

# The Ugliness of Spiritual Adultery

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Ezra 9:1-14

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Ezra, Ezra 9, continuing our exposition of the book of Ezra and actually the plan is to go right on into the book of Nehemiah, Lord willing, when we complete Ezra 10 because we believe that Ezra/Nehemiah were originally one book, in fact, they still are in the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra, the book of Ezra/Nehemiah, and in the English Bible they've been divided but they're right together, Nehemiah following right upon the end of Ezra.

As we've been looking at this, we've seen that Ezra is about the return from captivity, the return from the Babylonian captivity when the nation of Israel had been unfaithful to God and had been cast out of his presence, cast out of the land of Canaan, cast out of the land of promise because of their sin and their wickedness. Seventy year captivity came to an end and so the book of Ezra records for us three returns from that captivity. The first return to rebuild the temple is in chapters 1 to 6, and it happened around 538 BC, and those chapters cover about a 20 year period, 538-516 or so and the temple is rebuilt. And so the place of worship is reestablished and then about 60 years after the completion of the temple, God raises up another man, Ezra, and burdens him to return from the land of Babylon with another group of exiles and he brings back another large group, 5,000 or so Jews, Levites, priests, and just the people of Israel, and they come back to restore the temple, to beautify the temple, to bring the law back to the people of God. In fact, one of the really important things about Ezra is that he is a man skilled in the Scriptures, and so God sent him back to teach his people his law. In fact, the Jews regarded Ezra as they looked back over their storied history, one of the favorite ways of referring to Ezra is to call him a second Moses. Moses, the great law-giver who brought the Hebrew people the Torah, wrote the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and Ezra then in coming back as a priest, as a scribe skilled in the law of the Lord as we read earlier in this book, Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel, he comes back with a commission of the Emperor to teach the law of the Lord. And so this second return is about the restoration of the law of God to the people of God. You could say it's about the restoration of the word of God to the people of God.

We saw last week that when help arrives, God deals with things differently than we think. Ezra's name, remember, actually in Hebrew means help. He is the help from the Lord and

he is God's help to the people in crisis who need his help desperately, but when he comes back, his help is not in exactly in the form they expected. As he brings the word of God to them, as he preaches the word of God to them, what happens is their sin is uncovered, their sin is exposed, and this is the function of the law of the Lord, this is the function of the word of God. God gives his word, one of his central purposes in giving his word is to expose our sinfulness so that we can see our need of Christ, our need of a Savior. And so Ezra as he preaches the word of God, the people's sin is exposed in a way that is astonishing. We're gonna read this entire 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, the 15 verses of Ezra 9, and one of the things you're gonna see is Ezra's response to the sin that is uncovered as he preaches, and I want you to see that. It shows that he knew there were some issues back in Jerusalem when he's called by the Lord to leave Babylon and go back. He knows their spiritual needs. He knows they need the law of the Lord. He knows that the temple worship is not as it needs to be and so he's raised a lot of money and he's bringing it back with him, and so he knows their problems but he has no idea how deep the problems really are and you see it that clearly by his response, and the people had no idea how bad the problems in their own hearts were. They didn't know. They knew they needed help but they didn't know they needed help this much. And in this what we see is, what is true for you and me is that we don't know how bad we need God's help, and when the Lord brings his word to us, he exposes in our hearts depths of depravity and spiritual wickedness that we don't even begin to understand before the word comes, and this is God's way. The good news of the Gospel always starts with the bad news. True preaching of the Gospel, the Gospel means good news, true and right preaching of the Gospel always brings the bad news first because the good news doesn't make sense unless you understand the bad news.

You see this in Romans. In fact, I encourage you to read the book of Romans in your devotions sometime soon and maybe this week, and as you do, you'll see Paul sets out his purpose in the book of Romans is to preach his Gospel fully to the people in Rome. He's never been there, and he's heard that their faith is growing and he wants to give them his whole Gospel message. "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel," he says in Romans 1:16, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile." And his purpose then is to set forth this Gospel message. Gospel means good news. The announcement of the authoritative proclamation of good news. Well, what does that good news do? The first thing Paul says after he says, "I'm here to preach the Gospel," is he starts in chapter 1, verse 18, through chapter 3, verse 20, and he tells them that all flesh is condemned before the judgment bar of God; that every single human being that has been born save one, the Lord Jesus Christ, every single one is condemned in sin and in need of salvation. That's where the good news begins, and then he tells you about the wonder of what Jesus Christ has done in chapter 3:20 through chapter, really through chapter 8.

