

Matthew 5:27-30 (NKJV)

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not commit adultery.*'

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Jesus enters **exhibit B** this morning on the **wrong teachings** of the pharisees and scribes. And it is about the **heart** again. The pharisees focused on the external. Christ focused on the **heart** that all of the **issues in life** come from. We can often know that preachers and teachers are barking up the right tree when they are never satisfied at only changing behavior. The **Word of God** is to **pierce our hearts** in ways that it directs change **in beliefs**, in **thoughts**, in **attitudes** and in **actions**.

The pharisees were right, in as far as adultery is a horrible thing that should never be committed. But naturally, they would not explore the **seeds** of that sin that they would find in **their own** souls. They did not want to see **that** side of adultery. So they limited it. But even their own law made it exceedingly clear, unavoidably clear, that God was requiring a proper **heartedness**. The **external** actions were clearly not his **sole** interest. In Exodus we see this within 3 verses.

Exodus 20:14 (NKJV)

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Then 3 verses later he says this:

Exodus 20:17 (NKJV)

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

Now Jesus says in our text:

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

What does the phrase mean, “**to lust after**”?

The word used is Epithymeo Epee thu meh’ oh

Now this is very interesting and I think it gives us great insight into the text.

Romans 13:9 says this

Romans 13:9 (NKJV)

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Guess what Greek word is used for covet while quoting the commandments that were original written in the Hebrew language? Epee thu meh’ oh

The word that Jesus uses to describing **lusting** after a woman is the same word Paul used to translate the Hebrew that a man should not **covet**.

I think that is very strong evidence that Jesus was doing exactly what we are describing here.

The pharisees said adultery was a technical act that happened when a married man has sex with a married woman. Jesus said, no, you are not taking it far enough. When a man **covets his neighbors wife**, he is guilty of breaking the command against adultery.

Now most of the scholars do not limit this text in the way I believe it should be limited. Most understand the verse to mean that Jesus expands the concept of **adultery** to all **sexual immorality**. So if a man intends or contemplates any sexual immorality with any woman, he is committing adultery. They would apply it to even a single man. If that single man looks at pornography he is committing adultery. That was always my understanding of it until I really looked at it.

But looking at the text **in context** actually took away much of what I was intending to say. This is not to say that **general sexual immorality** is now ok. Not at all. There are lots of scriptures forbidding sexual immorality in general. No. That is all true. But I firmly believe that this is not what Jesus is talking about **here**. Jesus was limiting his conversation to marriage and the protection of it.

The topic here is Adultery, not all sexual immorality. He is not changing the topic. But He is expanding its application in a way the Pharisees **should** have been teaching. They weren’t, but they should have been. He is talking about Marriage.

Vs 27-30 describes the destruction of marriage through **violation**

Vs 31-32 describes the destruction of marriage through **decree**

But the topic is marriage.

We need to look at this Greek word Epeethu meh' oh more. This strong desire was not always a **bad** thing. Jesus said in Luke 22:15 that he **strongly desired** to eat the Passover with his disciples. Hebrews 6:11 the writer of Hebrews **strongly desired** good spiritual things for the readers. In 1 Timothy 3:1 a person longing to be an elder **desires** a good thing. They are all the same word.

So when is **strong desire** a **good** thing and when is it a **bad** thing? When is lust a good thing and when is it a bad thing? I think the answer is simple. When we strongly desire that which we can **lawfully** have, and we submit ourselves to **only having it lawfully**, that strong desire is **fine**. But when the strong desire is for something **unlawful**, then it is a **bad thing**.

What man among us got married without being at least partly motivated by a **strong desire for his wife to be**? I seriously doubt that is true of any man here. Was that lust? Well in the strictest sense of the Greek word it was. But it was the **ok** kind, the **good** kind, if we pursued it faithfully and the way God said was **ok**.

Based on all the other things that Jesus and the bible say about marriage, and based on what Paul says in 1 Corinthians about **how we are to make decisions** as to whether we **should marry** or not. (Remember 1 Corinthians says that is better to marry than to be distracted all the time with this strong desire). We cannot conclude that **all strong sexual desire is evil**. In fact Paul advises that we allow it to **play a part** in our marriage decision. It is not condemned that when God made men with strong sexual desire that all that desire is a **bad** thing. It is not. What we **do with it** can be permissible or forbidden. But a man should never be condemned because he has such a strong desire. His moral condition is determined by what he does with that desire, not by the fact that he has it.

