

Affairs of the Mind

The mind is an essential and integral part of any sexual experience, whether the experience takes place in the secret corners of the mind or whether it takes place in the realm of reality. In order for the body to be stimulated into triggering a secession of chain reactions that ultimately ends in sexual gratification, the mind must first register something that is sexually pleasing and then begin sending appropriate messages to the body so it will respond accordingly in anticipation of sexual activity. For some, particularly men, the beginning spark that ignites sexual attraction and interest is visual-- a curvy woman walking in front of him, a thought about his beautiful young wife, a knowing glance that is inviting, a warm smile, a tight skirt, a racy billboard. For others, particularly women, the beginning spark that ignites sexual attraction and interest is relational—a compliment, a personal conversation, warm interest and concern, casual affection, kind words.

Whether sexual “sparks” are initially triggered by the sense of smell, sight, hearing, touching, or tasting, it is the mind that first interprets the stimulation as sexually pleasing before the brain sends a message that prompts a physical response in the body. Throughout a sexual encounter at any level, the brain is constantly interpreting and communicating directions to the body. The body and mind work together interpreting what is pleasant and what is not, causing instantaneous changes both physically and mentally. Thoughts are so powerful they are able to trigger changes in body chemistry and functioning that produce escalating sexual sensations, even without the sense of touch being added. Thoughts act as the command center that not only controls emotional responses, but physical responses as well. In fact, the brain is the most important sexual organ in the body. It is an *essential* component to any kind of sexual sensation or experience.

For believers, this understanding is not the result of modern technological advances in the area of human sexuality. It comes straight from the Bible itself. There are numerous references to mans’ heart, or mind, and mans’ emotions and actions. We are commanded to “Keep [guard] thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23) The scriptures teach us that there is a profound connection between what we think and what we experience emotionally or what we do physically. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he;” (Proverbs 23:7)

Within the Song of Solomon we are able to see the way thoughts, emotions, and actions are all intertwined in an example of godly sexual expression. The story gives us a particularly intriguing look at a romantically charged exchange that takes place between two married lovers recalling their courtship and marriage. Some scholars believe it was originally written as a reenactment to be performed at a Jewish wedding. It is still read every year at the feast of Purim in Jewish synagogues. This book of the Bible not only typifies the romantic relationship of a wife and husband, but the special relationship that exists between Christ and the church as well. It has been regarded over the centuries as a very intimate and precious revelation of Christ’s love for believers, and the believer’s corresponding love for Christ.

What makes this dialogue between the lovers in Song of Solomon so interesting to our discussion on the mind is the way we see them utilizing all five senses in their lovemaking, but in particular, the way they use vivid visualization. Beginning in chapter one both the bride and groom describe their thoughts about the other, giving details as to what delights them and what stirs their passion for the other. The husband describes his lover's body by comparing her cheeks, neck, hair, teeth, lips, speech, breasts, navel, belly and smell to things he considers exceptionally pleasing. He talks about how delightful she is to him, how perfect and how inviting. Likewise, the bride describes her admiration and love for him and visualizes his body, character, lips, hands, belly, legs, and mouth. She concludes he is altogether lovely and tells all who would listen to her that she considers him as her incomparable lover and her dearest friend.

Throughout their romantic encounter with one another, the couple mentions the other's smell and even taste, and they obviously utilize speech, sight, and touch. Yet visualization and imagination are unmistakably incorporated into their exchange and it is apparent that their mental perceptions of one another result in sexual excitement, and passion. It demonstrates what even the world understands. Thoughts and mental pictures are powerful. So powerful, in fact, that they have long been recognized as an integral part of sexual stimulation and gratification. Which is why visual sexual "triggers" that God intended for the exclusive pleasure of a married couple are deliberately utilized by the advertising, film, publishing, clothing, and pornography industries.

Sexual Fantasies – Helpful or Sinful?

When sexual visualization is used within the context of marriage and is centered on one's spouse—not one's neighbor—it is a powerful stimulant that enhances enjoyment for both partners, and is not sinful. God says, "Marriage *is* honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Sexual expression is not evil in the least. It is sex *outside of marriage* that is evil and subject to God's judgment. Sex, like all of God's good and pure gifts, has been contaminated by sinful people and misused by those who have no interest in honoring God. So it shouldn't surprise us that sinful people also misuse the powers of their mind to derive pleasure from thoughts that are not pleasing to God. Indeed, it is sinful thoughts as well as sinful actions that brought God's judgment on the earth in Noah's day and will bring about the judgment of the earth in coming days. "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. *{every...: or, the whole imagination: the Hebrew word signifies not only the imagination, but also the purposes and desires} {continually: Heb. every day}* (Genesis 6:5)

Pleasurable thoughts are so intricately interwoven into sexual expression that one will naturally ignite the other. The moment sexual sensations felt in one's body begin to register on the mind, the imagination and thoughts gravitate automatically to things that are sexually appealing. The mind may focus itself on something quite acceptable and godly, such as thoughts of one's spouse and the qualities one finds appealing in him or her. Or, the mind may recall pleasant encounters with someone attractive; or construct images of an imaginary mate that embodies qualities one finds appealing in someone

other than one's spouse; or resurrect a titillating visual image seen in a movie or magazine. Any one of these things, if pleasant enough, is able to enhance pleasure that can be mildly, or strongly sexually arousing.

