

MATTHEW 5:28

“I THINK SHE’S ASLEEP NOW”

“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”¹

The people of Newburyport, Massachusetts were scandalized in the summer of 2004 when their mayor, Mary Anne Clancy, admitted to an affair with a married gym teacher. Clancy never imagined her tryst would be discovered. It only lasted a few weeks, there was never any physical contact, and all the evidence could be erased at the touch of a button. But when her husband Brian found the romantic e-mails his wife had exchanged with her paramour, he followed the man home, assaulted him, and subsequently was jailed.²

The ensuing headlines gave readers a look at a still largely hidden but rapidly growing threat to families—cyber-infidelity. Cyber-infidelity is defined as the act of engaging in acts of a romantic or sexual nature with an individual or individuals through electronic or virtual communities. The electronic communities can consist of dating websites, email discussion lists, interactive games, chat rooms or newsgroups, and certainly includes pornography sites.³ Whilst it is obvious to all but the deliberately obtuse that using pornography for personal gratification is detrimental to the marriage relationship, it appears that with increasing frequency women are seeking “romance” through fantasy role-playing using avatars and chat rooms to hide their identity. Above all else, cyber-infidelity is a violation of the trust necessary to a strong marriage.

Cyber-adultery, says one author, has become “a huge, huge issue... You’ve got this box on your desk that is accessible all the time with little or no effort. That just makes it too easy for a lot of people to communicate. People sneak down to their computers while their spouse is sleeping... They don’t have to meet someone at the bar.”⁴ Sadly, a husband no longer has to sneak out of the house to commit adultery. All he has to do is stay up a little later than his wife.

It is no secret that marriage is under assault from multiple quarters. From skyrocketing divorce rates, to governmental accession to homosexuals’ demands for married status, to a vast and general indifference toward this ancient institution—marriage as a pillar of western culture seems to be tottering on the edge of destruction. People have forgotten why marriage matters; and this cultural ignorance will only deepen as more husbands and wives find themselves enmeshed in the dark side of the Internet, hopelessly confused about what marks the line between “surfing” and infidelity. Already, some myopic individuals are beginning to excuse Internet sex, arguing that because most of these cyber-affairs never lead to physical encounters, they are actually “safe infidelity.” But infidelity is infidelity where the Word of God is concerned and adultery is adultery.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Meredith Goldstein, “A public admission of personal matters,” August 4, 2004, Boston.com, http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2004/08/04/a_public_admission_of_personal_matters/

³ See Marlene M. Maheu, “Women’s Internet Behavior: Providing Psychotherapy Offline and Online for Cyber-infidelity,” <http://www.telehealth.net/womens-internet-behavior-providing-psychotherapy-offline-and-online-cyber-infidelity>

⁴ Marilyn Gardner, “Cyber-flirtations seem harmless to some, dangerous to others,” The Christian Science Monitor, reproduced in USA Today, 8/23/2004 http://www.usatoday.com/tech/webguide/internetlife/2004-08-22-cyberflirting_x.htm

The Bible teaches that adultery is first and foremost a sin of the heart’s imagination. “[E]veryone who looks at a woman with lustful intent,” said Jesus, “has already committed adultery with her in his heart” [MATTHEW 5:28]. Adultery does not require physical intercourse. It is a matter of broken vows, shattered trust, and ruined families. It is betrayal, and putting the word “cyber” in front of it does not make it any less real or any less devastating or any less evil.

The message this day seeks to strengthen the marriages of those who listen. Undoubtedly, every individual who has been married for more than a few months has at some point been disappointed in his or her spouse. We cannot be individuals without discovering that our spouse occasionally disappoints us. However, we pledged to accept our spouse for better or for worse, and before God, we are responsible to love, respect and honour him or her. Tragically, we have come to a day when it is distressingly easy to engage in fantasies that superficially appear harmless. However, the Master exposes the danger of all such “harmless” fantasies. Join me in exploring the Word of God concerning adultery via the Internet.

ADULTERY, A DEFINITION — Secret sin cannot be tolerated if the child of God is to please the Master. All secret sin must be exposed and renounced if a Christian is to live a holy life that is pleasing before the Lord. Though there are perhaps many sins that are privately embraced, whilst He was seated on the side of a Galilean mount, the Master delivered a sermon in which He exposed those secret sins which are most egregious. Christians generally identify this message He delivered by speaking of it as “The Sermon on the Mount.”

In the first part of the message, Jesus addressed the need for His followers to be salt and light in the world [MATTHEW 5:13-16], encouraging all who profess to know God to glorify Him through the conduct of their lives. He confronted the tendency of His people to selectively apply the divine Law [MATTHEW 5:18-20], urging them to seek the righteousness of God.