So it's the glorious Gospel. Well, you see the same pattern. Ezra comes preaching the law of the Lord and the first thing he does is expose sin, and so God needs, and when we need the Gospel, we need the Gospel every day. It's a favorite saying that many people have said through the years, Jerry Bridges mentions that in his book, "The Discipline of Grace," you need to preach the Gospel to yourself every day. Christians need the Gospel

as much as unbelievers need the Gospel. Now unbelievers need the Gospel to be saved but Christians need it every day. Well, you need the whole Gospel which is to continually see your sinfulness in deeper clarity so that you can see the sufficiency of your Savior with greater joy and delight, and you will treasure him more. And so God wants to do that in our hearts today and so in the same way that they're surprised by the reality of their sin, Ezra is and they are, may the Lord grant that we will be.

Let's read Ezra 9 this morning.

1 Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." 3 When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering. 5 But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God; 6 and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day. 8 But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. 9 For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. 12 So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.' 13 After all that has come upon us for

our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, 14 shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? 15 O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this."

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we come to Your word and we ask that You would search our hearts, that Your word would be living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and it would discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, would lay it open before You, and even before us that we might see our own spiritual adultery, that we might be granted deeper repentance, deeper sorrow, godly sorrow for sin, an earnestness in being holy by the power of Your Spirit through the work of Your Son. And we pray this all in His name and for His glory. Amen.*

The title of the message is "The Ugliness of Spiritual Adultery." The ugliness of spiritual adultery. This passage is basically describing for us spiritual adultery and it's happened in actual physical terms started when the people of Judah, the people of Israel who returned from the Babylonian captivity, when they came back home they intermarried with peoples of the lands, and the peoples of the lands were, this was something that had been expressly forbidden to them as Jewish people, as the people of Israel. They were not to intermarry with the people that are listed in this chapter. He mentions eight different people groups, five of those peoples are from the region of Canaan, and then the other three are from outside but surrounding the land of Canaan.

We saw last week if you weren't here last week, I just mention you could watch or listen to last week's message, we made clear that this isn't really about racial issues, it's about spiritual commitment. It's not about racial identity but spiritual commitment. The reason they were forbidden from intermarrying with the people outside of Israel was because of the spiritual commitments of those people and that to intermarry with them was inevitably to become an idolater with them. To follow the desires of their hearts and for a young man to go after some beautiful Moabite girl or for a young woman to respond to the advances of some young Jebusite man, was to set in course, to set on course the inevitable apostasy of that person. God makes it clear and we're gonna read some passages that show this, and I mentioned last week that it's clear that it really wasn't about the race or the bloodline, it's not about some kind of racial, we're all one race, and that's really clear when you see that four different races of people mentioned here are in the line of Christ in Matthew 1: a Moabite, Amorite, Hittite, and I forget the other one. Anyway, Canaanite. It was a Canaanite, that's right. Rahab, Ruth, Tamar, and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

So it's not about the racial thing, it's about spiritual commitment and so but the point was by intermarrying, by following the desires of their hearts, they were becoming idolaters and this had happened so quickly. Remember last time we talked about how sudden it is as you're reading through the book of Ezra. Chapter 7 and chapter 8 are on this kind of ascending, things like we're getting, it feels like you're making your way to Jerusalem, you're getting closer and closer to the glory, you're with them walking as God is showing his mighty hand at work in Ezra's life, and everything, you know, we're onward and upward is what it feels like, and then you come to chapter 9 and, bam, what happened? And the suddenness of it in the text is created, I mean God tells it this way so that we feel the suddenness of the revelation of sin and how forceful it is when we see it. Finally our eyes are opened to see it, and we see it in its awful ugliness.

I want us to consider this message under three points this morning. The title we said is "The Ugliness of Spiritual Adultery," and the first point is the astonishing reality of spiritual adultery. The astonishing reality of spiritual adultery. Ezra makes this really clear as he tells the story for us, that it was a real problem and it was astonishing in its effect upon him. We noted a key word, or we need to note a key word in verses 1 to 4. It occurs twice and it is the word "appalled." When Ezra heard this, verse 3, "When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe," which was a physical way to express incredible remorse and repentance, "pulled hair from his head and from his beard and sat down appalled." Verse 4 he says after the people gathered to him, he sat appalled for hours and it means silent and desolate, astonished. It's the effect, this word "appalled" is the effect, it is sometimes described as the effect of like a natural disaster, like a tornado comes through and your house, your neighborhood is wiped to the ground and the people, the survivors are sitting there looking at it, processing it, and they are speechless. That's the force of the word "appalled." His soul is desolate. He knew things, there were needs. He knew there were spiritual needs. I mean, he's a man of the Scriptures. He knows that people are sinners, but he is appalled at the level of what he has seen. In a short period of time, just 60 years since the temple was rebuilt, 60 years since the wonderful ministries remember of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah which are recorded in chapters 5 and 6 of Ezra. Just 60 years and things have degraded to such a low point.

