

2nd Opinion: Lunch with a married man

April 12, 2017

I was interested as a Christian and a woman about to enter the professional workforce to read Meredith Stone's "Texas Baptist Voices" article, ["Pence, propriety and devaluing half the American population,"](#) but I found myself disagreeing with most of her points. While the assumptions and prejudices she is combatting are no doubt wrong, I am not convinced Vice President Mike Pence is making such assumptions, and to assume that his personal choices imply such things is itself an assumption perhaps motivated by pre-judgement.

Dr. Stone's main problem with Vice President Pence's rule is that it assumes "if a man and a woman are alone, a sexual connection, attraction or interest might be cultivated. When a man and woman are alone, temptation is just too great."

These statements, to me, demonstrate a lack of understanding as to how adultery usually begins. A recent study showed that [60 percent of males who cheat](#) do so with one of their coworkers; it is a very natural temptation. It seems in no way controversial to suggest that if a man and a woman are alone, a sexual interest might be cultivated. Is that not how we usually cultivate sexual interest?

Flee temptation

In addition, I don't think Pence's precautions imply the temptation would be "too great." We are to flee from all temptation, not only the overwhelming kind. If I refrain from drinking alcohol, that does not mean I think any person who takes a drink cannot avoid getting drunk. It is more likely I recognize my own vulnerability and wish to avoid reaching the point

of no return, not that I think the first drink itself is the point of no return or even an intrinsically bad thing.

I have a similar problem with Dr. Stone's contention this rule "devalues women as solely sexual beings who are not full persons who have something positive to contribute to the world." Precautions, especially those instituted privately, are practical measures, not moral judgements. When the museum places security guards in rooms where I'm wandering around by myself, they are not accusing me of theft or devaluing my personhood. I shouldn't take offense at the suggestion that I "cannot be held responsible for (my) choices and actions when (I am) put in the (room alone)."

We live in an imperfect world; these things happen. Indeed, statistically, I am much more likely to have a workplace affair than to rob a museum. Protecting ourselves generally is not the same as passing moral judgement on everyone who comes by, and if it is, it is only recognizing the depraved condition of the human heart, my own as well as everyone else's.

"Perception is reality"

Dr. Stone also contends, "As for those who suggest having lunch in a public place might suggest an appearance of impropriety, maybe they should think the best of people and assume a public, professional, platonic lunch is not the equivalent of sex." Let us keep in mind this statement is about the majority of the Arab world, much of the conservative Jewish world, and indeed, Western society until very recently.

As we say in the Navy, "perception is reality," and what appears to be improper can vary greatly. I don't think there's a call for moral judgment here. In light of recent scandals, the Department of Defense [instituted a rule](#) banning alcohol at events where instructors and ROTC students were in attendance. No one has accused them of "devaluing" either party or

suggested they think these people “only have feelings or relationships with one another that have to do with sex.”

I applaud Dr. Stone’s attempt to combat prejudices, which are still hurting many in our country, but I think her argument misses the mark. She says she “grew up in a church culture that said girls needed to do certain things so the boys wouldn’t be tempted. The girls’ job was to prevent the boys from struggling with sexual sin. It took me years to realize someone else’s sin was not my responsibility.” I would like to point out that while she is entirely right that someone else’s sin is his responsibility, his temptation certainly can be my responsibility. I have a choice in dressing to provoke a certain response rather than to glorify God. To recognize this imbues women with agency in sexual matters, not the opposite.

Avoid appearance

However, as Dr. Stone points out, possible assumptions and prejudices in Vice President Pence’s rule, I think she may ignore some of those associated with her analysis. After all, she accuses him of not trusting others with personal choices, but she seems to disapprove of his, and while she accuses him of making assumptions about uncontrolled drivers of men and women, she implies his own position is influenced by male privilege and inequity.

Perhaps Dr. Stone merely means this is an unfortunate consequence of Vice President Pence’s rule, not his intention or motivation, but if she intends to dispel prejudice, I would suggest she avoid the appearance of employing it herself.

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