At the same time, the moment thoughts gravitate toward things that move into the realm of sexually appealing, the body responds and begins to trigger chemicals that signal "get ready" to every body function involved in sexual enjoyment. One cannot possibly isolate arousing thoughts from physical desire or physical desire from arousing thoughts. They move lead to the other and involve the other. There's nothing wrong with this chain of events if these thoughts and sensations are directed toward ones spouse, but if they are centered on someone or something else, they become disobedient and sinful thoughts that have the power to bring incredible destruction and sorrow into a life.

Solomon warned his sons that although the lips of a woman other than one's wife seem irresistible and pleasurable to think about, remember "But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword." (Proverbs 5:4) He warns them not to be like those who indulge in sexual sin and then mourn at the last. All sexual immorality begins in the mind. It never "just happens." One doesn't casually fall into this sin, rather one indulges in pleasurable thoughts that engage one's passions until they consume a person to the point of action. Within marriage sensual thoughts find a righteous expression, but sensual thoughts outside marriage produce a disastrous outcome.

Immoral thoughts eventually grow into an emotional attachment that enslaves the mind and begins to affect behavior. What may have started as a pleasant diversion from the trials and disappointments of life can quickly become a passion strong enough to move one out of the realm of fantasy and into the realm of physical expression. Pleasant sensual thoughts may seem innocent enough when they are contained within the heart. Trouble is, they won't stay contained. As soon as they get a stronghold in the heart, they begin to dominate one's thought life until they intrude unwanted into the routines of everyday life. Before long, these thoughts are no longer a pleasant diversion, but a compulsive and dominating intrusion that controls instead of being controlled. Sensual thoughts are able to quickly take on an addictive quality as they slowly envelope a person's thought life and seek an outlet for expression. Though no physical immorality may have as yet taken place, the "affair" in the mind is nevertheless becoming an all-consuming activity that begins affecting behavior.

Friends and family may gradually become aware that a loved one has suddenly become distant, as though he is lost in a world all his own. They may complain that he's present but his mind is "somewhere" else. The person enslaved in his sensual thoughts may begin finding it difficult to concentrate on anything but his fantasy. His work may decline and he may become irritable and edgy. Whatever he begins thinking about gradually slides into sensual thinking, entrapping and at the same time tantalizing him. Because sensual thoughts *always* produce sensual physical sensations, this person will eventually look for a means of sexual release. It may be an adulterous relationship or some other type of sexual immorality that involves physical interaction with a sexual partner--but not always. Sometimes a person caught in the grip of sexual fantasies

attempts to relieve arousal through masturbation, imagining this is not immoral because it does not involve a sexual partner. And sometimes married fantasizers use their spouse for sexual release even while their thoughts are fixated on everything but their spouse. These people are engaged in adulterous behavior even while they deceive themselves into believing they are not committing a sexual sin.

It doesn't just happen

It is always stunning when a professing believer who has been known as a godly person who loves the Lord “suddenly” gets involved in an immoral relationship or activity. Because we can only hear his spoken words and do not hear his thoughts, we marvel in disbelief. How did it happen? The answer isn't new—sin is powerful. It gets a grip when it is very small and then gradually grows in the heart unseen until suddenly it is visibly apparent. It's not that we don't know sin is dangerous—but that we fail to comprehend *how* powerful it is and how vulnerable every human heart is when it sets its affection on anything other than things that are above. Wherever we find our greatest pleasure is where we will find what ultimately controls us. (Matthew 6:21)

One reason Christians get lured so easily into sexual sins is that they ignore the warnings of scripture that plainly tell us adultery and immorality doesn't start with an action—it starts in the imagination of the heart. Jesus warned, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28) For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.” (Mark 7:21) Jesus is teaching that the beginning of adultery is a desire in the mind and the end is the physical act—but everything that takes place from beginning to end is *all adultery*. Christians tend to believe if it doesn't involve actions, it isn't sinful. If they haven't actually engaged in sexual intercourse, they often do not believe they are committing adultery—even when they are engaged in adulterous, immoral thinking and behaving. Things that are imaginary aren't always viewed as dangerous or immoral. So long as it stays within the confinement of the mind, it seems inconsequential--controllable.