He is astonished. He's astonished at the spiritual adultery and where do we get that? The words aren't actually in the text, the word "spiritual adultery," but this is what's being described and a key verb in the passage actually in chapter 9 and chapter 10, it's only used twice but it is, in some ways, the most important word in the passage and it's there in verse 1. Now Ezra's been there for four months. He's been doing a number of things administratively and he's been preaching the word, and we know he's been preaching the word because they basically in their response, this man that comes to talk to him, these people who come to report to him, the princes, they use the words of Scripture that he's been preaching as they tell him what's going on, but this word, the key word is the word "separated, have not separated themselves. The people of Israel," verse 1, "and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands." That is the distilled nutshell of the problem, is a lack of separation from the peoples of the lands, and the Lord had called his people to be distinct and separate, to be holy. In fact, they

continue on in the next verse to say "that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands."

The race that is to be set apart and really holiness, when we sing, "Holy, holy, holy," as we sang earlier, the essential root idea behind holiness is separation. It's not righteousness, that's part of it but that's not the main essence of the idea. The essence of holiness is to be separate and distinct. God is holy, holy, holy. He is separate from his creation. Now he's sustaining it, he's upholding it, he fills his creation, and yet he's different and distinct from his creation, and his transcendent greatness so far above his creation, that distance is holiness.

Now when he sets apart a people for himself when he chose the nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants, when he delivered them from Egyptian bondage in the exodus, he called them to be a holy people, to separate themselves. In fact, you find this in Leviticus, this idea particularly in Leviticus where he points out in chapter 20, he basically makes this argument, he's telling them, "Listen, you're to live separately." And it's the same, actually the same verb is used four times in Leviticus 20:20-26 as is used here in verse 1, and this same word "separate" is used in chapter 10, verse 11, to describe what needs to happen. The problem is they have not separated themselves. They've not and the word literally means "to separate, divide; to sever; to cut; to make a distinction and distance." They have not done that. They have not separated themselves and you see separate is related to holy because holy means separate. It's not the same word, it's another word though meaning the same idea, the concept. And I mentioned Leviticus because the Lord there is telling them as he's brought them out of Egypt, "I have separated you from the people. I have carved you out from the world to be My own, to be My treasured possession. And what you are called to do is to separate yourselves unto Me."

This is the essence of the calling of discipleship, to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, to pursue him above everything else and to be separate from the world because the world doesn't live that way. In fact, it is completely opposed to God, and so you cannot love God and love the world at the same time. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John 2:15-17. You cannot love the world and love God at the same time. So the call to be faithful has always been a call to not love the world, to be separate from them and distinct.

So Ezra sees that these people who have been called to be separated have not separated themselves at all. That's what's astonishing. He can't believe the intermingling of the people, the holy people of God who have just left Babylon themselves, who just came back to the land knowing that they were sent, I mean, it's like they were sent to Babylon because they did not separate themselves. After the punishment, God brings them back, "Surely you know why you were punished, because you were worldly, you loved the world, therefore you're back now, don't love the world." Ezra comes and he finds out they're doing exactly the same things that led them to the Babylonian captivity. That's the heart of his prayer as you heard him. He's like, "I can't even lift up my eyes to pray. I can't believe that this is happening. You had given us a remnant. We're down to a peg.

We used to be a whole nation, now you've just given us Jerusalem and the surrounding area as a peg, and You've been so kind to do that. We didn't deserve any of that. We deserved Your wrath unabated forever, and You've shown kindness to us and here I come and I see we're doing, this peg is doing exactly the same thing."

They did not separate themselves and because they did not actively separate themselves, they fell into spiritual adultery. They followed their desires and they married these foreign wives, this is what we're told in chapter 9 and chapter 10. That phrase actually occurs six different times, they married foreign wives, and in doing that they became an abomination. Their lives became increasingly offensive to God. I mean, on the front end, it's basically are you going to live your life according to the word of God or according to your own thoughts and opinions and beliefs? The Christian way of life is to repudiate your own heart, to renounce your own desires, to renounce your beliefs and to say, "I will follow the word of God. I will follow God."