In identifying the common tendency to harbour secret sin, Jesus exposed anger as sin [MATTHEW 5:21-26]. Likewise, lustful thoughts [MATTHEW 5:27-30], divorce [MATTHEW 5:31, 32], relying upon oaths rather than a truthful life [MATTHEW 5:33-37], attempting to justify retaliation [MATTHEW 5:38-42], and harbouring bitterness toward those who may have wronged one [MATTHEW 5:43-48] are alike sinful. The Master exposed the heart, leaving no refuge for those who imagine they can treat secret sin lightly while claiming intimacy with the Living God.

Earlier, I stated that adultery is a sin of the heart, as is evident from the words of the Master that are recorded in the text. We are accustomed to thinking that adultery requires physical intercourse in order to be adultery. Indeed, that is the criterion applied in legal proceedings. Few of us would think of flirting as adulterous. However, there is a line that, however blurred it may seem, must not be crossed. And though that line may not lend itself to precise definition, God, who knows the heart, knows when an individual has crossed that line. Whenever an individual looks at another person with more than casual interest in his or her physical attributes, whenever one allows sexual desires to dictate how they view another person, they have crossed the line. Should the one creating an attraction in the heart be already married to another individual, they are crossing over into the realm of violating the trust of the spouse.

Underscore in your mind that Jesus is not attempting to provide a legal definition; He is addressing the greater issue of a holy life required of anyone who would please the Father. Jesus is teaching those who profess to worship God the necessity of a pure heart. You will recall that the Master taught his people, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” [MATTHEW 15:19, 20a]. When an individual rules over the heart, he or she controls his or her actions.

This brings up the issue of susceptibility and responsibility in the realm of sexuality. First, anyone is susceptible to temptation. God created us with a desire for companionship and a desire for sex. These desires are good, primarily because God gave them to us. The Word of God recognises the human desire for sexual fulfillment, and addresses the issue quite forthrightly. Paul has written, “Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:2-5]. It is expected that husbands and wives will enjoy normal sexual relations. In part, this is to circumvent the “temptation to sexual immorality” that is a tragic part of all human nature.

To be certain, Jesus taught that “Some men are celibate from birth, while others are celibate because they have been made that way by others. Still others are celibate because they have made themselves that way for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven”⁵ [MATTHEW 19:12]. Singleness permits devotion to the cause of Christ—if one can handle it [1 CORINTHIANS 7:1, 6, 7]. Singleness is wonderful if the individual is able to control their desires. However, the Apostle has taught, “If [Christians] cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:9]. In other words, the desire for sexual fulfillment is normal; surrendering to those desires outside of marriage as God intended is ungodly. Therefore, God gave us marriage, in no small measure to provide a holy outlet for the desires that He created within us. We could say that *marriage is intended for purity*.

I have always been impressed by the beautiful picture of marriage presented in the union of Isaac and Rebekah. You will recall the account provided in GENESIS 24 that details how Abraham’s servant sought a wife for Isaac. Rebekah did go with the servant, and as they neared the place where Abraham was staying, Rebekah saw Isaac. The Word of God says, “She dismounted from the camel and said to the servant, ‘Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?’ The servant said, ‘It is my master.’ So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.” Now, take special note of the final verse: “Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” [GENESIS 24:64b-67]. The physical love husband and wife shared was a source of comfort to Isaac. It is a beautiful picture of the impact of sexual expression within the marriage relationship. Thus, it is appropriate to say that *marriage is intended for pleasure*.

Marriage is also intended for procreation. Malachi makes this evident when he says of the marriage union that God was seeking godly offspring [see MALACHI 2:15]. In fact, in that verse, the prophet makes it clear that the Lord lays claim to a part of every marriage since there is “a portion of His Spirit in [each] union.” Malachi speaks of marriage as a covenant, not a mere contract of convenience. In fact marriage reflects God’s relationship to His people.

Ideally, when a man and woman marry, they picture the relationship of Christ and the people of God. Paul addresses this in EPHESIANS 5:22-33. Listen to this vital passage of Scripture. “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

⁵ International Standard Version New Testament, (Yorba Linda, CA, The Learning Foundation, 2000)

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

We will be tempted, but we need not surrender to the temptations that flit into the mind. Martin Luther was correct when he said, “I cannot keep the birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from roosting in my hair.” Temptations are a normal part of human existence; but that is not a concession to give in to temptation when it is presented. We have seen that the desire for sexual fulfillment is natural; however, each individual is responsible to rule over his or her desires, employing them within the channels that God created for their expression. Sex is designed for marriage. This is the reason that God has said, “Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.” You will recall that the passage continues by warning, “God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” [HEBREWS 13:4].