Sometimes it takes becoming entrapped in one of these sins before a person understands their danger and how quickly they enslave and control and destroy. David knew well the sorrows of sensual sins of mind. It led him down the same darkened path of pleasure that has lured others and ended where he never intended to go. His adultery began with lust for a married woman, but escalated into sexual intercourse, deceit, and finally murder. Later when he repented of his sin and his heart and mind were restored to a right relationship with God He could pray with passion, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” He understood, too late, that his thoughts were the gate through which the enemy always comes. He knew better than to pray that his actions alone be acceptable in God's sight—he prayed his words and thoughts would be pure as well. “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

Are thoughts as sinful as actions? According to human reasoning, no. According to the Bible, absolutely. Sexual fantasies are not an innocent means of enhancing one's love life as the world's experts tell us. Sexual fantasies that do not center on one's spouse and follow the perimeters of Philippians 4:8 are enslaving and destructive. They trigger sexual arousal to be sure, but they lead away from a truly blessed and fulfilling sex life and into an insatiable quagmire of sin. Never forget: "The *thought* [emphasis mine] of foolishness *is* sin:" Proverbs 24:9a "The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the LORD." (Proverbs 15:26) Foolishness and sin may be indulged secretly in the mind and initially be quite pleasant. But sexual fantasies always backfire because they do not satisfy lust as some suppose—they only feed it, for lust is insatiable.

What should one enslaved to sexual fantasies do?

God tells those who have been indulging in secret sins of the mind, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7) Change always begins with genuine repentance. One must first be confronted with truth and come to understand that no one "gets by" with secret sins. God does judge sexual immorality and any believer who gets involved is subject to God's discipline just as David was. This recognition produces that necessary fear of the Lord that causes us to depart from evil. (Proverbs 16:6) It also produces sorrow that leads to repentance. (James 4:7-9) Repentance results when we recognize we have offended God and sinned against Him and have become grieved for our sin enough to turn away from it. Believers who sin are invited to come to God with a humble heart and confess their sin just as David confessed his sin in the fifty-first Psalm and found forgiveness and cleansing.

After one has truly judged his sin as God does and has repented of it, he must repair every hole in the wall that allows little foxes to enter the garden and destroy the fruit. Like Job, it's time to make a covenant with one's eyes, ears or any other means that tempts one to center their thoughts on something sinful. Job said, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1) Paul gives a similar instruction to believers, "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:14) Those who are repentant will be willing to cut themselves off from whatever has a grasp on the emotions and holds one's affections. Will it be emotionally painful and uncomfortable? Yes, of course. Self-denial hurts when one's flesh is screaming to be fulfilled.

There's no easy way around the fact that saying no to a beloved sin that has repeatedly brought pleasure is like breaking up with an abusive boyfriend or girlfriend. It's the best thing in the world for you to do and spares you from a lifetime of heartache, but it is still emotionally wrenching because sinful or not, breaking an emotional attachment can be compared to pulling an abscessed tooth. Hurts for a little while, but brings immense relief when it heals. The habitual sin has a tenacious grip on the emotions, so it's initially hard. The good news is that doing what's right even when it's difficult is what eventually conquers the pull of the sin. Like that relationship that was ended for good reason, the emotions eventually die and the desire fades into nothing until one wonders why in the

world one ever had such a hard time giving it up. This place of victory will arrive if every venue that offers a titillating smorgasbord for the imagination is shut down and in its place one deliberately engages in thoughts and activities that trigger godly affections and actions.

Turn off the TV, find better avenues for recreation than movies, get rid of those romance novels and titillating magazines, put a filter on your computer, stop throwing yourself pity parties, break friendships that are a temptation, spend time with people who love and serve God and get busy using your spiritual gifts and developing your God given talents for the glory of God. In other words, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth *affection: or, mind*}....Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him..." (Colossians 3:1-2, 10) "Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established." (Proverbs 16:3) Memorize Ephesians 4:22-24 and Galatians 5:16-17. Remember Galatians 5:19-20 and memorize Galatians 5:22-25.