They had not done that. They didn't separate themselves and because they didn't, look how things go from bad to worse so quickly. He describes what's already happening, I mean, and they describe to him when they say, "The people," in verse 1, "of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands according to their abominations." He uses five different words here which show how bad things got so quickly, five different key words. The first is the word "abominations" which is repeated several times in the passage. You have it in verse 1 I just read, and then also in verse 11 when he's praying and he's remembering in his prayer what the Lord had spoken in his word through his prophets. He's reading Scripture or recounting the essence of scriptural passages as he's praying. He's praying the Scriptures when he says in verse 10, "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity.'"

Verse 14 he says, "shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations?" The word "abomination" means "disgusting." It pictures a kind of reprobation that is offensive to see or to hear. I shared last week from Leviticus a passage, I read it, didn't comment much on it, but I'm gonna remind you of it which basically talked about the abominable things that the people of the Canaanites were doing before God gave the land of Canaan to Israel, remember? It spoke of things like all kinds of deviant sexual practices including bestiality. I mean, is that, that was happening and so giving into your desires leads to more and more corrupt desires, leads to things like this, and so giving into their desires was already leading to abominable practices among the Israelites. The word "abominations."

The word "unfaithfulness" repeated twice in the passage, verse 2 and verse 4. He says the rulers and the princes in verse 2 "have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." Verse 4, "Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles." The word "unfaithfulness" speaks of breaking God's law and

his covenant as a conscious act of treachery. You're breaking a covenant, a conscious breaking of a covenant relationship. He says, "This is what is happening, you're intermarrying and this is what you're doing."

But he continues to use terms to show us how ugly it is. The word "iniquities" is used three times in the passage. Look at verse 6 as he says, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads." The same word is used in verse 7 and verse 13. The word "iniquity," the Hebrew word is one of the many words used for sin, it means "to bend, twist or to distort." So it speaks of crooked behavior, perversity, depravity.

So by intermarrying with these wives that they thought it made sense, I mean, hey, we've got to reproduce, we need to fill the land, there were probably good reasons in their mind and this is an attractive woman, she seems like a fine lady, and this is an attractive man, he seems like a fine man, and so we're gonna marry, and their parents don't object and they get married. And he said, "This is what's really happening, though, because you are worshipping their gods and you are adopting their practices."

Another word he uses in the passage is the word "impurity," in verse 11, and "uncleanness." He talks about the unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands with their abominations which have filled it from end to end with their impurity. These words are graphic words. In English we have a way of euphemistically saying things. I think every culture does. The Lord doesn't really do that a lot, though. He calls it like it is. You know, we say things like, I'm trying to think of, you know, there are many euphemisms we use. You know, we say things in a better way. Scripture occasionally does it like when he says, Paul says they fell asleep, he's talking about they died. We say passed away or moved on, or you know, something like that. We use euphemisms.

Well, in this particular passage when he's saying uncleanness, abomination, particularly uncleanness and impurity in verse 11, he's using words which speak of bodily discharges, the uncleanness and the impurity of the land, these are verses that you can find in Leviticus where he talks about bodily discharges, menstruation and other discharges of the body that are gross and ugly and that you keep to yourself. I mean, you know, a boil. I know there's some, my daughter told me recently that there's something online, people are crazy, where you can watch people pop pimples, a doctor that pops pimples. Can you imagine? What are people thinking? Some of you think, "Wow, that would be pretty cool actually." I don't know. There are things that I would think are cool too. I know we all have crazy things that we have to repent of, but anyway. But I mean, think about, you know, the pus from inside a wound. You don't want to see that. What the Lord is saying through Ezra is that, "When I look at Israel right now, I look at the land that My people are inhabiting around Jerusalem, what I see is a land filled with discharge kind of stuff all over the place." Like walking into a room like where the hospital, where people have been, they've been, you know, fighting to maybe some kind of tragedy's happened and they haven't had time to clean things up. Blood is everywhere. All kinds of stuff is everywhere and it's just gross and nasty. God says, "That's what you look like to Me. That's what it feels like to Me to come into your presence." The impurity and the



uncleanness and Ezra knows that and that's why his heart is broken because he's thinking God's thoughts after him and he says, "This is what we are." And this is what your life may be like right now. This is what our lives can look like and will look like if we are not walking in truth.

The astonishing reality of spiritual adultery. Isn't it amazing how ugly sin gets and how quickly it gets there? Think about if we right now could look at the thoughts of anyone of our lives this week, moments where we struggled was put on the screen for everyone to see, how horrified we would be, and some who have given themselves to sin and are really walking in spiritual adultery, though you may look like you're not on the outside, God knows your heart and if we saw your heart up here on the screen, we would gasp and that would be sinners gasping, sinners like you. How much more does a holy God when he looks at our sin gasp in horror?