In the text before us, Jesus interprets the *seventh commandment* that prohibits adultery [EXODUS 20:14] by applying the *tenth commandment* that proscribes covetousness [EXODUS 20:17]. He says that looking with lust upon another individual while either party is married is adultery. The covenant relationship of commitment to one person is violated in the mind of the one coveting another when longing to violate the marriage is tolerated and harboured. Jesus holds His people to the high standard of being not only accountable for their actions, but also of exercising control over the secrets of the heart. The Christian cannot evade responsibility by saying that she never physically violated the marriage vows if she routinely and habitually entertains thoughts of such violation!

ADULTERY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY — The Internet is a double-edged sword for Christians; it offers both promise and peril. Positively, the ease of communication, the wealth of information, and the worldwide audience that is offered has made the Internet a powerful Christian resource. Thousands of websites are devoted to proclaiming the gospel and to teaching doctrine. Multiplied thousands of pastors post their sermons online, churches organize ministries through e-mail, and Christians are readily able to connect with people from all over the world for evangelism, missions, and prayer. Indeed, as a congregation we endeavour to act aggressively to advance the cause of Christ through our own ministry via the Internet. The sermons are published and growing numbers read them as they are posted each week, and we are labouring to provide streaming audio of the sermons for the edification of those who listen via the Internet.

On the other hand, the Internet has become a seedbed of secret sin for far too many. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune to the allure of sin that seemingly offers freedom from the eyes of a spouse or other family member. Increasingly, Christians are succumbing to the myth that since there was no physical act involved, no violation of marriage vows is entailed in viewing pornography or through fantasy role-playing via the Internet. However, as we have seen through reviewing the words of the Master, the sins of the heart are viewed as seriously as any action that may subsequently follow. God expects His people to be pure and holy.

Under the Law, adultery involved sexual intercourse with mutual consent between a man, married or unmarried, and the wife of another man. Sexual congress without the consent of the woman was rape, and only the male who forced himself on the woman was held accountable in that instance. The term “adultery,” and the penalty, applied equally to both the man and the woman [see **LEVITICUS 20:10; DEUTERONOMY 22:22**]. Again, appealing to the Law, a betrothed woman was considered in this context as though she were a wife [**DEUTERONOMY 22:23, 24**]. Obviously, under the Law, adultery was considered one of the most serious offences an individual could commit. The reason adultery was viewed as such a heinous sin was that it broke the relationship that was a reflection of the relationship between God and His people.

Review in your mind the way God describes Israel’s desertion to follow other gods. “‘How sick is your heart,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different’” [**EZEKIEL 16:30-34**; see also **HOSEA 4:7 ff**].

Well before the Law was given, Joseph recognised that adultery would be a sin not only against Potiphar, but that it was especially a “sin against God” [**GENESIS 39:9**]. David, after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the sins he subsequently committed to cover his initial sin, confessed to God, saying,

“Against You, You only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in Your sight.”

[**PSALM 51:4**]

It is interesting to note that God, through Hosea, appears to hold men to a higher standard in this regard than He does women. Men are responsible to take control over their lives, exercising restraint. This is not to excuse women for sinful behaviour, but in the case of adultery, God seems to condemn the male offender more strongly than the female. In **HOSEA 4:14** we read:

“I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,
nor your brides when they commit adultery;
for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes
and sacrifice with cult prostitutes,
and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.”

Certainly, if a man maintains his integrity before God, there will be no adultery.

Jesus raised the bar, affirming the Old Testament commitment to maintain the integrity of the marriage bond, while refocusing the understanding that the integrity of marriage vows are not confined to physical relationship. It is not enough to maintain physical purity. The purity of the marriage relationship depends upon exclusive devotion to one another in every aspect of the lives of the husband and wife. This commitment excludes wanting another person, or satisfying oneself—even mentally—with another person. Looking at another person with lustful intent breaks the unity of the bond that a man has with his wife!

The scriptures cited present a theme that cries out to be stressed in contemporary society. The principle underlying God’s expectation of purity of heart in the relationship of husband and wife is firmly founded in the relationship between God and His people. Ezekiel graphically exposes Israel’s spiritual adultery—not just when they engaged in idolatry, but when the heart of the nation and their eyes desired other gods. Speaking through the prophet, the Living God laments, “How I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols” [EZEKIEL 6:9].

