



The truth about sexual lust; Part 12.

The Matthew 5:28



Perhaps no verse has been so misunderstood, misconstrued, and misused to condemn the natural instincts of men, than Matthew 5:28. This verse has been wielded by countless wives to punish faithful husbands by putting them into the same category as those men who actually climb into the windows of the homes of married women and put their penises into their vaginas.

Some women have even divorced their husbands because of it.

Jesus said the following:

But I say to you, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

There is a crime to this context. What is it? Adultery. Let us start here. That the crime in this context is adultery tells us that if a single man were to look upon a single woman with lust in his heart, he could not be committing the sin of this famous verse. Correct? How could he be, since adultery involves only married people? Already, then, we have discovered a flaw in the common interpretation of this passage: a single man, lusting with his eyes, cannot commit the sin of this passage against a single woman.

What about a married man? I contend to you that a man who is drawn to a woman's beauty (lust), and who then walks away—*without the intent to steal her from another man*—experiences a normal function of his eyes, sacs, semen and hormones, and does not sin. A man who lusts after a woman *to commit adultery with her*, however, *has* sinned. In order to commit the brand of sin Jesus referred to, *there must be the intent to steal the woman from her husband*.

Let us review Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:2—

Because of prostitutions, let each man have a wife for himself, and each woman have her own husband.

A man's desire to engage in some kind of illegal sexual intercourse ("prostitutions") is, in Paul's mind, a given. In Paul's mind, the problem is not the desire, but rather what a man does with that desire. Paul does not say: "Shame on you for desiring illegal sexual intercourse." He says, in effect, "Since men can't help being drawn toward illegal sexual intercourse, and since illegal



sexual intercourse would be wrong, then every man ought to have his own wife.” Otherwise, he would have said, “Because of prostitutions, let each man confess his sin and repent.”

It is not the desire that concerns Paul, but rather the illegal avenues available to it. Paul wants the desire channeled toward marriage.

If adultery consists of merely looking at a woman, even with desire in the heart to be with her, then every man would be guilty. Why? Because God made men to appreciate female beauty. If men did not appreciate and lust after female beauty—and, in fact, for the females themselves—they would never marry.

Many women will not like what I am about to say, but it is nonetheless true: Men do not primarily marry so that they can father babies and spend thousands of dollars every year being responsible for other people. They marry because God poured five-quarts of testosterone into them and they want desperately to have regular sex with the same woman. Men lust by default. It’s what they do with that lust that makes it sin or not.

In 2 Samuel 11:2, David saw a beautiful woman bathing. It was Bathsheba. David appreciated Bathsheba’s beautiful body. This, itself, was lust. Remember, lust merely means, “desire.” There are good lusts and bad. The lust to see beauty is a good lust, in that it is natural. We humans lust to eat; we lust to drink; we lust to sleep;

we lust to find beauty in the world; we lust to spend time with our families; we lust for meaningful work; Jesus lusted to eat the Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:15); the holy spirit lusts against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). These are all good and legitimate desires, that is, lusts.

If David had *only* lusted for the beauty of Bathsheba, all would have been well. I will go even further and say that had he only desired the woman herself and—because of the spirit of God within him—refrained from stealing her from her husband, all would have been well.

A person who loves food may lust for (desire) the sight and smell of pizza. This corresponds to David appreciating the beauty of Bathsheba’s naked body. Is it wrong to desire something so delicious as the sight and smell of a hot pizza? No; it is completely natural. David’s desire for the beauty of the hot Bathsheba was also completely natural. Now let’s say that a hypothetical pizza person not only lusts for the smell and the sight of the hot pizza, but for the pizza itself. In this case, there are six huge, hot pizzas sitting inside a glass window. This is the equivalent of hot Bathsheba being *extremely* enticing, and David saying in his mind, “It would sure be amazing experience—I am betting—to make love with that hot, married woman. *In fact, everything in me wants to do it.*”

The potential sin for David is adultery; the potential sin for the pizza person is gluttony.