And so this is the reality of spiritual adultery, the astonishing reality. The second point is the surprising power of spiritual adultery. The surprising power and essentially the essential point we see I think illustrated in this account and illustrated again and again through Scripture, is once you stop separating yourself, once you stop actively and intentionally separating yourself from the world, it is inevitable that spiritual adultery will happen in your heart. That's the power of it, and so that to see the reality of fighting the world and the flesh and the devil, the sin nature that still is a part and clings to us who have been born again, we still have in ourselves the principle of sin. We have ungodly lusts and cravings and we have the world system around us which is diametrically opposed to the things of God. In fact, the word "cosmos," the reason that that word is used for "world" or one of the reasons I think the Lord sovereignly allowed it, is it speaks of an orderly arrangement but the way when, and it could be used in a number of ways, sometimes positively in Scripture, you know, "God so loved the world," the cosmos, he loved the whole group, everyone. But then it's also used in the sense of, "Do not love the world." Well, God loved the world. No, he's not talking about the world that way, he's talking about the world system, that is, its system of values, its systems of beliefs, its system of what really matters, why you do what you do, what are your motives. When you look at the motives of the world, the values of the world, they're completely and they're completely orchestrated and organized by Satan, the god of this world, the god of this age, the prince of the power of darkness. He has governed and shaped and then our own sin has gladly cooperated with him in cultivating ideas about what really matters in life, and if you're not actively separating from that, you are getting caught up in the tide that is continually pushing, it's like the stream of a river, you've got to climb, be climbing out of the river, fighting against the current or you are being swept downstream. If you're not actively changing your values, if you're not actively changing your thoughts and your intentions by clinging to the word of God, then you are by definition being conformed to the world and you are becoming more and more a spiritual adulterer. In essence, uncrucified desires always result in spiritual adultery of some kind. So if you're not killing sin, it will be killing you, as John Owen said.

I found something really helpful in one of the really helpful things that I remember from one of Jess's messages was cravings carve idols. I thought that was an excellent way of

saying it. Cravings. The cravings of our heart, they're there. They're a reality. Until Jesus comes, until you die and go to be with him, you will have ungodly cravings in your heart and the question is what will you do with them? If you do nothing, that is giving them free reign and cravings will carve idols, and you will find that you go from your desire to worshipping false gods.

That's what was happening to them. They started out with a craving, hey, to have maybe a beautiful wife, a handsome husband. The craving to have a better life, "If I marry this person, he's kind of wealthy. I'm gonna do better. They've got some nice land." It is a craving for a better life, the craving for security turned into idolatry and they began worshipping Chemosh, Molech, Baal, Asherah, the gods of the Canaanites were being worshiped along with Yahweh, or Yahweh worship was being perverted into some kind of amalgamation where you're bringing in the values of the ungodly and mixing it into biblical faith and that doesn't work.

There's this relentless pull toward worldliness. James 4:4, when we saw this, this shows the connection of desire and idolatry when James says, and how that's spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery is basically another way of saying idolatry. It's not something radically different, not something separate, it's two ways of describing the same thing. Idolatry is when you worship something in the place of God; when you look to something to in a way that you should only look to God; when you give something else first place in your life; when you live for something, when you don't live for the glory of God, you live for anything else. That's an idol and spiritual adultery is another way of saying that. You're being unfaithful to your covenant. You're being unfaithful to your spouse. You're worshipping an idol, that's spiritual adultery.

James 4:4 says, "You adulteresses," and he says that right after he's talked to them about their conflicts that come from their pleasures. The word there is "lust; desires," it could be translated "cravings." You have these pleasures, these lusts, these cravings you want to satisfy. You can't get it so you murder in anger when you don't get what you want, and so that's why you have a problem with anger. It's not really that you have a problem with anger, you are an idolater. I am an idolater when I sin in anger.

Then he says, verse 4, to add on to how ugly it is, he says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." You must determine to be separate. This is the call of discipleship. It is the call to be separated.

