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**Lust Messes Up, Love Straightens Out: Ask Mark Sanford**

*Why do so many American politicians -- from Bill Clinton to Mark Sanford -- use religious language when they make public confessions of marital infidelity? Are they truly penitent or just pandering? How can we tell the difference?*

Words govern behavior. When defined DOWN, they loosen and expand. "Marriage" defined down expands to include same-sex commitments. Defined UP, "love" tightens to*exclude lust-driven behavior.*

1.....When for six days Mark Sanford disappeared from his family, community, and his gubernatorial office, and attributed the absence to "love," his most serious abuse - rigorous linguists would say - was of the word "love." Yielded to, lust terrorizes and threatens order at every level of life on which "love" stabilizes life.

2.....Feelings come and go, obligations stay. Since "love" is*an obligation, it is not a feeling*: since lust is a feeling-urge-drive, it is not love. The arranged marriage has been normal in most cultures throughout history: society, through parents, lock boy and girl in wedlock, lust happens, and mutual affection normally ensues. The West's reversal - romantic lust first, then love-commitment - has been an increasingly visible failure.

3.....Since "love" is an obligation requiring self-control, it can be taught and even *commanded*- as in Jesus' summation of the law, "You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself."

4.....Gerard Baker's WSJ "Sex Americana" (27-28 June 09) rightly associates Anglo-Saxon uptight sex with the "*puritan moral heritage and...Protestant work-ethic*." That was the culture my wife and I grew up in. So (and this is a flat statement, no boast), 64 years ago we married as virgins and have remained virgins except to each other. Of course we've committed Jimmy-Carter-style adultery, being occasionally sexually attracted outside of marriage. But effective for us has been Jesus' preemptive strike against the act of adultery: to even the thought of it, give the name "adultery." You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair.

5.....While marital faithfulness is only one expression of character, it is continuous with other expressions rooted in truthfulness, integrity, honor, and therefore with the *social, economic, and political health of society*. Variously, America's Founding Fathers said that liberty and its freedoms depend on character, which depends on religious faith (then and there, experienced chiefly in various forms of Protestantism: if no Protestant faith, then no Protestant ethic, "Protestant work-ethic," capitalism, or democracy).

6.....When religion is not involved, marital infidelity need not be publicly "confessed." The reverse is true: when religion*is*involved in speaker and/or hearers, marital "infidelity" is naturally "confessed" in religious language. The public knows the difference between penitence and pandering by the aftermath: when real, repentance in words is followed by behavioral improvement. In old biblical English, "Repent, and do works meet for repentance."

7.....Power is neither good nor evil. Power *with*and power*for* are good: power *over*"corrupts" (said Lord Acton) and is (as Henry Kissinger said) "the ultimate aphrodisiac." With the exceptions of those who (as William Penn implied) remain humble under God in spite of being in positions of power over people, power expands the ego (with increased possibilities of advantaging oneself, including by sexual conquests) and shrinks the superego (conscience, one's sense of guilt and shame at abusing one's powers).

8.....As ecstatic experiences of self-transcendence,*sexuality and spirituality* are intertwined. This is a further explanation as to why, in a culture where religion has any vitality, sexual miscreants publicly use religious language when publicly coming clean. Mark Sanford publicly confessed that after five days of weeping in Argentina, he returned to God as well as to his commitments in South Carolina. Said he there are "moral absolutes"; "God's law is there to protect you from yourself. And there are consequences if you breach that."

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  JULY 2, 2009; 10:33 PM ET**

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A couple of thoughts occur to me:

1. It has been said that the Greek language has seven words for the one English word "love": Eros, Agape, etc. I think this confuses things for us English speakers when we use the same word to describe our feelings toward our parents, our children, or for someone we are \*in love\* with. To dismiss Sanford's feelings for his mistress as mere lust doesn't really fit the situation, in my opinion (based on what has been portrayed in the media). It would seem to be more a form of Eros, erotic love not being quite the same thing as what the Christians consider a mortal sin: lust. (Not that betraying one's spouse is not a bad thing, whether Christian or not.)

2. I don't think arranged marriages are the answer. This may be a woman's perspective, but I don't think you can just say "lust happens". Maybe it generally would for men, but it can't be assumed for women. It also reminds me of something from "Anna Karenina": If there is marriage without love, there will be love without marriage.

**POSTED BY: LAURELYVES | JULY 6, 2009 10:51 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20LaurelYves%20%20|%20%20Lust%20Messes%20Up,%20Love%20Straightens%20Out:%20%20Ask%20Mark%20Sanford%20%20|%20%204691711&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4691711%26blog_id=618)

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