At this point, have either the King of Israel or the pizza person committed acts of either adultery or gluttony? No. But here is the big question: *Have either of them committed these sins in their minds?*

No.

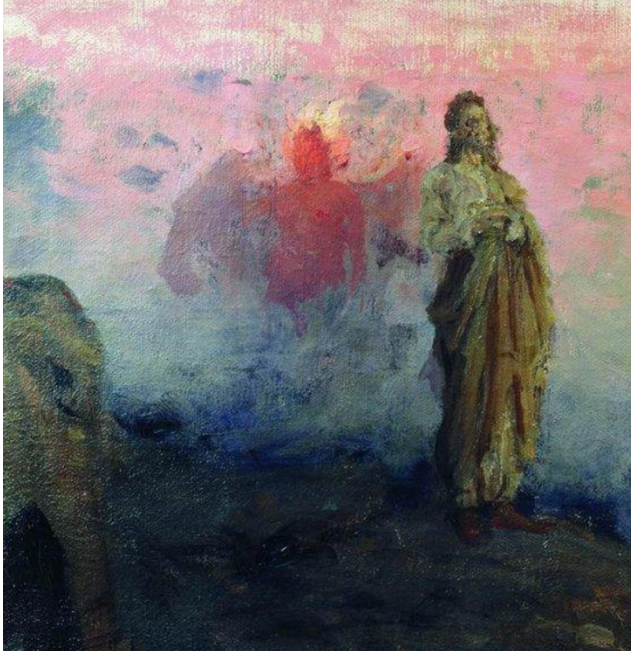
How has the pizza person committed gluttony in the simple act of desiring the pizzas? At this point, *the spirit of God can yet activate and cause the pizza person to exercise self-control*. After all, if there were never any temptations in life, how could anyone nobly resist them? Without real temptations, the spirit of God would never have a foil for display.

For David and the pizza person to be guilty of the kind of mental sin Jesus refers to in Matthew 5:28, one key ingredient must be present: *intent*.

Let us say that the only thing holding back the pizza person from buying the pizzas and consuming them on-site is the presence of three people from his church, sitting in a nearby booth. If not for these people, the pizza person

would surely buy and consume all six hot pizzas. In this case, then, not only is the desire to eat the six pizzas present, but the intent as well. The only thing lacking is opportunity. Thus, the pizza person has as good as done the deed and—in Jesus' estimation—committed gluttony in his heart.

Now, back to David. If David merely admires the beauty of the hot Bathsheba and leaves it at that, he has not committed adultery with her, not even in his heart. If he desires to have her for a wife, *but decides against it when the spirit within convicts him*, he has not committed adultery with her, not even in his heart. It is only when David lusts in his heart to commit adultery with Bathsheba, *and schemes to carry it out*, that he is as good as guilty, as good as if he had actually done the deed. That he actually does do the deed (he eventually has Bathsheba's husband killed in war so he can have her for his own) proves that the intent, not just the desire, was there all along.



THE DESIRE/LUST TO COMMIT A SIN, IS NOT, SPECIFICALLY, SIN. IT IS, RATHER, A COMMON INCLINATION OF THE FLESH. WITHOUT INCLINATIONS OF THE FLESH, THERE CAN BE NO OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO RISE UP AND COUNTER WITH AN ACT OF SELF-CONTROL.

Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan; note this: He was actually tempted. That is, our Lord thought about carrying out the power trips Satan dangled before Him. The thoughts, therefore, were not sins, but merely temptations—desires, lusts—to sin. Without temptations to sin, the overcoming power of the holy spirit has no field upon which to exercise. Unless our Lord was truly tried, His resistance can hardly impress us. But because He *was* tried to the point of actual wavering, the spirit within saves the day and His sinlessness stuns us.

