

Adultery of the Heart

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.”²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matt. 5:27-28

A common challenge for men is in how we handle our response to the female body.

We know that typically men are visually stimulated more than women are. (Few men, even Christians, would collect many sea shells on a topless beach.) That is part of the sex drive that helps fulfill the Genesis 1:28 mandate, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” And it contributes to the strength that intercourse can have to enrich a godly marriage.

Many men live under a cloud of condemnation and are handicapped in their relationships with women, and especially those who “have a lovely figure and are beautiful.” *Can* a godly man recognize a woman as having a nice figure and a beautiful face, without imagining having sexual intercourse with her? And just where does he cross the line into Matt. 5:27-28?

The Background

As part of the man-woman thing, God created men to be the protectors and conquerors, and the more daring, risk-taking and adventurous of the two. We are to be the initiative-takers and leaders in much of life. These characteristics of authentic masculinity, and of “being a man,” are part of God’s plan for us.

At least when expressed appropriately, these marks of manhood have historically brought safety and stability to a society’s women and children. They have been practiced in most cultures, and certainly in the United States until the 1960’s when feminism’s rise toward dominance accelerated.

The fact is however, that every virtue, and every capacity for good also has a potential downside. It is fundamentally a healthy thing for men to be attracted to both the female and feminine aspects of “woman,” but that can also take us to places that a godly man doesn’t want to go.

The Problem

The problem is, that while God designed these characteristics to be life-giving to others, they became perverted when man fell into sin. Because of the emptiness that followed his loss of relationship with God, man became selfish. One consequence is that men’s sex drive, and the other strengths of masculinity, were now controlled by his selfish need and were no longer life-giving.

Thus, a man could break his marriage vow, and/or ask or force a woman other than his wife to have sex with him. It is a display of masculine power, daring, and adventure-seeking as he attempts to satisfy his now almost-animalistic sex drive, which is often “turned on” by what he sees with his eyes.

The “adultery” of Matt. 5:28

The “adultery of the heart” of Matt. 5:28 speaks of looking at a woman lustfully, that is, with a desire to have sex with her. It is a serious matter because our heart represents who/what we are in our innermost being. It defines us and is often a precursor to action, as Jesus says in [Matt. 15:18-19](#), but it is not adultery itself as spoken of in [Exodus 20:14](#) and [I Cor. 6:16-20](#).

For the question of “what else might be there” to flash across a godly man’s mind is not necessarily sinful lust, and does not necessarily imply guilt. It can simply be our opportunistic tempter’s attempt to present an occasion for us to satisfy our sex drive inappropriately. We must draw the line at “appreciation” and refuse “desire,” which quickly leads to sinful thoughts which can produce sinful actions.

Because of the “never satisfied” nature of our sex drive (like our desire for food), and the “always something more” nature of porn, it can lead to more and more exploration which can be captivating. It can handicap a man in thinking of and valuing women in a healthy way, and in lovemaking with his wife. It can also lead to adultery of the heart (a strong desire for sex with a woman other than one’s wife) and create vulnerability to actual sexual adultery, but is not in itself an act of adultery. Adultery of the heart will be manifested by at least a consideration of the pursuit of fulfillment of the desire.

A Beautiful Woman with a Lovely Figure

It’s not “dirty” for a man to recognize that a woman other than his wife has a lovely figure and a beautiful face. Even the Bible speaks of that, as in:

- Genesis 29:17: Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.
- Esther 2:7b: This young woman (Esther) had a lovely figure and was beautiful. (partial)

To see such a woman and appreciate her attractiveness, can be something like seeing the dessert menu in a nice restaurant. Cheesecake with black raspberry topping touches an appetite inside me, but it’s not on my “okay list” very often. I can’t stop and ponder it or I’ll cave in. And obviously, having a woman other than my wife is *never* on my “okay list,” so I can’t stop and ponder her even if something within me is stimulated, which is not necessarily a sinful thing at that point. In fact, such stimulation can give me ideas and make me want to get home.

Good Sex

Fortunately, “good sex” is a lot more than what you see. It is person-to-person intimacy in marriage, which reaches to the core of our masculine and feminine sexuality and our personhood. The “giving” of love is much more important to good sex than a generic definition of a lovely figure and beautiful face. Hollywood, with it’s pumped up breasts, manipulated bodies, drugs, food disorders, bed-hopping and frequent divorces, knows nothing about it.

Godly manhood requires understanding, discipline and strength. Our goal is not to deny our basic God-given attraction to “woman,” but to shape it through our spirit which has been “born again” and which is now increasingly pure, honorable and life-giving.

If we know ourselves at all, we’ll guard against anything that creates vulnerability that can lead to sin. And if we love our wife as God calls us to, we’ll be careful to avoid anything that makes her feel insecure in our relationship. Part of femininity, is her need to know that she’s the only one for us. She is beautiful to us even if she’s not a beach babe or a cover girl, and that needs to be reinforced “till death us do part.” To “desire” any other, is truly adultery of the heart.

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