I am saying all this to make what I think is a very important point, and one that most of the commentaries do not do business with.

The word used for woman is translated as **woman** 129 times and as **wife** 92 times. What does that tell you? It tells you it can mean either thing.

In verse 31, the word translated woman is the same word for **wife** when it says whoever divorces his wife.

I believe that we are barking up the right tree when we interpret what Jesus says based on the command that **forbids coveting your neighbors wife**.

Let's apply this by paraphrasing again what Christ is saying.

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at another man's wife to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

What I am proposing here, (and please check it for yourself. Don't just agree because it is easier to agree, and don't disagree having never done the work of checking it out for yourself. Look into it. See if this is the best interpretation.)

What I am proposing here is that Jesus is **not** talking about a man **desiring the object of his affection with strong desire**. I am proposing that a man's strong desire for a woman will play, and should play, a big part in his marriage decision. And given that this decision is wholeheartedly submitted to the guidance of God's word and is submitted to God's person, **that desire** is not what Jesus is speaking of here. If this man were free to make a commitment and this woman was uncommitted, this is not the coveting that is a sin. The coveting that is sinful is coveting that which the law **does not allow**. That strong desire will be destructive.

There is also some question about the wording of this text that could lead to two different translations.

Klaus Haacker, I believe a German trustworthy theologian says this when talking about the phrase "to lust after"

But it is explainable if *the phrase to lust after*, commonly understood to mean "with a view to lusting for her," is translated "so as to get her to lust." The evidence for this interpretation is strong. The man is therefore looking at the woman with a view to enticing her to lust. Thus, so far as his intention goes, he is committing adultery with her, he makes her an adulteress. This does not weaken the force of Jesus' teaching; the heart of the matter is still lust and intent.

Expositor's Bible Commentary,

So if Mr. Haacker is correct, this would make the text read something like this:

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at another man's wife to get her to covet him has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And just to show that this is not an isolated translation I'll read this from the Reformed Expository Commentary:

Therefore he says, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" ([Matt. 5:28 NIV](#)). The ESV translates this verse as "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The ESV hints at a small riddle in the text. The original Greek may be translated "anyone who looks at a woman *in order to lust after her*" (cf. KJV, NASB) commits adultery. That is, Jesus forbids the leering looks that are

intended to stir up lustful thoughts. But the Greek may also be translated, “anyone who looks at a woman so as to cause her to lust” commits adultery. In this case, Jesus opposes the man who looks at a woman and wonders how he can cause her to desire him, so he may seduce her.

Reformed Expository Commentary - Reformed Expository Commentary – Matthew, Volumes 1 & 2.

What we see immediately is that this is not as simple as a man seeing a good looking woman and feeling tempted to lust after her. It is not seeing that image that you were not pursuing on a web page, and feeling the urge of sexual attraction. It is not looking at your girlfriend and wishing you could be married to her so you could legally do what you want to do. No. It is not **incidental** or **accidental** attraction or instantaneous desire. It is not a strong desire for which you are pursuing a **lawful path** for fulfilling.

Just like forbidden anger in our earlier passage was a **committed grudge**, this lust described is a **committed plan**. The committed intention is to commit an unlawful act. And there is no way that this intention can be construed as anything that is obedient or faithful to God. It cannot be.

The word for “looks” in our text is in a verb tense that refers to a **continually looking upon**. This is intentional and repeated. And the goal is for a bad end with that person. He views this woman, looks upon this woman, imagines himself with this woman, hopes for an interaction with this woman, tries to create desire in this woman. And every bit of it is evil. In fact it is so evil that the guilt of its desire is just the same as if this person committed physical adultery with her.

There was a song in the ‘70s by Rick Springfield that I think captures the sin Jesus is talking about. I can’t think of **anything** that captures it better. It goes “Lately somethings changing, it ain’t hard to define. Jesse’s got himself a girl and I want to make her mine. I wish that I had Jesse’s girl.” That describes the attitude that Jesus is condemning.

In the time of Jesus, boy-girl relationships were not so fluid as they are now. Normally when a girl reached a marriageable age, she was either spoken for or available. To desire and pursue a girl who was spoken for would likely be regarded as akin to adultery. It was, in essence, the pursuit of another man’s wife.