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). It is the act of adultery that is a sin—*only if the body intends to enact the thought, the spirit of God be damned*. Otherwise, the thought is merely that—a thought. Even better, it is an opportunity for the exercise of God’s spirit.

Looking, therefore, is not the sin of Matthew 5:28. The sin of Matthew 5:28 is not even the natural desire to make love to a woman—any woman—for

that would only provide an opportunity for the spirit of self-control to kick in. The sin of Matthew 5:28 is lusting after a woman *to commit adultery with her*. That is, if the married man could have five minutes alone with the married woman, he would steal her. This is the sin of the context: *the intent to steal another man’s wife*. If a married man lusts in his heart to commit adultery with a married woman—that is, if having her as his own is the intent of his heart and he would surely do it at the first opportunity—then these specific thoughts count with God as actually committing the crime.

Philo Thelos writes in *Divine Sex: Liberating Sex from Religious Tradition*:

Human nature is such that every normal male is sexually attracted to a pretty woman. He doesn’t have to “work up” an attraction, it is simply there. It is automatic for a man to delight in the sight of a beautiful woman and to have a



strong sense of her sexuality. It is all part of one package ... If a man looks at a beautiful woman, is sexually aroused, and is moved to ask the woman for a date, has he sinned? Is a man's delight in a woman's sexuality legitimate, as part of his desire to marry her?

A man is aroused by the physical/sexual beauty of a married woman. Is this *arousal* sin? That is, if a man is sexually excited by the beauty of a *married* woman, yet has no desire and forms no intention to take her away from her husband, has he sinned? Where is the sin—in the look? In the sexual excitement? What biblical word or phrase describes this act as sin? Is being *sexually aroused* the same as *desiring to possess* a person?

It may not be apparent to wives, that when their husband “checks out” a beautiful woman, he is not somehow being “mentally unfaithful” to her, or wishing he had married someone else, or he no longer thinks that she is beautiful, or he no longer loves her ... If a husband looks appreciatively at another woman, the wife need not feel hurt, as though she has somehow become less in his eyes.¹

Falsely accused

A man wrote to me—

Martin, I have been a loyal husband to my wife of 30 years. I have never cheated on her, and never even thought of it. I love her, and our two children. I have provided for my family, and have been a present, loving husband.

My wife was brought up very religious, and she has a very low tolerance for anything that has even a hint of sin. I am more of a maverick kind of guy, and I live all-out. I appreciate great food and I am especially fond of sports cars. I don't own one because I can't afford it, but I like to look at them. I also admit that I like to look at beautiful women. I think that any man who says he doesn't like to look at beautiful women, is lying. It's as simple as that. It is so stupid to deny that women are beautiful. Who are we trying to kid? I don't see any reason for denying it.

My wife is very shy. In addition to this, she is insecure. At various times in my marriage, she has seen me looking at other women, and it has hurt her. I never did this overtly—or tried to. But my head would turn, and she would catch me. Or she would see me at the magazine rack looking at the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit cover. I never tried to contact any of the swimsuit models, or cheat on my wife with them. I just looked at them and felt happy inside because their bodies were so beautiful. It did not mean I didn't love my wife.

I knew that my wife was sensitive about this, so I tried

to be sensitive about it as well. I was very careful not to let her see me admiring other beautiful women. (My wife is beautiful, by the way.) I suppose you could say I should have just stopped looking at beautiful women. I know this is what the book, *Every Man's Battle*, is about. The truth is, I was just about willing to try what the book said, for the sake of my wife. But there was only one problem.

I would have had to have convinced myself that my heart was wicked—and I knew it wasn't. Even if it was, how would an outward law help it? The outward law does not touch the root of the heart, it only puts on a good face; the heart is still the same. Jesus changes the heart. I prayed earnestly to Jesus to change my heart, but He never did. By this I came to understand that my heart was fine; there was nothing wrong with it. I never had an adulterous heart. But my wife thought I did, and she said so.



