lev. 20:10). Clyde Woods observes that, in this command, the “sacredness of marriage” is emphasized, and it is this “principle of social purity” that “provides the basis for numerous (other) laws regarding sexual relationships and offences” (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:1-18; Deut. 22:13-30).²⁶ In Leviticus 18:1-25, God addresses Israel and gives a long list of unlawful sexual activities including adultery, incest, homosexuality and bestiality and ends with “Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore, I will visit the its iniquity upon it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants.”

In the gospels, Jesus affirmed the commandment against adultery and seemed to extend it further by condemning even adulterous desires: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5: 27-28). He taught his audience that the outward act of adultery does not happen apart from sins of the heart (Matt. 15:19-20). Thus, the word adultery in New Testament usage, as defined by Christ, does not necessarily refer to the sinful physical (sexual) act alone. It is not restricted to genital contact as the only way of violating the sacred marital bond. In the passages of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the term adultery is given the sense of ignoring the bond, of which one is guilty who formally puts away one’s partner unjustifiably and regards oneself unhitched. The Letter to the Hebrews puts it succinctly: “Let marriage be held in honour among all for God will judge the immoral and adulterous” (Heb. 13:4).

Church Teachings on Adultery

Traditional Catholic moral teaching condemns adultery as contrary to the purpose of marriage. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church considers adultery so grave that, like the prophets, she likens it to the sin of idolatry.²⁷ The moral assessment of adultery must necessarily

²⁵James Swanson, “*nā’ap*,” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997). 47

²⁶Clyde M. Woods, *Genesis-Exodus* (Henderson, TN: Woods, 1972), 179.

²⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2380.

consider the effects on at least three people: the marriage partners and the third party, with attention given to the “creative growth” and the “human integration” of each person and with special consideration of the effects upon the already existing marriage of the bonded pair. Adultery is condemned by the Church based on the fact that it is not only against the virtue of chastity, but also violates the virtue of justice.²⁸ It violates the right of one’s spouse or the spouse of another. Above all, they tend to bring children into the world who will not be properly cared for because the parents are not permanently united. Adultery also involves destructive consequences for the love, harmony and stability in the family of the married partners.²⁹

Causes of Adultery in Christian Marriage

There are many causes of infidelity in Christian marriages. We shall examine a few of these. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and these reasons given below are not justifiable reasons for marital infidelity. They are only plausible reasons based on people’s experiences which can guide us in recommending solutions to this problem.

i. Social Media

The Internet is identified as one of the major enhancers of marital infidelity. The advent of social media, while bringing so many benefits to modern society, has been largely responsible for a lot of immorality. Because there are so many websites where people can meet with no questions asked, social media has become a meeting point for people with all sorts of sexual fantasies and the avenue to find ways and means to satisfy these fantasies. Also, because of the power of social media to connect people around the world, a lot of old flames are rekindled, thereby making married people face the temptation of reconnecting with former lovers. Many unfaithful spouses have attributed their cheating to a reconnection with an ex-lover on social media.

ii. Pornography

Another plausible cause of marital infidelity is the ubiquity of pornographic content. Pornography is rampant on the Internet and while this does not necessarily lead to extra-marital affairs, it does lead to emotional affairs and the death of love and trust. Addiction to pornography is a significant factor causing the breakdown of marriages today. This is often because it leads to an unhealthy craving for sex and a wanton desire to explore unwholesome sexual practices. The problem

²⁸ Ibid 2381.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2381.

is compounded when it becomes a compulsive habit. This problem is faced by many married men and women today.³⁰

iii. Lack of respect and appreciation

People have a greater tendency to be unfaithful when they feel disrespect or unappreciated at home. This goes for both male and female spouses. There is only so much people can endure or tolerate in their marital homes. Since everyone enjoys a compliment, it would actually go a long way if spouses find ways to complement each other often. Some people have attributed their extra-marital affairs to the simple fact that they did not feel appreciated at home or that they are “doing all of the work” in keeping a marriage and home together. Some cheated because they felt the respect they lacked at home was provided by someone outside. Thus, disrespect and lack of appreciation are a major cause of marital infidelity.

