



Why “Lusting” in Matthew 5:27-28 Doesn’t Make All Men Adulterers

Description



A clarification before we begin: I’m not about to say that

leering at women with drool running down your chin is acceptable. That is **not** the point. I’m not looking to condone dishonoring behavior; I’m hoping to help good men with some needless guilt.

That said, let’s dive in.

(Edit: I finally got a chance to write [an article on porn, masturbation, and fantasy](#) in response to all the emails I’ve received concerning this article. I’ll put another link at the very end of this article for your convenience if you are interested.)

Get Thee to the (original) Greek

(Note, all scripture quotations are in the NASB unless otherwise noted.)

Matthew 5:27-28

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’;

28 but I say to you that **everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

Because of bad translation, this verse has caused a lot of needless guilt among Christian men for nearly 2000 years. (*Ever since they stopped reading it in the original Greek.*) Probably the biggest problem is the omission of Greek words which change the meaning of the passage.

And yes, that happens a lot.

To start with, let’s get a somewhat stilted (*but more accurate*) [translation of this passage from my favorite interlinear Bible](#).

Matthew 5:27-28 (*interlinear, which is why it sounds a little funny*)

27 You have heard that it was said “not shall you commit adultery”.

28 I however say to you, that **everyone looking upon a woman in order to lust after her** already has committed adultery with her in the heart of him.

This is my first point: English translations often skip or omit Greek words to make the sentence flow in English. It’s a downside of translating because no translation is perfect. Unfortunately, that’s not the case here. Like I said, they’ve omitted a Greek word for seemingly no reason at all.

I don’t understand why.

The Greek word translated “in order to” is the Greek word “????” ([pros](#)). It’s a preposition with the meaning:

4314 *prós* (a preposition) – properly, **motion towards to “interface with” (literally, moving toward a goal or destination).**

4314 /*prós* (“towards, with”) **indicates “extension toward a goal, with implied interaction or reciprocity** (L & N, 1, 84.18), with “presumed contact and reaction” (L & N, 1, 84.23). 4314 (*prós*) naturally suggests the cycle of *initiation and response*

The Greek word Pros conveys intention. **Jesus was talking about intentional, purposeful looking/staring here and that’s the first crucial point.**

Jesus is not talking about an accidental glance or catching a bit of flesh out of the corner of your eye.

I've heard some people really abuse this verse.

Some people say that just *thinking* a woman is attractive means you're flirting with lust/adultery. Put simply, that's stupid. There is nothing wrong with thinking a woman is beautiful, or that she has a beautiful figure. That is not what Jesus is driving at in this passage (*which I'll prove*).

So no, thinking a woman is beautiful is not flirting with lust... Because Jesus is not even talking about lust in this passage!

Lust or Coveting?

Let's talk about the word that's translated "lust" in that passage. It's the Greek word "?????????" ([epithumeó](#)). First, I'd like to point out that epithumeó is a verb.

It's not a noun, it's a verb.

A noun identifies a person, animal, place, thing, or idea/feeling. A verb (*other than a linking verb*) indicates action. The word translated "lust" is a verb and thus it indicates action, not a mere feeling or passing thought.

Epithumeó means:

1937 epithymé? (from 1909 /epí, "focused on" intensifying 2372 /thymós, "**passionate desire**" – properly, **to show focused passion** as it aptly builds on (Gk epi, "upon") **what a person truly yearns for; to "greatly desire to do or have something – 'to long for, to desire very much'** " (L & N, 1, 25.12)

So we have the Greek word "Pros" which shows the looking is intentional and purposeful. Now we have the Greek verb epithumeó, which again brings out the purposefulness of the action here. It means to show focused desire on something you really want.

Further – and I can't stress how crucial this is – **you must "greatly desire" and/or "show focused passion" and do it *on purpose* to be "epithumeó"**. Again, this isn't a passing glance or fancy. It's not even (*necessarily*) a double take when an attractive woman walks by.

This is focused, intentional, passionate desiring.

Now, let's dig the well deeper.

Romans 7:7 (KJV)

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, **Thou shalt not covet**.

Romans 13:9 (ESV)

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, **You shall not covet**,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The word translated “covet” above is the same word used in Matthew: *epithumeó*.

Think about that for a moment.

Really think about it.

When Paul quotes the 10th commandment (*you shall not covet*), he uses the same word that Jesus uses. Could they have a similar meaning? Absolutely.

Remember: context.

Jesus starts the previous verse by talking about adultery. The 7th commandment forbade adultery, and the 10th commandment forbade the thing that *leads to* adultery: coveting. earlier in the passage (verses 21-22) Jesus reminded them that murder is wrong, and then forbade the thing that leads to murder: hate.