I am about to tell you what religious condemnation can do to a person. I realize now that if my wife had not condemned me for my natural instincts, it would have calmed me and lessened my impulses, just as it calmed me to learn from God that I was saved by grace. Outward laws only build resentments. What good is bouncing the eyes if my wife's acceptance of me is conditioned upon it, and I can't do it all the time? What if I make a mistake and look at a beautiful woman? The resentment and condemnation of my wife

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would be a mistake away. How could I be comfortable with her, knowing this? How could I be comfortable with my wife, knowing her acceptance of me was not based upon grace, but upon my ability to control what I considered a natural function? Here is what my wife said to me: I came home one day, and she said, “Why have you committed adultery so many times? You are an adulterer. You have cheated on me hundreds of times.”

Martin, I was floored. Stunned. For several moments, I literally could not move. I just stood there, dumbfounded. This statement came out of the blue. I finally got my wits about me and asked her what she was talking about.

“Every time you look at a beautiful woman, you commit adultery with her,” she said. “That’s what Jesus said. Jesus said that lusting after a woman is the same as committing adultery with her. If that is true—and it is obviously true because Jesus said it—then you have committed adultery many, many times.”

I don’t know where this came from. She must have been talking with some of her girlfriends. She went to a woman’s Bible study once a week, and I had to guess that that is where this attack came from. Because that’s exactly what it was: an attack. I wanted to be enraged, but I controlled myself. I knew that if I started defending myself then I would say something I would regret, so I just excused myself and left the room.

What good was my faithfulness? I am a good-looking man, and have had many opportunities to cheat on my wife over the years. Yet I never have. Even when a beautiful woman would strike up a conversation with me, I would talk for only so long, then walk away. I would never allow myself to dine alone with another woman. That was one of the rules I made for myself. I was very conscientious. I am a good, Christian man. I love my wife, and I love my children. I also have a healthy sex drive, and my wife does not always consider that. In fact, my wife has actually told me, “I could live the rest of my life without sex.”

I have had opportunities to cheat, and the temptations have been there to cheat; don’t think it has never crossed my mind. I know how good it would feel. I know what a thrill it would be. But I have always resisted, because I am a good man, a loving man, and a Christian man.

One time, at a business conference at a fancy hotel, I was accosted by a beautiful woman who was actually a lingerie model. My wife has no idea how hard it has been to resist things like that. I excused myself and hurried to my room and locked my door, and I literally sweated in my resistance to that woman. I did not want to commit



adultery. I hate adultery; it is a grievous sin. I would never take another man’s wife, and neither would I cheat on mine. I am only describing to you the temptation, which was very real. It was a real struggle, not imagined. I succeeded because I love my wife, because I love my children, and because I am a good Christian man and the spirit of God lives in me.

So what? With my wife’s comments, I realized that none of my efforts mattered. All my efforts were crap. I was an adulterer anyway. For all my prayer and struggle, and for all my desire to do the right thing, and for all the grace given me by God to resist temptation—and for all my hundreds of successes in actually *doing* the right thing—I was nevertheless lumped in with men who *actually* screwed other men’s wives. I was lumped in with men who habitually gave into the temptation, who had no morals, and who did not care if they wrecked their families, or anyone else’s. In my wife’s mind, *I was the same as these other men. I was an adulterer.*

This revelation from my wife devastated me. I got no credit whatsoever for 25 years of faithfulness—in spite of severe temptations. The spirit of God inside me that made me love my wife and be faithful to her, did not matter at all to her. *Not at all.*

Please, please, please, Martin! Please publish the truth about this, and help save marriages!

The eyes are guiltless

See how this man’s wife classically misquoted Matthew 5:28. She said, “Every time you look at a beautiful woman,



you commit adultery with her.” This is the common misapprehension. But Matthew 5:28 does not say that looking equals adultery. It does not even say that lusting equals adultery. It is lusting with the *intent* of committing adultery that equals adultery. Intent means that the only thing lacking is opportunity, and that the luster would do the deed at first opportunity—*that* equals adultery.