Ezra, as they come, they say the problem is, chapter 9, verse 1, they have not separated themselves. We're gonna see that after the Lord begins this spiritual awakening in chapter 10, verse 11, Ezra gives them the instruction when he says in verse 10, "You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel." This is chapter 10, verse now 11, "Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." So the issue is you have not separated yourselves, you need to separate yourselves because the power of spiritual adultery is so great that if you do not separate

yourself, you will worship idols. If you're not actively fighting against sin, you will worship idols. If you are intermarried, like in that time, you intermarried, this is before they had the Holy Spirit and we're told in Scripture not to marry unbelievers, that's the only interracial marriage the Bible forbids and it's not really, well, it's only are you in Christ, are you not in Christ? In one sense you could say there are two races: Adam's race and Christ's. So don't marry interracially. If you are married already that way, you're married to an unbeliever, well, be faithful to the Lord because he says you're to live a godly life before them so that they can come to faith. It doesn't give you permission to leave them. No, you're already there but if you're considering being married to an unbeliever, repent, don't do this stupid, foolish thing. But in this particular time, to marry a person outside of Israel was to be inevitably drawn to idolatry.

You know, another verse in that passage that we were looking at in 1 Corinthians 10 when Jess was preaching it was, "Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall." You know, you think that you're standing, you better watch out, you may fall. You think you're above idolatry, you're in a dangerous place. You are on the precipice of a great cliff and you don't even realize it. You don't even recognize it. Turn back. To give the world an inch is to give the world everything.

There's an astonishing example of what the power of spiritual adultery in the life of Solomon. Turn with me to 1 Kings. I want you just a few books back toward the front of the Bible, you find 1 Kings. I want you to look at chapter 3, verses 5 to 9. This is Solomon who has now become king after his father David has died. The Lord says to him at the end of verse 5, chapter 3, verse 5, "Ask what you wish Me to give you." I'll give you anything you want, ask me, the Lord says, "Then Solomon said," verse 6, 1 Kings 3:6, "Then Solomon said, 'You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people?'" This pleased the Lord immensely, that he had asked for wisdom, "And because you didn't ask for money, I'm gonna give you wisdom and riches." And then the rest of the next few chapters show how amazing Solomon was. I mean, it's really the point of the first 10 chapters, one of the points is, look at how God blessed Solomon.

Chapter 4, verse 29, "Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore." That's a pretty smart guy. "Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and he wrote 1,005 songs. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals

and birds and creeping things and fish." To talk with Solomon, this was the ultimate renaissance man. I mean, he made Leonardo da Vinci look like, you know, like I can't think of a good example. Like Jughead or something, you know, "That's all you got?" I mean, Solomon, he's just incredibly wise about everything he looks at, he understands it because God has granted him wisdom.

And he goes on to say people come from all over the world to sit under him and to hear him speak his wisdom. We have in chapter 10 the Queen of Sheba coming and she basically says, "When I heard about your wisdom, you know, I was skeptical, in my own land when I heard about your wisdom, but as I now have heard you talk, your wisdom far exceeds all that I ever heard." People just like coming saying, "You're amazing in how wise you are." And he's godly and wise.

Chapter 11, verse 1, 1 Kings 11:1, "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh," an Egyptian, "Moabite, Ammonite," it sounds like our text, doesn't it, "Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.' Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away." I can't imagine what that was like for this man but he had all of these women and his heart's desire was always available to him, and yet these women turned this man of wisdom away from God.

Look at verse 5, "For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites." He's worshipping idols. This man of incredible wisdom is bowing down worshipping a rock or things hewn out of stone or formed out of wood. He's worshipping that. How? He stopped fighting and separating himself from the world. If he can fall, how can you say, "I'm safe?" The power of spiritual adultery is great. We must be actively and intentionally separating ourselves or we can fall.

Let's turn to the third point. Turn to Romans 12:2 and I'll give you the third point. We've seen the astonishing reality of spiritual adultery, and the surprising power of spiritual adultery, now let's look at the sure remedy for spiritual adultery. In the text of Ezra, what we see is Ezra as he's confessing the sin, he points out, "They have married foreign wives," and he says, "We have forsaken Your commandments." The problem was in stopping being intentional about separating themselves, they stopped pursuing God through his word and if you're not actively pursuing God through his word, you are forsaking the Lord and his commandments because the heart is naturally moving away from those things. It's like you're driving uphill, some of you may remember what it was like to have a manual transmission car. Maybe some of you still do, it's like very rare to have that, right? Back in the day, that was, you had to learn, most people had manual transmission cars. I had to learn to drive a manual transmission car and that means, you know, you had the clutch. For those of you that don't know, you used to have to not just go park and then just drive, you had to put it into first gear and you had to let out the clutch and give it the gas, and if you let out the clutch too quickly, the car would die. And

if you let it out too slowly and you put the gas in too much, the engine's roaring, you're sounding like you're trying to race somebody. And then you also, if you're on a hill, you've got to have your foot on the brake so you don't roll backwards because nowadays in an automatic transmission, your car doesn't roll backwards when you're on a hill. I mean, you still have your foot on the brake but you don't roll backwards. You wouldn't roll back into the car behind you. Then you would have.

