

**Blaming Mrs. Spitzer  
Adding Injustice to Injury**

by Joe Dallas  
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Sex scandals and car accidents have much in common - injured parties, public spectacle, and charges hurled every which way amidst an abrupt, life changing tragedy. They both attract and repel us as we drive by, shaking our disapproving heads even as we crane our necks to see more. Small wonder, then, that Governor Spitzer's use of prostitutes is eclipsing even Hillary v. Obama in the talking heads department.

But a new wrinkle was added to the fuss last week when Dr. Laura Schlessinger, appearing on the Today Show, had this to say about Gov. Spitzer's wife:

“When the wife does not focus in on the needs and the feelings, sexually, personally, to make him feel like a man, to make him feel like a success, to make him feel like her hero, he's very susceptible to the charm of some other woman making him feel what he needs. The cheating was his decision to repair what's damaged and to feed himself where he's starving.”

Whew! Mrs. Spitzer didn't try hard enough, so the malnourished governor found someone who (for a mere \$4000.00 or so) would provide a bit of supplemental hero worship. The predictable outrage from Schlessinger fans and foes alike is there for any Googler to view, as parties from all sides take umbrage with the suggestion Mrs. Spitzer is somehow the villain. And while I've admired Dr. Laura's positions and contributions over the years, this time I'd say her remarks warrant umbrage, and then some.

But truth be told, the myth of an adulterer's wife being somehow responsible for her husband's sin is painfully common. I've seen it repeatedly, as couples shattered by indiscretion have come to my office asking who's to bless or blame. Often, to the Church's shame, wives have been told by Christian family members, friends, and yes, pastors, that their shortcomings as women contributed to, if not caused, their husband's downfall. The question thus shifts in their minds from “Why did *he* do wrong?” to “What did *I* do wrong?” Two sadly the misguided conclusions they come to look something like this:

**“I'm must not be attractive enough for him.”**

An odd conclusion indeed, especially for the likes of Mrs. Spitzer who is, as the news footage of her proves, a singularly attractive woman. Yet women just as lovely have asked me point blank, “If I were less like *this* or more like *that*, would he still have cheated on me?”

The question often comes from the wife who caught her husband looking at porn, and who's seen first hand the type of women he privately ogles. Or from the spouse comparing herself to the call girl, stripper or masseuse her husband dallied with. She sees the surgically enhanced body in the exotic outfits and cries “uncle”, assuming she can't hope to compete.

Yet one remembers the ghastly murder of actress Sharon Tate, stunningly beautiful wife of director Roman Polanski, at the hands of the Charles Manson cult. After her death Polanski publicly admitted to frequent adulteries with numerous partners, all the while asserting his love for Sharon and praising both her beauty and tenderness as a wife. Clearly, one couldn't impugn the looks of Miss Tate, one of the most exquisite figures Hollywood ever featured, because of Polanski's behavior. Nor should anyone, especially a betrayed spouse, assume a wife's appearance can either prevent or contribute to an adulterous act. Adultery, in short, is more a statement of what a man *is* than of what his wife *isn't*.

**“I wasn't attentive enough to him, so he cheated.”**

Let's not too hastily dismiss the first half of the statement. In fact, let me get this off my chest before going any further: *Some* wives are indeed getting away with murder.

Not all. Most, I believe, are loving, strong partners in grace with their men. But I've seen more than a few Christian ladies grow comfortable screaming at their husbands, undermining them to their children, humiliating them in public, complaining regularly about their real or perceived shortcomings, and, in general, treating them like dirt. Their husbands, in turn, are expected to obey Paul's admonishment to “Love your wives as Christ loved the Church.” But just try quoting the other half of that command – “Wives, submit to your husbands” – and watch the outrage at such an archaic, sexist notion. For that matter, attend a Christian men's conference and you're likely to hear multiple rebukes heaped (rightfully, alas) on male attendees who are exhorted to better fulfill their roles as husbands/fathers. But visit the Christian women's conference across the street and, ten to one, you won't hear similar exhortations. In fact, when a husband commits adultery, is there no irony in the fact people refer to him as one who broke his vow of fidelity, yet little or no criticism is aimed at the critical, caustic wife who routinely breaks *her* vow to love, honor and cherish?

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That said, let's not unduly muddy the waters. Dr. Schlessinger, trying to clarify her earlier comments in a later interview, rightly pointed out that “*His* responsibility for cheating is his. The responsibility for mistreating her man is *hers*.” That time she got it right. The wife who is inattentive, indifferent or downright abusive is responsible for her sins, not his. No woman, no matter how odious, makes her man commit adultery, so if a wife sins, let her account. But let her account for her sins alone.

That's a fairly big if, though, considering the many women who've shown more than reasonable affection and concern for their spouses who cheated nonetheless. King David, for example, had countless wives and concubines at his disposal when he committed his notorious adultery with Bathsheba. Does anyone really believe a harem of palace wives and concubines didn't know how to show the King all due attention? And what constitutes “enough attention” anyway? None of us, in moments of brutal honesty, will deny we at times wish for more love, notice, or affection from our spouses. But will any of us then have the *chutzpah* to conclude we're entitled to sin because we feel sinned against?

The wreckage of the Spitzer's crises is still being cleared, and time will tell how effectively they repair the damage. But should the Governor decide to apply himself to restoring trust with his bruised wife, then his work is surely cut out for him. He'll need to acknowledge the nature of his betrayal, making no excuses, no rationalizations. He'll need to express due remorse, showing her he not only publicly recognizes his failure, but privately feels ongoing pain over it as well. He'll need to then give her room to express her own pain, allowing him an education in the emotional holocaust a woman experiences when her man violates her in such an intimate yet cruelly public way. And he'll surely need to establish some structure of accountability and treatment by which he can assure her this behavior will never be repeated.

Meanwhile, let's suspend public speculations about what role if any this injured woman had in the agony she's enduring. Let the sinner repent and the system exercise fairness in its judgment. Let the Church be a healing agent, should the Spitzers want to avail themselves of it, and let the prayers of believers everywhere continue for all involved.

And please, in the future, let prominent leaders refrain from adding insult, much less injustice, to such a devastating and needless injury.

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