Jesus’ message was not: “Stop appreciating beautiful women!” It is a murdering of the context to construe it as such, and God only knows how many marriages this misinterpretation has ruined. Moral integrity must be real rather than cosmetic—*that* was Jesus’ message.

Adultery does not proceed from the eyes. If it did, then blind men could not commit adultery. The eyes have nothing to do with adultery. Thus, no man needs to bounce his from feminine beauty. Adultery proceeds from the heart, not the eyes—

“For out of the heart proceeds ... adulteries (Matthew 15:19; c.f. Mark 7:21).

The eyes, therefore, are guiltless.

Arterburn and Stoeker are defiled

“All, indeed, is clean to the clean, yet to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is clean, but their mind as well as conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15). The wife of the husband

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whose letter I published thought at first that he was the dirty one, and that she was clean. She condemned him, not for adultery, but for noticing beauty; never mind that *her* sin was jealousy. I cannot help but notice a double-standard. And yet, while the Bible nowhere prohibits an acknowledgment of feminine beauty (how can it, when God Himself notices it), it is rife with warnings against jealousy.

Based on Titus 1:15, I contend that the husband who wrote the previous letter is clean, and that the wife is defiled. The husband is a believer in Jesus Christ, and thus possesses the spirit of God. The spirit within him testifies to his spirit that his appreciation of feminine beauty is clean. His religious wife, however, is offended by many things. Her condemnation of him is based, not on Scriptural prohibition, but on her own insecurities, jealousies, and personal qualms.

Scripture warns against drunkenness, not wine. Since Jesus Himself drank wine, He obviously considered it clean. Many religionists falter here; Baptists are prime examples—they think wine is dirty. How could it be, seeing as how Jesus Himself drank it? Such facts fail, however, to discourage those of a defiled conscience. Their disbelief in the cleanliness of creation makes Paul consider them (in Titus 1:15): “unbelieving.” Conversely, the clean believe all to be clean. This is not me talking; it’s Titus 1:15. My conclusion is startling, yet Scripturally sound: the wine-drinker is clean; the abstainer is defiled.

Most moralists are defiled; their morality is a pose.

Loving the weak of faith

The following is Romans 14:1-4, from the *New American Standard Bible*—

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

A husband should never hold in contempt a wife whose weak faith disallows her an understanding of his freedom. Likewise, the faith-weak wife should not judge

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her husband's appreciation of feminine beauty, for God has accepted him.

The following is verses 13-23, from the same chapter of Romans—

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.

All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

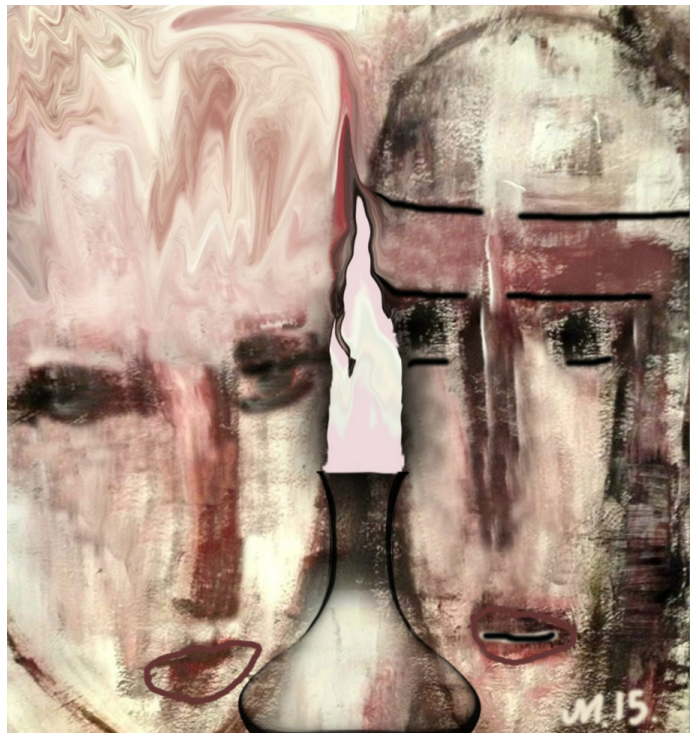
The husband who does not condemn himself in what he approves, is happy. He should not let his happiness, however, cause his wife to stumble. The freedom he has to appreciate the beauty of women besides his wife should be held as his own conviction, before God. The loving husband will not purposely flaunt his freedom in front of his wife. But neither will he condemn himself; *Every Man's Battle* requires him to condemn himself; this is never healthy.