I like how MacArthur puts it. He notes something in the text. Where it says **has already committed adultery** it is in past tense. He says:

He already has committed adultery in his heart. It is not lustful looking that causes the sin in the heart, but the sin in the heart that causes lustful looking.

A popular proverb goes, "Sow a thought and reap an act. Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny" This is what Jesus is describing.

Jesus is telling his audience that the pharisees **have it all wrong**. It all starts at the **first thought**. It all starts with what we do with that **first awareness**, that first opportunity to decide. Then what do we decide?

Now where does this coveting come from? Where does this desire for that which can never be **lawfully ours** come from?

You and I as believers are commanded to be content. We who are married are commanded to be content. We are to **thank God** for what He gave us. We are to nip the roving eye at its source. We are to **want** what **God gives us** to the place that we need nothing more if this is what God has for us. This is the protection from the evil of the adulterous heart.

Now do you think it will ever arrive naturally at thanking God for what He has provided for us? Well maybe, when everything goes our way and our spouse performs like we like. But how often is that true?

The reformed commentary said this:

Discontentment with a spouse drives out love and respect for her. Discontentment is prideful, for the discontented think they deserve better. Discontent is distrust in God's providence, for it accuses God of providing the wrong spouse.

The culture says, "Get the best partner you can." But we should say, "God has given me this man, this woman." Then we should ask, not what our spouse can do for us, but what we can do for our spouse. Contentment is the partner of love and the scourge of the roving eye. Contentment breeds faithfulness.

The Bible often commands believers to be contented with their possessions and with their life situation (e.g., [Eccl. 4:8](#); [Luke 3:14](#); [Phil. 4:11-12](#); [1 Tim. 6:6-8](#); [Heb. 13:5](#)). Paul says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain" ([1 Tim. 6:6](#))—

The cause of lust is not attractive women, but an improper response to attractive women. The cause of marital discontentment is less "my spouse's flaws" than it is a hard-hearted response to those flaws.

Reformed Expository Commentary - Reformed Expository Commentary - Matthew, Volumes 1 & 2.

It is like I said the other week. The problem with us is not a hard life but a hard heart.

Are you content with your spouse? Are you content with the situation God has placed you in. No one is saying here that your spouse does as good as maybe they could do or should do. But would you want to be held to that standard? None of us could stand. I really liked this next quote.

Every potential partner is a sinner, and no two sinners are perfectly compatible. No two sinners, rubbing elbows day by day, can keep their wedding vows perfectly.

People love to ask questions like “What are the two biggest causes of trouble in marriage?” There are many potential answers: money, sex, children, in-laws, communication. But the two biggest causes of marital strife are the husband and the wife.

Reformed Expository Commentary

I am saying all this with the intention of helping us all to avoid this terrible sin. And the sin is not just **committing adultery** but it is mentally **catering** to adultery, it is seeing adultery as an answer that will **make us happy**. It is expecting anything **outside of God’s will** to provide for ourselves something that we think will fulfill us. Such a thing **does not exist** and we should not leave room in our hearts to think that it **ever could**.

Scripture says this.

Hebrews 13:4 (NKJV)

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Hebrews is essentially seconding what Christ said.

Marriage is good.

Sexual desire is good in its place. And it is a wonderful gift when it is kept in its place. God has granted us this opportunity for expression. It is honorable. It is virtuous. We should never be critical of a human being created in the image of God because they have a great deal of this kind of desire. As long as the person submits sexual desire and its expression to God’s word and God’s person.

When kept there, there is nothing at all wrong with it.

And then we see that word BUT.

but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

In our passage Jesus is dealing primarily with adultery. And He tells us here in Hebrews that God will judge adulterers. It does not matter if they are living in a continual state of **adultery of the heart** or committing actual **technical adultery** with their bodies. Both are states of rebellion against God. Both are not living in a faithful relationship with their Savior. Fortunately this is not to say that anyone who commits fornication or adultery cannot be forgiven. Praise God that is not so. Because all of us have been guilty in one form or fashion of adultery or fornication. But those who **live** in a **commitment** to fornication or adultery will be judged by God.

And this is the very thing that Christ is helping us to avoid this morning. Christ's love for His children caused Him to make clear how dastardly this sin is and that it must be avoided in all its forms.

