

Definitions of 'Fornication' and 'Adultery'

Written by K B Napier
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It seems that many Christians think the two forms of sin are totally separate and different. But, they are not, as I will show in this short paper. The reason for highlighting this mistake is that some, with a malicious heart, try to damage fellow believers who have divorced. To see what I mean see A-346. In this paper we will simply look at the two words and their definitions, as given by scripture.

A straightforward meaning for 'Adultery' is that it is a sin committed by a male and female, one or both being married, that mimics the marriage union. That is, two people ignore their marriage vows by 'going off' with another person they are not married to. However, that is not the end of the definition...

No Real Difference

'Fornication' is usually applied to single people who indulge in illicit sex. Illicit sex is any sexual activity not within the marriage bond. However, even within the marriage bond there can be illicit sexual behaviour. These can include such acts as anal sex, 'role playing' where there is fantasy about another person, and so on.

Illicit sexual behaviour can be anything from 'normal' to outrageous and wicked. For example, whilst using a prostitute is a sin, its sexual activity may be 'normal'. On the other hand, bestiality, and other activities are both sinful and abnormal. The same applies to homosexuality, both male and female. There is a difference between normal sinful sexual behaviour and abnormal behaviour that is usually perverted. In all cases, the sexual activity is illicit.

'Adultery' is usually applied to married people who leave their marriage bed in favour of another person, who is also married. This is not the whole story, though, for a married man or woman may leave temporarily or permanently, openly or secretly. He or she might have sexual relations with another person of the opposite sex, or the same sex, with animals, dead people, one's own family members... the list is endless, but all of the activities are sinful; some are perverted. And all are illicit.

Some married couples have sexual relations openly, such as those who indulge in 'swinging', whether in individual situations or in group orgy situations. The fact that they do so openly with each other's consent, makes no difference, nor does having an 'open marriage' make any difference! It is all adultery and illicit.

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The married spouse may also go off with a single person. This is still adultery.

Though both words are used independently, both have essentially the same meanings, because 'fornication' means illicit sex. So does 'adultery'. Adultery is a sin *because* of fornication, which can be either physical or mental. Many modern Christians have come to grief because they indulge in computer fantasy, entering pornographic websites to satisfy sexual lust. Though they have not physically met another person, their activities are nevertheless sinful. If they are married, they tend to watch this kind of image secretly. Whether or not their spouse discovers their secret is irrelevant, for they have still committed adultery. And if they are single, the sin remains, but is usually referred to as fornication. But they are essentially the same thing.

Fornication is where we get our word for 'pornography'. The Greek word for 'fornication', as used in scripture, includes the meaning of adultery. And, as we have said, it covers every imaginable sexual activity. For single people fornication is any sexual activity that is both illicit and outside marriage. For married people, fornication is the same, and can exist even within the marriage itself (see above). I have had a number of emails from folks worldwide who asks me if anal sex with their wives is acceptable. I will not cover the activity in this article but suffice to say it is sin. The reason men ask the question is that they have allowed their minds to roam into fantasy, a fantasy of the world, not of normal relationships.

The summation is that fornication and adultery are essentially the same thing, because both refer to illicit sex.

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