Jesus established the *oneness principle in marriage*, when he referred to the commentary on the first marriage recorded in Genesis, “A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh” [MATTHEW 19:5, 6]. The principle of oneness in the marriage relationship implies that a wife gives herself to her husband exclusively and that he gives himself to her exclusively. This is an exclusive relationship; there is no room for another person in the marriage relationship. Therefore, whenever a man looks at another woman, desiring her, he has rejected his wife, giving himself to that other woman. Likewise, whenever a woman desires another man, she has rejected her husband, mentally giving herself to that man. As we have previously established, lust originates in the heart [see MATTHEW 15:19], which is central to one’s identity and will. Therefore, adultery is not only physical intercourse, but it is also mentally engaging in any such act of unfaithfulness.

Superficially, it appears that Jesus applied His warning to men, excluding women. Perhaps you wonder why Jesus would, even superficially, speak more pointedly to men than to women. The answer lies in the difference in the sexes. One pastor has appropriately described men as microwave ovens and women as crock-pots.⁶ Men are readily aroused by visual stimuli, whereas women seek relationship. The reason for the difference in the sexes lies in the observation that men and women are different by design. Generalising the observable differences, Pastor Ted Cunningham says, “Men express fact, women express emotions; men are objective, women are personal; men want basics; women want details; men can detach from their surroundings, but the home is the extension of the wife.”⁷

Consequently, men are more liable to engage in using pornography, whilst it is primarily women who engage in fantasy role-playing online. However, it is of scant moment whether one speaks of pornography or online role-playing; either must be viewed as violating the oneness principle of marriage. Whenever a husband or a wife cross the line of contentment with their spouse, entering the realm of desiring another person, they are sinning egregiously against the one to whom they committed themselves, and they are sinning egregiously against the Lord.

Let me pointedly address these secret sins that are increasingly tolerated in contemporary society. No woman can ever compete with pornography—life does not airbrush our flaws and since being a wife does not permit continuously being made up to fulfil the fantasy that is scripted by the pornographer, wives cannot compete with pornography. Whenever a man uses pornography, he tacitly says to his wife, “There is a flaw in you.” He is admitting that she no longer pleases him and he needs to go outside the marriage to find fulfillment.

Likewise, whenever a woman engages in cyber-infidelity, she is saying to her husband, “You no longer ‘do it’ for me.” She is saying that her virtual world is more satisfying than the real world in which her husband lives and works and loves.

⁶ Joni B. Hannigan, “Authors Address Sex at Marriage Conference,” April 3, 2009, <http://baptistpress.org/BPnews.asp?ID=30215>

⁷ Citing Ted Cunningham, *ibid*.

It is one thing for an individual to say he has never committed adultery; but it is another thing all together to say that he has never violated the marriage through flirting with another person, through engaging in fantasies concerning life with another person, through secretly desiring another person, or through viewing pornography. The Apostle to the Gentiles illustrates the difference in the two positions as he recalls the degradation of his life when compelled by its presence to apply the tenth commandment [see **ROMANS 7:7-13**]. Applying God’s standard, as enunciated by Jesus, leads the individual to commit himself or herself to his or her spouse exclusively, treating the one to whom they committed themselves with the respect due to one created in the image of God. Anything less demeans one’s spouse and dishonours God.

GUARDING ONESELF AGAINST ADULTERY — God expects His people to be pure, not only in their actions, but also in their hearts. The principle that dictates the thought-life of a believer leads to the conclusion that when the heart is not right, drastic action is needed to correct it before it results in outward sin. How serious is harbouring lustful thoughts—secretly desiring one particular individual to whom you are not married? Listen to Jesus on the matter, for He provides a commentary on the issue. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” [**MATTHEW 5:29, 30**]. The Master is not advocating self-mutilation, but He is stressing the serious consequences of treating secret sin in a casual manner.

How shall we guard ourselves against succumbing to tolerating secret sin? The question is of greatest significance in a world that increasingly tolerates every deviation from holiness. Tragically, even the churches of our Lord appear increasingly inured to gross deviation from righteousness. Within the first three years following the initiation of ministry in this area, I witnessed four out of eight senior pastors removed from their churches following moral failure. All of these pastors were shepherding northern churches co-operating with one denomination. Some left quietly and little was said; others created quite a public scandal. All dishonoured the calling they professed and brought disrepute on the cause of Christ.

The greater scandal in my mind was the response of denominational leaders to their sin. Rather than calling their actions sin and permanently removing them from pastoral oversight, the denomination spoke of their “sickness” and recommended “therapy” as a cure. However, there is but one cure for the sickness that had infected their hearts, and that was the application of the blood of Christ the Lord. Through failure to call sin by its proper name, the leadership dismissed the seriousness of their actions and disgraced the Name of the Saviour. The leadership of that denomination, to say nothing of far too many of us who have received divine appointment to this sacred office, were far better versed in modern psychological technique than they were in the Word of God. Anyone who seeks to fulfil faithfully the ministry of oversight for a congregation belonging to the Master must be willing to go to any lengths to strengthen the marriage bond—both for his own family and for the families over which he has charge.