iv. Marital Unhappiness

Marital unhappiness is another major cause of divorce. It is common for a married woman or man to engage in an adulterous relationship simply because they feel unhappy in their current marriage. A partner who feels their spouse does not show care/attention, or simply does not love them anymore, has a greater tendency to cheat. While majority of people would argue that this does not justify infidelity, marital unhappiness is one of the most common reasons behind adultery. Unhappiness in marriage can even be caused undue pressure from extended family members and in-laws.³¹

v. Boredom

It has been observed that sometimes, marital infidelity can be triggered by sheer boredom. Without specific steps or changes, certain marriages can begin to feel like routines or schedules. This monotony can lead to boredom and the desire for something new. In various cases, the bored married woman or man becomes dissatisfied with their predictable, familiar marriage and begins to seek a thrill elsewhere. While this does not mean that a bored spouse may seek out a lover. However, the married woman or man may meet a new person and the resultant chemistry or initial attraction may create an infatuation which may lead the dissatisfied spouse to engage in adulterous acts with the new person just for the thrill. How long this affair or passion will last is dependent on other factors. Some have even been known to cheat because the thrill

³⁰ Henry Gorbein. *14 Common Causes of Infidelity in a marriage*, 20.04.2021, <https://www.divorcemag.com>, accessed 01.05.2023.

³¹ Regain Editorial Team. *What Causes People to engage in Adultery*, <https://www.regain.us/advice/infidelity/>, accessed 02.04.2023.

is in the danger of being caught. The Book of Proverbs captures this thus: “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is tasty” (Prov. 9:17).

vi. Lack of Sexual Satisfaction

Adultery in Christian marriages is sometimes motivated by lack of sexual satisfaction. A person who feels he/she lacks sexual satisfaction may they resort to seek it outside their marital home. This means that the married woman or man may genuinely love their spouse, yet cheat on them simply because they believe their extramarital lover can give them in the sexual gratification that their legal partner cannot. This point is one reason why a lot of people feel the past life of a person is important if they are to be considered for marriage. It is believed that people who have lived a sexual reckless life in the past may not find sexual satisfaction easily and, therefore, are more likely to cheat. This reason is quite arguable as many people have countered that a man or woman who truly loves their spouse could never cheat on them. However, the validity of this claim remains highly probable. Indeed, sexually unsatisfied husbands and wives have, from testimonies, cheated on their spouses even when they claimed to genuinely love their spouse.

vii. Falling Out of Love/Falling in Love with Someone New

Although falling for an extramarital lover is seemingly uncommon, it can and does happen. A cheating spouse could meet someone outside of their marriage with whom they think they have a connection. The unfaithful husband or wife may misconceive emotional or sexual intimacy as love, or even misinterpret the generosity of a third party expressed in expensive gifts and money as love. Ultimately, the only person who knows whether he or she loves someone else is themselves. In extreme cases, some individuals have abandoned their current marriages to pursue new relationships with their paramours. In some cases, the new relationships work out, while in other cases they do not. Whatever the case, falling in love with another person or simply falling out of love with one’s spouse can increase the chances of adultery.³²

viii. The Company one Keeps

The company one keeps after marriage can, to some extent, influence one’s lifestyle. While some may argue that an adult cannot be influenced by another, the fact remains that the company one keeps already tells a lot about them. One’s environment does significantly impact their values, beliefs, and choices later in life. While the decision to participate in adultery is ultimately up to every person, exposure to

³² Henry Gorbein, <https://www.divorcemag.com/blog/most-common>, accessed 01.05.2023.

adulterers or people who have no sense of the sacredness of the marital bond, can make one more prone to committing the act themselves.³³

Consequences of Adultery in Christian Marriage

Proverbs 5:15-23, among other Scriptural passages, establishes that all sexual needs are to be met only within the covenant of marriage. While sexual sins may give the illusion of pleasure, such pleasure is often short-lived. In the long run, sexual immorality degrades the participants and leads them into shameful behavior. Some of the consequences of adultery are:

i. Destroys Openness and Trust

Sexual sin that reaches outside the borders of a marriage leads to isolation within the marriage. Partner engaging in the illicit behaviors build walls around themselves to prevent their partners from finding out what is going on. This results in a double life. More and more lies are told to cover up and this creates distance between the couple further eroding intimacy.³⁴ Those who engage in sexual sin often live in shame and fear that others will find out what they have done. If they are married and violate their vows, the shattered trust can be extremely difficult to rebuild. The effects of the sin reach to husband, wife, children, and even extended family members.