And so I remember learning, you know, how it would be where you're on a hill at a red light and somebody's behind you and they get kind of close to you, and I'd be checking how close they are and thinking, "Oh, my goodness, I gotta get the clutch engaged and I've got to give it gas to get moving because I don't want to roll back into that car." Because on a hill in an manual transmission car, if you are not, the engine is not engaged and you are not giving it the gas, you are not moving forward, you are moving backward. That's the Christian life. If you are not actively engaged in moving forward, you are moving backward. There is no choice. And what would happen if you didn't engage the car correctly and you didn't put the brake on and you could just roll backwards and you'd get going faster and faster and faster because of the principles of acceleration due to gravity until you finally end in a wreck.

What's the sure remedy for spiritual adultery is to be actively and intentionally engaging yourself in going forward which means be actively and intentionally separating yourself from the values and the thoughts and beliefs of the world; to be constantly remembering who you are and whose you are; that God has separated you from the people, the peoples of this world to himself; that you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, 1 Peter 2:8. God has chosen you and separated you unto himself, his treasured possession. Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. Do you know what he says right after that, after he says, "Remember who you are," he says, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." He says, "Fight against your cravings which war against your soul and if you're not fighting, you are losing." It's just a matter of time until destruction is evident, until the appalling reality becomes clear. We must fight.

We must fight to crucify our cravings. Romans 12:2 pictures this, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Paul says, "Listen, the world is continually trying to conform you, to press you into its mold. It is exerting continual pressure on your thought processes." Everything that you see in the world is offering to you values. It's saying things like, "Follow your heart." It's saying things like, "Don't fear." Those things are just wrong. Why? How do I know that? Because God's word says something different. God's word does not say follow your heart, God's word says, "Don't trust your heart. Follow My word." Here as it says don't be conformed to this world. Don't let the world force you into its mold. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you're not actively renewing your mind, you are being conformed to this world and you are sowing the seeds of spiritual adultery.

Let me just give you one application, an example of this. I'll try to do it both ways. One of the great challenges for our young people is to grow up in an age which is incredibly confused about sexuality. I mean, more confused than many of us could have ever imagined, right? I mean, sexual identity now, it's unbelievable. It's not really that surprising, though, if you look at the Scriptures. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" There's no telling what the heart will do if you leave it alone.

Young women, you young ladies, I'm speaking to you if you're 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 35, the world is telling you something about your sexuality, the world is telling you that you need to look a certain way; that you need to give off a certain aura; that you need to dress a certain way to attract the attention of men or boys. The world is trying to press you into its mold and it's doing that continually. Every time you see a television commercial, every time something pops up on the internet, they're giving ideals of what you should be, what you should look for, what you should want in a man, and they're basically telling you, this is one of the key things is become an object for a man to lust after. They don't say it that way but that's what they're doing. The temptation for most women is to be pornography and to resent the fact that your body is not like the person on, you know, the billboard or on the television screen, and you wish that you were. No, that's unbiblical thinking about sexuality. That is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and Scripture offers something much more wonderful and glorious. Do you know why? Because God invented sex. God created it. It was his idea. Satan has given nothing to us, he just takes what God has given, the good precious treasures that God has given, and he teaches us, tries to train us to use it in ways God never intended, and in doing that he robs us of the pleasure, the real pleasure of it.

God intends for you to reprogram your mind with Psalm 139, "You are fearfully and wonderfully made." The Lord has made you to be what he's made you to be and if he intends you to be married, he's gonna give you to a man and you are the gift to that man and that man needs to start working even now. Young men, you need to be changing the way you think about women. If you're not actively trying to address this, you are being pressed into the mold of the world and the world tells you a woman is to look like this and to be provocative in this way, and to dress like this, and that's all lies. That's what the world does. That's not what Christians do. We have a high calling. We have a wonderful calling. We have the true path to joy. If you're a young man, God is calling you to not look and lust in the way the world does. And young women, you don't want to create, especially if you're Christians, you're dating a Christian boy, don't provoke in him lusts that are actually things that cannot be satisfied except in sin. You don't want to provoke lust. You crucify lust so that you can then know the wonder of love and desire in the covenant safety of marriage.

