

Question: In view of the recent “Ashley Madison” revelations, what do you think Jesus would recommend to a person who learns the heart-breaking news that his/her spouse has been having an affair?

The Bible teaches that from the beginning God intended marriage to be for life (Genesis 2:23-24). When Jesus commented on what is said in the book of Genesis, he added: “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:6 NIV). Jesus did provide for an exception in a case of “marital unfaithfulness” [sexual affair] (Matthew 19:9). But this does not mean that he demanded a divorce when a spouse has been unfaithful. Forgiveness and redemption of the marriage might be possible.

With this in mind, I believe that the “tough love” approach when there has been an affair is completely consistent with what Jesus taught. Assuming that one still loves his/her spouse and wants to save the marriage, tough love would mean saying something like the following to a spouse who had an affair: “I love you, and I do not want our marriage to end. But I will not continue in this marriage if you do not end your affair and break off all contact with that person. When you do that, I will find a way to forgive, and I will work with you to find out what went wrong in our relationship that led you to stray. I am willing to accept responsibility for any failure on my part. I will do all I can to rebuild our marriage into what it needs to be.”

If a husband or wife allows an affair to continue for fear of losing the spouse, the marriage will most likely end anyway. One is highly unlikely to regain the respect and love of a spouse by allowing him/her to treat a marriage partner like a doormat. By standing strong in the demand that he/she cannot have both the lover and the spouse at the same time, one is more likely to save the marriage. The experience of numerous counselors has demonstrated how this works. That’s “tough love.” It’s difficult, but it works. It has been known to result in a stronger marriage relationship than before.

I recommend that a person involved in this type of situation find a trained Christian marriage counselor who can provide the emotional support and help that the couple needs to rebuild their marriage relationship. There are also some excellent books that can help with this kind of problem. When a straying spouse does break off an affair, do not return to where you were in your relationship before the affair. Without help and

some changes, another affair will likely occur. I would be happy to recommend reading materials and a counselor if you will contact me. [Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web:

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