ii. End of the Relationship

When Israel turned away from God, they were referred to as a harlot and a cheating wife. God considers divorce to be violence. It is the tearing apart of two who have become one (Malachi 2:14-16). Families and friendships are lost as a result of divorce. Spiritual covering is shredded and all sorts of calamities can befall a broken family.³⁵ The offending spouse is usually sent packing. The result of which is that the children grow up in a broken home and are exposed to every form of social vice: drugs, fraud, sexual immorality, violence, etc.

iii. Sickness/Disease

St Paul in Romans 1:24-32 says that God will allow men to reap within their physical bodies the results of sexual sin. One physical result of sexual immorality is disease. There is a vast array of sexually-transmitted diseases. Sexual sin comes with a high risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases: HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes,

³³ Regain Editorial Team, <https://www.regain.us/advice/infidelity/What-Causes-People-to-engage-in-Adultery/>, accessed 01.02.2023.

³⁴ Matthew Schoenherr. *Six Consequences of Sexual Sin*, <https://levaire.com>, accessed 20.05.2023

³⁵ Ibid

etc. These can affect the spouses physically, psychologically, socially and financially.

iv. Soul-ties are formed

In the words of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:16, “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’” This shows that sexual activities go beyond mere physical gratification. There are spiritual dimensions to sexuality. Soul-ties are formed when two people engage in sexual activity. This makes it difficult for them to resist each other whenever the opportunity arises. Little wonder the expression “Okafor’s Law” used by young people to refer to the fact that once sexual activity has occurred between two people, there is always the possibility that it can happen again.³⁶ Also, sexual sins violate our bodies which are temples of the Holy Spirit. Thus, to sin against one’s body is to vitiate the presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁷

Recommendations: Practical Steps to Mitigate Adultery in Christian Marriages

i. Limiting social media life

Since this is one of the major causes of marital infidelity today, it is important to recommend that married people need to regulate their social media life. While social media is important for communication, information, business, etc., it is also a major source of temptations. Certain social media sites need to be avoided by Christian couples who genuinely seek marital fidelity. Some of these are dating sites. Also, the kind of posts people make on social media tells a lot about them. The general mindset is that married women who are very active or post certain kinds of pictures or videos on social media are still available. Social media can also breed distrust and a sense of insecurity in one’s spouse. Once one realizes that their spouse is not comfortable with their social media life, they need to regulate it.

ii. Setting/respecting boundaries

It was imperative that couples establish boundaries in marriage. This involves couples discussing important questions about boundaries. They should discuss the company they keep, access to their phones, evening outings, relationships with third parties, etc. These issues are often the cause of friction in marriages. They should set and respect boundaries especially with regards to third parties.

iii. Spending time together

³⁶ “Okafor’s Law of Congodynamics”, <http://www.urbandictionary.com>, accessed 07.06.2023.

³⁷ [Http://billiGraham.org](http://billiGraham.org). *Are all Sins the Same in God’s Eyes*: (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 2004).

It is imperative that couples spend quality time together. This means that, no matter how busy their schedule is, married people must create time to be together. With the economic situation in the country that has made it necessary that both partners need to work in order to break even, the temptation is to pursue career development or financial growth at the expenses of the marriage. This temptation must be avoided. Some couples even have to live apart because of their jobs, thereby exposing themselves to temptations. It is important that no matter the distance, married people should find a way to bridge the gap by communicating frequently and finding ways of spending time together. They should create time to satisfy each other sexually, because sex is a renewing ritual for the covenant they made.³⁸ Spending quality time together does not entail having sex alone, but talking about things that matter.