Central to the qualification for leadership over a church is an emphasis on the health of the leaders’ marriages. Those who provide oversight for a church are to be examples to the church through commitment to their wives [**1 TIMOTHY 3:2; TITUS 1:6**]. If one who leads fails to demonstrate purity in his relationship with his wife, it is questionable whether he will be pure in any other area of life. Such commitment and purity provides a powerful testimony to the reality of the presence of the Kingdom of God.

Sin originates in the heart; it condemns the thoughtless or arrogant individual who rests complacently on his or her external acts of righteousness. How we live reveals the condition of our hearts, and anyone who destroys the marriage bond is worthy of eternal condemnation, because the sin reveals that he or she is not a disciple of the Master. Life as a follower of Christ Jesus the Lord does not produce ungodly people, but rather life as a follower of the Risen Son of God produces disciples who live out human relations—including marriage—in the manner God originally designed.

Just as leaders are to be pure, reflecting the reality of the presence of God’s Kingdom, so all who claim to be within that Kingdom must likewise reflect the purity of the Kingdom. If we will guard against succumbing to the allure of embracing the philosophies of this dying world, ***we must call any such secret dalliance by its proper name—sin.*** We are not guilty of momentary lapses; we suffer from sin. We do not change the serious consequences of our actions by renaming what we have done. We must recognise the serious nature of tolerating “just a little bit of sin.” God’s people as an assembly are responsible to adjudge every sin as “sinful beyond measure” [ROMANS 7:13]. We must no longer excuse sin or treat evil that may erupt among us as something of no consequence. We must again be prepared to hold one another accountable for our attitudes as well as our actions.

If we are willing to call sin, “sin,” as it truly is, ***we must also abjure the sin.*** If we are prepared to identify sin as sinful, we must unite in renouncing the sin. Whenever I baptise an individual, I call on them publicly to renounce the sin that previously marked their lives, embracing the Living Saviour as Master of life. The attitude and decisions of a congregation are a reflection of the prevailing attitude of the people that make up that assembly. Just as society reveals the moral state of the populace, so a congregation reflects what is generally tolerated by the people. When a congregation rejects the Word of God, choosing personal comfort rather than sharing in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, it is doubtful that any great work will be accomplished there. Until the people of God repent of their sinful attitude, and are again repelled by wickedness, it is doubtful that purity will prevail, or that any great work will be accomplished.

The people of God must be ***committed to purity in marriage.*** Men and women within the Kingdom of God must commit themselves to serve the Saviour with radical abandon. If they will enjoy the power of the indwelling Christ in their lives, they must be radical in their commitment to purity, especially in the marriage relationship. Men must no longer permit secret desire a safe harbour in their thoughts. Women must be strict in rejecting any thought that jeopardises the marriage bond. Each of us must encourage our brothers and sisters to stand firm in holding the sanctity of marriage inviolate.

No finer word can be found to conclude the message to believers than that which is provided by the Apostle in his First Letter to the Thessalonian Christians. “Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8].

Permit a final word to those who have suffered a broken marriage. Perhaps you were caught by surprise by the actions of a spouse, or perhaps you were the one who violated the marriage. There are consequences to our choices, and you know the truth of that statement all too well. However, though your marriage has been broken you are not rejected by God. If you sinned in some way, He stands ready to forgive you, provided you seek and receive His forgiveness. God always stands ready to forgive His people when they confess their sin and forsake sinful ways. God, through His servant John, promises, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [**1 JOHN 1:9**].

The instruction of the Saviour, while applicable to the life of outsiders, is unlikely to be applied. The natural man will excuse his indiscretion as normal, and wonder why anyone should question his thought life. If this describes you, this is so because you are yet in darkness, having never known the light or the life that is found in Christ the Lord. Your great need is to be born from above and into the Family of God. This is not something that you can do through your own effort; you must respond to the invitation of the Spirit of God who even now calls you to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved.

Christ the Lord died because of your sin—all your sin. Then, He rose from the dead to provide the righteousness that is required for life in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the Word of God clearly says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth that one confesses, resulting in salvation.” That portion of the Word concludes by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13** author’s translation].

The sincere prayer of each believer that shares in the life of this assembly is that you will believe and thus receive the life that is offered in the Son of God. May He convict you, convince you, and convert you is our sincere prayer. Amen.