Both adultery and fornication have this in common. They are violations of that which God created to be good and created to be received as a gift from His hand.

Here is another quote from the Reformed Expository Commentary

By its very nature, physical love is a life-uniting act. God intended it to be a sign and a seal of the union of two lives. "Casual sex" is a misnomer. Sex is no mere bodily function. Our bodies are us. To quote Smedes again, "When two bodies are united, two *persons* are united. Nobody can go to bed with someone and leave his soul parked outside. The soul is in the act."

Therefore, the trouble with extramarital sex is that it is "a life-uniting act committed without life-uniting intent." It is not just adultery. It is a thieving lie. Intimacy is a sign and a seal of the union of two lives. But outside of marriage, the act and the intent clash. Intimacy of body and intimacy of soul go together. That is why adultery—as well as other sexual relations outside of marriage—is wrong.

Reformed Expository Commentary - Reformed Expository Commentary - Matthew, Volumes 1 & 2.

I don't know how Job knew so much with so little scripture at his disposal. But this is how he protected his soul. And we do well to mold ourselves after him.

Job 31:1 (NKJV)

¹ "I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?"

Job 31:6-12 (NKJV)

⁶ Let me be weighed on honest scales, That God may know my integrity.

⁷ If my step has turned from the way, Or my heart walked after my eyes,

Or if any spot adheres to my hands,

⁸ **Then let me sow, and another eat; Yes, let my harvest be rooted out.**

⁹ **"If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door,**

¹⁰ **Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her.**

¹¹ **For that *would be* wickedness; Yes, it *would be* iniquity *deserving of* judgment.**

¹² **For that *would be* a fire *that* consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase.**

Job understood that everything starts in the heart. And he made a commitment that he would not sin according to his sexual desire. He knew it was a big deal and he acted accordingly.

Men, I think we have seen this morning that what Jesus said was largely directed at us. I think that is because **men** were made, in part, to **protect** women. Most women have a **natural proclivity** to follow men and to get their **validation** from men. They are **hard wired** in this fashion. Genesis gives us a clue that women will tend not like that about themselves, but it is true. Our culture revolts to such an idea, but if we just watch human relationships you will see it over and over again. Women are **not** naturally designed to protect themselves emotionally or physically in the world of men. So we men bear the weight of what happens to the women we are responsible for. When Jesus is talking about adultery, he primarily addresses men. But I would hate to leave the women out this morning.

I have a quote from Arthur Pink.

If lustful looking is so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and lusted after... are not less but perhaps more guilty. In this matter it is not only too often the case that men sin, but women tempt them to do so. How great then must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses. (*An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974], p. 83)

I think it is absurd the way many women advertise in our culture. They flaunt their sexual features and then are aghast at how effective their advertising is. It is like it never was a thought in their minds that **all** men respond to sexual stimulus. Somehow these women seem to expect the **response they elicit** to be limited to only those men that **they desire**. This is not to say that the men are fine to respond. Sin is sin wherever it is found. But it is absurdly foolish to

advertise something as being available **to everyone** when it is only open to a **very select few**. While the marriage bed is honorable, displaying that which **belongs in the marriage bed in the street** is not honorable. It is dishonorable and will not serve men or women well. It is an easy argument to make that men should **never give free reign** to their passions. It is certainly wrong. And it is always their fault. But it is absurd for a woman to stir up a bees nest without any fear of being stung.

All this to say that women also must be mindful of their motives. To be modest is more important than to be stylish. The people who love you will always love you no matter what you wear. But those who respond to style may respond **dramatically and flatteringly**, but **never** love you.

Women too may be guilty of trying to gain the sexual attention of a married man in order to get strokes. And this would fit very neatly into the umbrella of adultery that Jesus was speaking of.

So I think we have been challenged by Jesus this morning to look at our **thoughts** and our **desires** and our **actions**. Are we cultivating coveting? Are we allowing our minds to covet that which we cannot have lawfully? Are we doing anything, even subtly, to make someone desire us sexually whom we cannot marry? Are we truly willing to accept the spouse that God has given us as that which is currently best for us, best at **changing us** in the way **we need changed**? Will we protect marriage in our hearts and minds and actions?

After hearing from Christ, we are never left without homework.

Can you wholeheartedly thank Christ for your spouse and willingly and gladly **accept His provision for you**? Thou shall not commit adultery.