My goal is to deliver men from the condemnation of *Every Man's Battle*. Ideally, I also hope to expand the faith of wives, so that the wives will at least no longer judge or condemn their husbands. They may still personally dislike the fact that their husbands look at other women, but jealousy, judgment and condemnation will get them nowhere. In fact, these things will eventually destroy the marriage.

The trauma of the letter-writer was not that his wife could not understand his appreciation of the fair sex, but that she judged and condemned him for something that the spirit of God within him insisted was clean. She told him, in essence, that he was a sinner; in fact, that he was

an adulterer. None of this was true. This is what killed him: his wife's jealousy, condemnation, and judgment killed him. It is also what eventually killed the marriage.

HUSBANDS: Do not flaunt your freedom. The freedom you have to admire the beauty of women; have it to yourself. Yes, give your wife this article. Yes, try to help her expand her faith and to understand that her acceptance of your God-given bent (that is, your manhood) will cause you to love her more, not less. Far from driving you away from her, it will drive you toward her. She does not realize that her jealousy, judgment, and condemnation of you are the things driving you away and causing you to distrust her. Even so, resist holding her in contempt.



WIVES: If you are able, please try to understand that your husband's desire to notice feminine beauty is hard-wired in him by God. Because he loves you, he will not flaunt this freedom. But neither will he deny it. To enact the unnatural practices of *Every Man's Battle* would be a denial of who he is. Anyone attempting such nature-denying practices are doomed to failure, and will eventually resent those pushing it upon them. As the apostle Paul notes in Colossians 2:20-23, ascetic practices such as those prescribed in *Every Man's Battle*, are of no moral value, and end up only pampering religious flesh.

HUSBANDS: You wives are not contemptible

WIVES: Your husbands are not evil.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES: Continue reading this series of articles, while exercising grace.

Why the battle?

God created sex to be enjoyed, not battled. Why do we make life so difficult for ourselves? We are our own worst enemies. It is always this way with grace and law—and with sex. God says, “Grace,” we say, “Law.” God say, “Sex,” we say, “No, thanks.” It is as if we are terrified of pleasure. It is as if we think that we deserve the worst. It is as if we say to ourselves, *Why should we be happy?* We see the rest of the world struggling and we feel guilty when we live relatively struggle-free lives. Guilt, guilt, guilt. We feel guilt when we eat, guilt when we relax, guilt when we miss church and relax on Sunday with our family, guilt when we enjoy common earthly pleasures. Enjoying earthly pleasures is not commensurate with loving the world. The Bible warns us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. Using the world is not loving it. It is merely using it. We use it because we are here. Who among us doesn’t want out of here? We use it, yes, but are equally willing at a moments notice to leave it. In the meantime, we *will* crack the nut of life, to see what delights it might hold.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31:

Now this I am averring, brethren, the era is limited; that, furthermore, those also having wives may be as not having them, and those lamenting as not lamenting, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not retaining, and those using this world as not using it up.” (*Concordant Literal New Testament*)