iv. Transparency/Trust

It is important that married couples always in mind the fundamental formula of marriage that “the two shall become one”. This means there should be secrets between the couple. They should be as transparent with each other as much as possible, thereby leaving no room for doubt or suspicion from their partners. One who has unlimited access to their partner’s phone will have less reason to suspect. There should also be trust between them. There is a need to avoid unhealthy suspicion or distrust of one’s partner, especially when they have done nothing to warrant it.³⁹

v. Mutual dependence

Marriage is a give and take relationship. There is need to depend on each other to make it more interesting. Couples need to rely on each other in their needs: physical, emotional, financial and spiritual. Unnecessary independence can be inimical to a happy marriage. It is not only allowed, but encouraged, that one should call on their partner to help them even for those things they can do alone. Doing things together adds fun to the marriage. There is danger in creating a marriage that in reality is just two separate lives.

vi. Delineating relationship with others

It is important to clearly define their relationship with third parties. These third parties may be ex-lovers, colleagues, business partners or new acquaintances. Married people must always spell out in clear terms the nature of their relationship with others. Ambiguity of any kind should be avoided. The moment any words or actions appear

³⁸ Domeniek L. Harris, *How Should the Church Handle Adultery?* (Christianity Today, 2023)

³⁹ Chara Dohahue. *Eleven Ways to Protect Marriage from Adultery*, <https://www.ibelieve.com/relationship/protect-your-marriage-from-adultery.html?amp=1>, accessed 02.04.2023.

flirtatious, there should be immediate withdrawal. It is okay to always point out one's marital status. On no condition should a now married person agree to meet with an ex-lover alone. That would be a recipe for adultery.

vii. Prayerfulness

It is said that "a family that prays together, stays together". Christian couples must create a consistent prayer routine that engages both partners. They must always remember that God is the source of marital love, and only with total dependence on Him, can a marriage be successful. No matter the distance between them, Christian couples who adopt a prayer program which they shall both abide with, such that they will always be spiritually connected to God and to each other.

viii. Avoiding temptations

Avoiding sexual temptations involves avoiding both people and things that cause unnecessary sexual tension. Thus, it would be imperative to avoid any coworker, business associate, or neighbor to whom one knows, in sincerity, that they have a sexual attraction. It would mean avoiding conversations with friends that put one in the mood for sex when their partners are not available. It would also entail avoiding pornographic movies or sites, as well as any exchange of erotic materials on social media. Avoiding these would go a long way to preventing unnecessary sexual tension that would need immediate satisfaction.

ix. Resolving conflicts

"Do not let your anger lead you to sin; the sunset must not find you still angry. Do not give the Devil his opportunity." (Eph. 4: 26-27). It is important that married people resolve conflicts quickly and totally. There must be no room for bitterness and unforgiveness. Christian couples must learn the habit of apologizing when they are wrong. They must also learn to let go of wrongs and be always ready make a fresh start. This entails avoiding making any reference to past wrongdoings. Forgiveness should be fast and sincere.

x. Intermittent marriage maintenance

Once in a while, Christian couples need to undertake some marriage maintenance activities, these can come as date nights, anniversary trips, or yearly interactions with a marriage counselor. These things are important and should not be taken for granted.

Conclusion

Adultery is not a new vice. From biblical times, there have been instances of adultery even among God's people. It has been a problem, not only in Christian homes, but in every culture and religion. However, there appears to be a significant rise in the cases of marital

infidelity in our age and time due to the advent of the internet and social media. There is obviously greater access to like minds who share one's fantasies and ready to collaborate in executing such fantasies no matter how depraved. The decline of family and societal values has only compounded the situation further by celebrating immorality within the public space without any guilt. Greed and financial inducements have also made sex a readily available bargaining chip as a means to acquire certain comforts. As a result, adultery has torn many homes apart. It has become a deadly virus eating deep into Christian marriages in our world today, resulting in unhappiness, distrust, diseases and extra-marital children. In the midst of all these, Christian couples, who are firm in their resolve to have a happy marriage free from infidelity of any kind, can actually do so. This would not come easy, but with prayers and the cooperation of each other, they can actually achieve it. They must realize that there is no end to temptation. Thus, as long as they are married, they must remain on guard against any temptation to cheat. Marital fidelity is a conscious decision and will only be achieved with conscious efforts.

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