



# Look Away

Dressing chastely at all times is an important part of discipleship and the consideration of other people's struggles against sin and lust.

Men tend to experience a very powerful yearning at the sight of a lovely woman's thighs, belly, or chest, in addition to other parts of her body. Likewise, women are not immune to sensations of lustful desire upon seeing a handsome man's exposed chest and rippling muscles. Even those who are not particularly attractive can incite lust in someone, for beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder.

To avoid becoming a moral stumbling block, Christians strive to attire themselves discreetly and chastely, concealing those parts of the body which are most likely to incite lust in some beholder's eyes and mind (First Corinthians 12:23). There will still be some beholders, of course, who will find titillation in public body parts, but the disciples of Christ will do as much as depends upon them to remain above reproach.

The other side of the subject of chaste attire, however, is equally important today as fashions continue to become more revealing and people dress shamelessly and provocatively. What is the beholder's responsibility when excessive flesh is intentionally or even accidentally exposed?

Some time after Noah parked the ark, he became a vintner, and upon sampling one of his wines, "became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent" (Genesis 9:21). All of that is his fault, but then his son, Ham, stopped by to visit and "saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22). The

text implies that Ham dishonored and embarrassed his father, but his brothers "Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness" (Genesis 9:23).

Noah was accountable for his drunkenness, reducing him to such a state of inebriation that he was unaware of what was happening in his own tent. His sons, however, were also accountable for how they handled the opportunity to observe his nakedness. Ham chose to look and mock his father, while his brothers would not even so much as glance at him.

When the wife of his employer tried to seduce him, Joseph, handsome in form and appearance, resisted, but finally was forced to flee her embrace:

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. (Genesis 39:11-12)

It is unclear whether Joseph fled completely naked or simply less clothed than he was before. Regardless, Joseph was unintentionally disrobed. Something vaguely similar happens today when clothing shifts as people sit, stand, or bend and significant body parts are emphasized or exposed, even for a moment. While the beholder might legitimately argue that the object of his gaze should have taken better care, the beholder still has to deal with his responsibility.

It happened even to one of Christ's disciples at the Lord's arrest. "And a

young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked" (Mark 14:51-52).

More infamously, David was walking on the palace roof one spring afternoon when he espied a beautiful woman bathing in the distance (Second Samuel 11:1-5). There is no indication that David was on the prowl for some flesh or that Bathsheba was purposely trying to catch his eye. Instead, it seems that she negligently allowed herself to be observed in a very private moment. David, perhaps, could not help but see her, but he did not have to continue looking, allowing his thoughts to coalesce around an adulterous plan that eventually led even to murder.

David, through no apparent fault of his own, stumbled upon a very enticing image, but it was his responsibility at that moment to choose to look away. King David demonstrates the fact that, "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

We, like David, are not responsible for the images that we innocently stumble upon, but we are all accountable for what we do next. Whether it happens at the magazine stand in the bookstore, in the web browser, or "in the flesh," the beholder is not rendered unaccountable even by someone else's malice, negligence, or accident.

Centuries before, Job answered accusations that he harbored lascivious thoughts by explaining, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? What would be my portion from God above and my

heritage from the Almighty on high" (Job 31:1-2)?

Jesus, perhaps building upon that noble concept, also reminded his listeners of their responsibility when confronted with images that cause lust to simmer. In the sermon on the mount, he addressed looking to lust:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 5:27-30 ESV)

The effect that you can have upon the attire of others, through shame, rebuke, or compulsion, is extremely limited by others' free will. The effect you can have on your own eyes and mind, however, is unlimited – because of your own free will, simply, to look away. Look away and take steps to avoid stumbling into the same imagery again.

**By Jeff S. Smith**