

The Compartmentalizer

By Joe Dallas (<http://joedallas.com/blog/index.php/2015/04/07/the-compartmentalizer-2/>)



“If you follow a universal principle, it positively impacts all areas of your life. Universal principles don’t compartmentalize.”

-Steve Pavlina

Year after year, I hear wives agonize over the choices their husbands made. “What was he thinking?” they’ll cry, “and how could he do a thing like that if he loved me?”

The conclusion they often come to –wrongfully, but understandably – is that he used the porn, or had the affair, or acted out in some other way, because he stopped loving her. Or because she no longer was attractive to him. Or because she didn’t try hard enough to please. How else can his selfish, destructive behavior be explained?

It’s hard to believe, but truthfully, a man can love his wife and still betray her, because love is not a guarantee of faithfulness. Granted, agape love as described in [1 Corinthians 13](#) never fails, so this sort of failure and agape cannot go hand in hand. But human love, however deep, is still limited.

Still, unfaithfulness is intolerable, and no excuse for it can ever be made. But it does not necessarily indicate lack of love. Lack of mature *agape* love, perhaps, or lack of discipline, character, common sense. But complete lack of love? Well, if the history of men and women in scripture teaches us anything, it’s that genuine love and human imperfection can and often do walk hand in hand.

The Best of Men Have Done the Worst of Things

King David gives perhaps the best example of this. A man after God’s own heart, as God Himself christened him, was also capable of adultery, cover up, and murder. You remember the story: Israel’s at war; the King is lounging on the palace rooftop. He spies a beautiful woman down below, ceremonially bathing, and lust kicks in. (You know the experience: “I see; I want; I’ve got to have!”) She’s married, as is he, but in the throes of desire he’s not about to let a technicality like that get in the way. He takes her; days later word comes to him that she’s pregnant. After comical attempts to get her husband back from the battlefield to sleep with her have failed, David orders the man placed in the front lines of an impossible battle, there to be killed, so everyone will assume his pregnant widow’s child is his, not the King’s. (See II Samuel [chapters 11](#) and 12)

Case closed. David, like many a Christian man, walks away from his sin assuming that, because there are no immediate consequences, he’s gotten away with it.

Until Nathan the prophet confronts him with a story that so obviously parallels his own, you’d think David would recognize himself in it after the first sentence. “A poor man had one little lamb”, the prophet explains, “who he loved deeply. A rich man had several flocks, but when he had guests for dinner, he decided not to kill any of his own sheep, instead, he snatched the poor man’s lamb and killed it for his meal.”

By now most of us would say *Busted*. Not David. He's furious, demanding that the culprit be punished severely, until Nathan utters that most famous of all indictments *Thou Art the Man!*

Who, Me?

Duh. Wouldn't anyone in David's position know the point Nathan was making? No, and that's the power of compartmentalization. It happens when a man blocks out his wife, God, and family, in order to indulge in a deliberate sin,. After all, he can hardly enjoy a bit of adulterous binging while thinking of his loved ones. Then, having binged on porn, sex, whatever, he blocks that out, returning his thoughts and attention to his real life. Men, it seems, have an innate capacity for compartmentalization, often leaving their women baffled and shattered.

Especially, it seems, because women tend to be more global in their thinking and experiences, less likely to block out; more likely to mentally and emotionally multi-task. (Some can and do, I know, but by and large I still find this to be much more common among men.) So when a wife finds her husband has been able to break his vows to her, she may look at his behavior through the lens of her own makeup and think, "I could never possibly do that to him, unless I stopped loving him. Therefore, he has to have stopped loving me."

Logical, but wrong. Men can commit heinous sins, often by relegating the sins to a private back room which they visit on occasion, then lock up and forget until next time. Their real life, which they block out in order to indulge, is what they love; their sin, blocked out except for the occasional visit to the back room, is a dark luxury they enjoy. The two can, and often do, co-exist. They shouldn't, but they can.

Yet an explanation for sin cannot be construed as a justification. A wife can and should demand faithfulness from her spouse; her spouse can and must work on keeping his mind clear, his behavior clean, his dark, empty rooms swept and free of destructive indulgences. And one of the best ways he can do that is by directing his thoughts towards what is real, vital, and top priority. Lust so often starts in the mind, where it will either be entertained or vanquished.

"What were you thinking?" so many wives ask in their anguish. "Didn't I matter to you?"

And truthfully, yes, she did, but in his mind she simply stopped existing for a brief period. That's the power of compartmentalization, and that's the trap we need to avoid by thinking on what matters most. The mind set on God and loved ones has no room for dark compartments housing strangers who've no business being there.

So God grant all of us renewed zeal to know (and vanquish) the enemy when we spot it. The quick decision to focus on who you really are, and who's really your priority, can be life-saving, and the life you save may be your own.