Paul is saying: hold on loosely. He is not telling people not to be married. In fact, he assumes people to “have wives.” We’re just not supposed to strangle them, metaphorically speaking, and make life hard on them. Same with wives toward husbands. Married people are supposed to live like they are not married. What does this mean? It means that they are to cut one another slack. It means, *Look, this world is passing by, everything is about to change; Christ is returning. Stay married, for crying out loud, but stop being so possessive. Give each other room; cut slack. Lighten up.*

Same with buying. Paul calls it, “buying and not retaining.” Is he saying we should go out, buy stuff, then take it immediately to the landfill? No. He is saying: “Go ahead and buy; don’t stop buying. Just don’t put too much weight on your possessions.” The key word is “as,” as in, “buying *as* not retaining.” Buy stuff, then pretend you don’t have it. Don’t clutch it to your breast like a teddy bear. Same with “using this world.” Use it, but don’t use it up. Same with

wine: drink it, just don’t drink the whole bottle and get drunk. God created sex and beauty. Use it. Enjoy. Imbibe. Taste each other; taste the world. Husbands and wives: Admire the beauty all around you. Admire both sexes. Admire everything. Just don’t freak out. Husbands, do not commit adultery. Wives, do not disallow your husband beauty.

For the love of God, do not struggle against what God made to be enjoyed. God is rolling His eyes at this nonsense. *I give them the world to enjoy, and they’re getting religious on me. Drink wine, buy clothes, look at women. Just don’t get drunk, make clothes your god, or stick your manhood into everything that moves.*

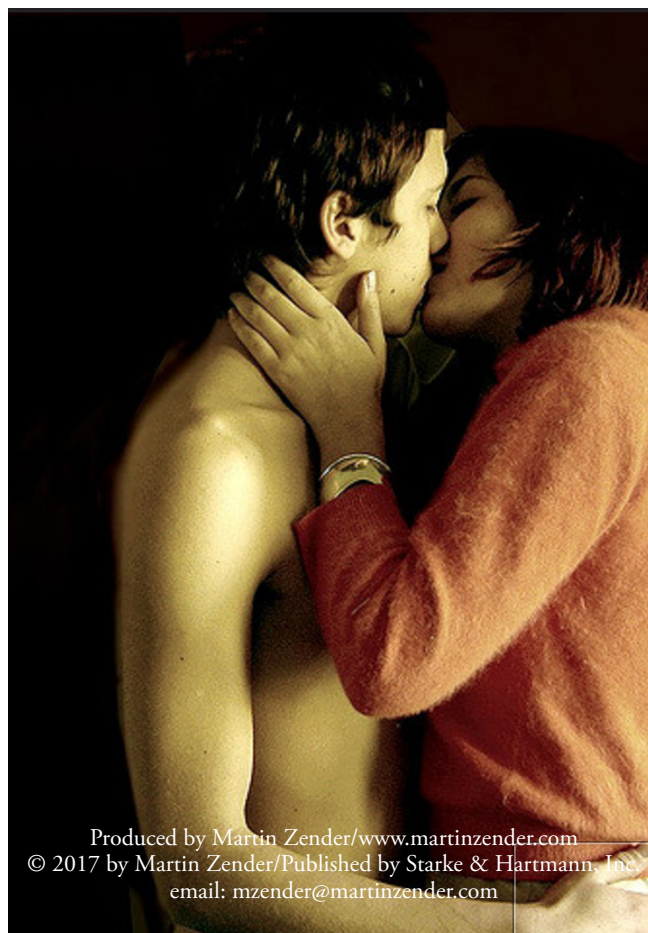
Is this so difficult? Why do we make life so difficult?

One would think, from reading *Every Man’s Battle*, that the worst thing God did to the human race was to give men and women sex drives.

Actually, it’s one of the best things. Let it work for you, not against you.

Life is too long, not too short. God has cut you slack. Why can’t you do that for each other? —MZ

(*To be continued.*)



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