Notice the symmetry there.

Epithumeó can have a positive connotation. Jesus Himself uses it in Luke 22:15. But *in context*, it certainly seems that Jesus is referring to the 10th Commandment about coveting.

Now, back to Matthew

The word that Paul uses for “covet” when quoting the 10th commandment is the exact same word that Jesus uses. Further, the context dictates that Jesus is referring to coveting (*not lusting*), in violation of the 10th Commandment. However, it’s translated “lust” instead of covet because...

because...

I have no idea.

As we’ve already seen, it’s a strong focused desire that’s not necessarily sexual in nature. With that understanding, I’m going to alter the NASB translation slightly to bring it more in line with what we’ve

learned so far.

Matthew 5:27-28 (altered NASB)

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’;

28 but I say to you that **everyone who gazes intently at a woman in order to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

Makes a big difference doesn't it?

This understanding totally changes the meaning of the passage from “don't look at women” to “don't covet women”. Coveting is clearly a sin and you can find many references to it being one.

However, we don't have the full meaning of the passage yet. There are still more pieces to the puzzle.

So Let's Talk About What Coveting REALLY is

I could write paragraphs about what coveting really is. However, I'll let Dennis Prager explain because he does such a marvelous job. (*The video is less than 5 minutes.*)

There's nothing wrong with admiring what another person has. Sin/coveting only comes when you desire to take those things away from another person to own them yourself.

A Note About Adultery

If you require further evidence that Matthew 5 is talking about coveting, then look no farther than the definition of the Greek and Hebrew words that we translate “adultery”. In English, adultery means “*a married person having sex with a person other than their spouse*”. However, the Greek and Hebrew words have a more narrow definition for “adultery”.

Throughout the Bible, the words we translate “adultery” have only one meaning. Biblically speaking, **Adultery is a man having sex with another man's wife.** (*Or to state it differently “a married woman having sex with a man who isn't her husband”.*)

[I have a whole article about adultery](#) where I prove the statement above at length. Easton's Bible Dictionary agrees with my definition and defines adultery as:

conjugal infidelity. An adulterer was **a man who had illicit intercourse with a married or a betrothed woman**, and such a woman was an adulteress. **Intercourse between a married man and an unmarried woman was fornication.** Adultery was regarded as a great social

wrong, as well as a great sin.

If a married man has sex with an unmarried woman, that's sexual immorality or fornication. Both are serious sins and I am **not** saying it's acceptable because it definitely isn't.

Sex outside of marriage is a serious sin.

It's a **very** serious sin. it's so serious that I [devoted an entire article to proving that it's not only a sin, but a wicked, senseless sin that God promised to judge.](#)

I'm not trying to minimize that at all.

Two unmarried people sin greatly when they have sex with each other. However, they don't commit adultery. Adultery requires a married woman to be involved. The marital state of the man is irrelevant to deciding if it's adultery or not; the marital state of the woman determines if it's adultery.

Now, back to the Matthew (*again*)

Important point:

In Greek, they don't have a separate word for "wife" vs "woman".

They are the exact same word and only context can tell you which is which. (*which creates a headache interpreting some passages...*) So, what if Jesus wasn't talking about just any woman, but specifically a married woman? Remember, a man can only commit adultery if he has sex with another man's wife.

Remember: context.

The point Jesus is making is about adultery. Biblical adultery can **only** be committed when a **married** woman is involved. Therefore, the women mentioned here **must** be married. If she isn't, then you simply **can't** have the sin of adultery. It's literally impossible.

Please keep that in mind as you read.

Matthew 5:27-28 (*Altered NASB from before with the proper meaning inserted*)

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';

28 but I say to you that **everyone who gazes intently at a [married] woman in order to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

All of a sudden, the whole verse makes **perfect** sense. Jesus says that if you covet your neighbor's wife, you've as good as committed adultery with her in your heart. **The issue is coveting another man's wife**, **not** noticing an attractive woman.

Conclusion

No, men shouldn't stare open-mouthed and drooling at attractive women. However, it's not wrong to notice beautiful women. It's rude – and unloving/dishonoring – to gawk and stare though so please don't do that. However, just because you noticed that a woman is beautiful – or even has a great figure – doesn't mean you've violated Jesus' words in Mathew.

You cross the line when you switch from noticing/admiring to coveting.

It's about the desire to posses (covet) another man's wife that Jesus warns about here. It's perfectly normal and natural to find women attractive; just don't cross the line and covet another man's wife.

Just one last thought.

Men: keep it classy and treat all women with honor as if they were daughters of the Most High God... because they are. (*Isaiah 45:6-7*)

(Edit: Here's the link to [my article about the Bible/God's position on porn, masturbation, and fantasy if you are interested.](#))