Those who engage in a secret sensual thought life will need to redirect their thoughts toward their spouse and actively work to improve their marital relationship. Neglecting one's spouse sexually or neglecting to cultivate friendship and closeness with one's spouse makes both partners more vulnerable to the lures of imagining a more satisfying relationship with someone other than their spouse. "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband...Defraud [do not withhold] ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.[lack of control]" (I Corinthians 11:3)

In conclusion, never forget that the battle for control over the believer's life is fought in the mind. Paul sums it up well when he says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

Steps to gain victory

- Ask yourself how long your daydreaming has been going on? When did it begin? What is the nature of the daydreaming? How much time is spent daydreaming? Have you begun imagining your spouse being deceased so a relationship with this person could become "legitimate?" To what degree is the fantasizing affecting completion of responsibilities? Family relationships? Have thoughts become obsessive and intruding to the point of interrupting thoughts throughout the day? Are the daydreams indulged at a particular time of day or particular situation? Are you acting on desires or engaging in self-stimulation while thinking of this person? How are you particularly vulnerable to daydreaming? Are you single, alone a lot, experiencing difficulty or dissatisfaction in your marriage, depressed?

Are you working in close proximity to the object of your fantasy or have opportunities to interact regularly? Is the only thing keeping you from acting on your impulses an opportunity or favorable response from the object of your fantasy?

- To what degree are you aware you are sinning? Knowing what you believe with regards to thoughts and actions will affect how and what you need to initially deal with. To what degree are you enslaved to your thought life and how much is your daydreaming problem an escape from real life? Or in other words, what's going on in real life that makes daydreaming attractive? Do you have a background of depression that is connected to avoiding responsibilities or difficult circumstances? (You might want to consider obtaining a copy of "*Why Am I So Depressed*" listed in the resources of this website) Consider the nature of your prayer life to give you an idea what your thoughts tend to center on. It will be helpful if you make yourself a list of the sins or problems that underlie the habit as these will all need to be faced in order to be addressed.
- Once you understand the scope of the problem, deal with sins of the mind that enslave you and the progression that has led to entrapment. Learn to recognize how other problems feed this problem, trigger it or are a part of it. People become very emotionally attached to this sin to the point that they love it and do not wish to give it up. Most people hang on to it with tenacity until they are convinced it is destroying their life. You will need to see that the pleasure being derived from the sin is short term while the consequences are long term and filled with sorrow. Fantasies bear no resemblance to reality. The daydreams are constructed according to the desires of the heart and what a person wants to believe—not what is actually true. People soon discover this when they abandon their life to fulfill their daydreams and find they are not what they imagined—often only after they have made an irreparable mess out of their life.
- Once you understand the nature of your sin (it is adulterous, immoral behavior) and have a genuine desire to overcome the problem, you will need to learn how to break the mental adultery/daydreaming habit and deal with connected problems in real life. Do you want a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, you will not find God's help available to free you from this sin. If you answer yes, remember that you *cannot* have the imaginary adulterous relationship *and* a relationship with Christ at the same time. Which do you want? A relationship with Christ or the illicit relationship you are cultivating in your mind and heart? You **MUST** come to the place where you want a relationship with the Lord **MORE** than you want to proceed cultivating your relationship with an imaginary lover. You will need to understand this so you do not continue to deceive yourself into believing you are right with God or not subject to God's discipline in your life. You must make the connection between your habit and idols of the heart. The idol of an imaginary lover *must* be torn down if you wish to worship God in spirit and in truth. Repentance needs to be centered on the sin of adultery or immorality and the sin of idolatry first and foremost. You will need to understand you are breaking the commandment telling us to love the Lord and not to have any other gods before God, and the commandment not to covet or commit adultery.

- Remember, this problem doesn't just happen—there are other problems in your life that need attention. The Lord wants a relationship with you, is ready to forgive immediately and has everything you need to deal with any other problem going on in your life. Furthermore, there are other believers who are able to help and encourage you.
- You will likely need to restructure your life so you are not subjecting yourself to constant temptation. This may require changing jobs, backing out of a friendship, changing your recreational habits, redirecting your mind and rescheduling your day. You will need to cultivate your relationship with the Lord as well as other relationships that have suffered or are in trouble. You will need to understand the put off and put on principle and the fact that we change *only* as we put off, renew our mind, AND put on the righteous counterpart to our sin. The righteous counterpart to adultery is purity and truth as opposed to the lies of the imagination. The counterpart to idolatry is a genuine worship of God. He must become first in your life in every way.
- Learn what it means to walk in the Spirit so you do not fulfill the sinful desires of our human nature. Read Galatians 5:16-24
- Can thoughts be sinful?
Ge 6:5 Isa 55:7 Isa 59:7 Jer 4:14 Pr 24:9 Pr 15:26 Ac 8:22 Ro 7:7
- Can an imaginary relationship or a sexually stimulating encounter that takes place *only* in the mind be sinful?
Job 31:1 Pr 6:25 Mt 5:28 Mr 7:21 2Co 10:5 Eph 5:12 Ro 1:27
- Controlling one's thoughts is essential to pleasing God and walking in the Spirit
1Ch 28:9 Pr 4:23 Pr 16:3 Php 4:8 Ps 19:14 Ps. 73:25-28