God intends for young men to understand that what the world says is an ideal for a man is a lie. You're not to be like the heroes in the movies, you are to be like Jesus Christ. That's the manliest man that ever lived. You are to be a man of God. You are to turn from thinking like the world thinks and you're to fight against it with the word. How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your commandments. And so

you let the word of God tell you and what the word of God tells you is this: if you're gonna get married, if the Lord wills for you to get married and it's not that, God calls some to singleness, but if he's called you to get married, he's called you to delight in the wife of your youth.

This is one of the most powerful realities and I wish I had known this when I was a young man, and I'm telling you right now, I've learned this and I delight in it today and I praise God for how much joy he's given me in my wife today, that I have more joy in her than I ever had, more delight in her than I've ever had because God has shown me, "This is the way you live. This is the way I say to live and it is the best way." Read Proverbs 5, 6, and 7, young men, and see what God says there. He says, "The lips of an adulteress drip honey, smoother than oil is their speech, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharper than a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold of Sheol. She has not pondered the way of life. Her ways are unstable. She does not know it. Go after her and walk into the grave." He goes on later in that passage to say, "Why would you be enraptured with a strange woman, a foreign wife, a foreign woman, an adulteress? Why? And let your springs be dispersed in the street?" He's basically saying, "You enjoy the sexual relationship with your wife." He says, "Delight yourself in the wife of your youth. Let her breasts satisfy you always." The Scripture says that. That is the command of God, "Delight in your wife's breasts."

God invented this thing and we are called to obey him and when we obey him, we find that his way is the best way, and then in the sexual relationship the Lord invented a man to love his wife in the way that a man loves his wife in marriage, to serve one another, not to act out of lust and selfish interest, but to look and put the other person's need above your own, and what happens is there is a sweet communion physically and in the soul and spiritually that as Martin Luther said, approximates something that must be what heaven is like. And you want to give that away for the garbage that the world is offering? No. I urge you to say no. And if you're not fighting against the tide that is everyday going against your mind, if you're not reducing some of this stuff that you're watching, you're listening to, you're not repenting, you're not accountable, you are sowing corruption that you're gonna have to work through in your marriage if you get married. Don't do that. Today begin seeking purity. Repent and you will find that God's way truly is best. He is good. Everything about him is good and right and best, and if we'll renew our minds and separate ourselves from the world, we will be holy unto him and we will not only enjoy one another, we will enjoy him whom we were created to love and to know and to enjoy forever.

That's what God is calling us to. The ugliness of spiritual adultery that comes on so quickly, so suddenly that we must be vigilant to fight against but we have the power in Jesus Christ, the Gospel, "If you continue in My words, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The truth sets free from every bondage. Jesus loves to take, you may be struggling because you have been giving yourself to all the wrong ways of thinking. You may be a young lady and you've been thinking and trying to be like the world to attract the attentions of men and you've done some things that you're ashamed of, repent today, run to Jesus, confess your sin to someone that you can trust in the body,

and start walking in purity and start getting counseled and helped by another believer just to walk alongside you and help you follow Jesus. Young men, you may be struggling with pornography, older men, you may be struggling with pornography, you need to stop, you need to repent, you need to confess your sin to another brother and you need to get somebody alongside you, walking with you to help you pursue purity and holiness.

It is worth fighting for. It's worth fighting for just the blessings in this life, but it's worth fighting for because our souls are at stake and so much is at stake. But we have all that we need in Christ. There is nothing too hard for God, nothing too hard for Jesus. What a glorious Savior. What a wonderful Father. What a precious Spirit.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we ask You to help us. Lord, You know each heart in this room. You know the struggles and the sin that no one else knows. You know it all in every heart, including mine. You know how we tend to stumble, how we tend to tolerate things that should not be tolerated. God, help us now to turn from our sin and to You. Help us know the only hope is Jesus, that His death and His resurrection deliver us from the penalty of sin but also from the power; that knowing Him and walking in Him and clinging to Him and walking in His truth and trusting in His power, filling our minds with His word, is the way to life.*

*Father, I pray that You would help each person to commit to do what You're calling them to do. Some do need to confess their sin today, many may need to confess their sin today to someone. Help them do that and help us as believers to love each other enough to be willing to have those conversations where someone, we allow someone to confess their sin to us because sometimes we're gonna need to confess our sin to them. Help us be more serious and weighty in conversations that our conversations would really produce what You want to produce in our lives, holiness.*

*And Father, fill us with the joy of walking in increasing righteousness. Make our marriages shine like Christ and the church, and shine with a brightness and a brilliance that people around us will see. And help us, Lord, in every area to be separating ourselves from the way the world thinks and walking in the truth and victory of Jesus. And we pray this so that He might be glorified, that He might be magnified, and we pray this in His name. Amen.*