Are love and lust two sides of the same coin? Certainly these two get confused. The billboard out on the interstate suggests lust leads to hell. That would put it pretty far away from love!

Maybe we are we wired for lust and hopefully love follows?

Allow me to take a detour down a road that is both obvious and treacherous. Testosterone is a hormone that drives men crazy. Women may argue with who gets driven crazy! Testosterone is associated with social dominance and a woman’s sense that she has ‘clicked’ with a man. Neither of these need necessarily be negative. Testosterone feeds the drive to be victorious but also engenders cooperation, traits that can lead to helpful liaisons of all types. But maybe we can blame the big T for lust.

Lust may be what attracts us, but its love that will keep us together (apologies to Neil Sedaka.) A nice lady told her husband early in their relationship, “I won’t always feel like loving you, but I will always love you as an act of will.”

Feelings like lust may be highly charged but too fleeting for our goal of healthy coupling.

A young husband and father came into my office recently with depression. We uncovered guilt about sexual behavior prior to marriage. He was using work to avoid emotional commitment to his wife and child. With some work he realized how lust was clouding his relationship with his wife. He even began to see himself as addicted to lust. Lust provided excitement and the safety of a distance. But the price was too high; guilt, self doubt and isolation wracked him. Through honesty and a lot of vulnerability he experienced a newfound love for his wife and child.

Lust is self-serving and transient. It can shift with mood or even the temperature; something hot can go cold real quick. Not to mention that lust is one of the seven deadly sins to be avoided. Usually associated with carnal desire, lust depersonalizes what one supposes is a relationship.

Coming from the position of lust, the other person is objectified and the opportunity for meaningful understanding and sharing is lost. Lust wants what it wants when it wants it. This is language used with immaturity, the inability to delay gratification, the behavior of a three year old.

And that’s what you get, three year olds. If you don’t get your lust under control, you end up with a string of failed relationships with a string of children living in a variety of houses. And does this ever put a strain on the burgeoning love that may have been there. Good luck with that.

More pain is added when lust gets loose in extramarital activities. When one follows lust into the wrong bed, partners, children, even communities suffer.

The challenge for mature adults is to get past our more primitive natures and allow love to move us toward civil, mutual coupling.

Is lust okay? Absolutely! In a committed relationship, passion and desire are crucial. But don’t get the cart before the horse, the coupling will get tangled, the horse will trip and the cart tipped over.