

**Shayla:** How would you respond to this interpretation of Matthew 5:27-28?

**Background info:** The following email was forwarded to me by a brother in South Africa for comment. Nothing was removed or corrected, including the spelling errors.

An interpretation of this passage is that if you look at the Greek verb (lust more properly translated covet or desire), is the same word used in the Septuagint's translation of the 10th Commandment (not covet). In this case, Matthew has Jesus saying that covetousness, the desire to deprive another of his property, is the essence of adultery. Jesus was then reaffirming a quite traditional understanding of what is wrong with adultery.

The Greek word here is, of course, epithumia, which also means "covet" and is the word used by the translators of the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew, chamad, in Ex. 21:17 "Thou shalt not COVET ." It is not coincidence, by the way, that "neighbor's wife" is included with the other PROPERTY listed in this text...like neighbors ox etc...

In this case, Jesus was asserting that adultery does not consist primarily of sexual union of two people, at least one of which is married, but it consists rather in the intention, accomplished or not, to take what belongs to another. The purpose of the verse is to show no one is free of sin, but the nature of sin lies in impurity of the heart (taking from another man his wife) rather than the physical act itself. This is different from consensual nonmonogamy. Its like the Rabbi said at the swing club, "I don't want to own your wife, just borrow her!" Now, lets look at how porneia is used here,

The natural desire for sexual variety or the enjoyment of looking at a beautiful body has absolutely nothing to do with "lust" as most assume it to mean. Lust is only wrong if it is the selfish desire to take something from another. Lust is wrong if it is about greed and self satisfaction at the expense of another. But there is nothing whatsoever wrong with mutually desired loving intimacy and enjoying sexual variety or pornography for that matter.

In biblical times man could have as many wives and concubines (breeders) as they wished once the man was age 12 and the women age 13, and adultery was only a sin for a married women. It was never a sin for a married man as long as the other women was not married (owned by another man). There was nothing wrong with "common" prostitutes which are often mentioned with no negative inference. Only the idolatry of the Temple prostitutes who were via sex worshipping the fertility gods was a sin, not prostitutes or their customers.

Biblically lust was not nearly such a bad word as those that use it against sexuality seem to think. In the original Greek the word translated "lust" was used several other times for things NOT considered wrong: Jesus "lusted" to be with his disciples. The word is the same as that some use to make lust to be a sin. Did Jesus sin? No, but He lusted. Strong desire for something is not a sin.

Another interpretation of the famous "lust" passage is that Jesus was taking the law in which the scribes and Pharisees believed that they were so authoritative on and pressing that law (using adultery as an example) to its ultimate conclusion, the intent of the heart.

Jesus was not interested in making a new law for us to follow. After all, he came to fulfill the law in himself through atonement, to bring back to God those of us who will come. The ONLY commandment he gave was LOVE, love of God with all that is within us and love of others as we should love ourselves.

Jesus was pressing the law to its ultimate conclusion to show how damning impossible a task its proposed adherents set for themselves in their inherent inability to follow the law. Other NT verses come right out and say that the law condemns, and that salvation is to be found elsewhere. The law does not save. Jesus' graphic illustration of sin by saying that the lustful should first cut out their eyes to enter heaven is not meant literally because the heart is the real core. Jesus is being sarcastic with the dogged enemies of the truth that were the Pharisees and Sadducees who sought to keep their status quo intact.

Best wishes

Dave in Phoenix - Promoting Intimacy and Positive Sexuality with honesty and integrity

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### **Midrash:**

Brother, I wouldn't waste a lot of time trying to deal with this wicked man. Dave from Phoenix claims to be a Believer and is encouraging sexual immorality in the name of our Master who told us through the Apostle Peter:

- **1 Peter 1:14-16 HCSB** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance (15) but, as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; (16) for it is written, **Be holy, because I am holy.**

The Bible teaches:

- **1 Corinthians 5:9-11 HCSB (9)** I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- (10) by no means referring to this world's immoral people, or to the greedy and swindlers, or to idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. (11) But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person.

But in order to help you understand something of the depravity of this false teacher's philosophy, I will briefly explain the biblical view of fornication.

Fornication is usually defined as voluntary sexual intercourse between unmarried persons. The word comes from the Latin word *fornix* which actually meant "archway" or "vault". The reason archways became associated with sex is that in Rome Prostitutes used to hang out in the archways (particularly surrounding the Circus Maximus) soliciting their customers. So *fornicatio* came to mean "done in the archway", a euphemism for prostitution.

This is particularly relevant because Dave from Phoenix is not merely saying that sex between consenting adults is all right, but is actively encouraging the use of prostitutes or the purchase or distribution of pornography – all in the name of Christian liberty!

- **Romans 6:1-2 HCSB** What should we say then? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may multiply? (2) Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

The Greek word for the Latin "*fornicatio*" is *porneia* (Strong's #4202) and contrary to Dave of Phoenix' teaching, it is not a very closely defined term. Instead, it is a very broad term for sex outside of the bounds of marriage. Not only does it include premarital sex, but it also includes adultery, homosexuality, incest, bestiality and remarriage after non-biblical divorce. It is even used in certain extra-biblical texts for the viewing of pornography (hence the name)! Thus fornication, whether with someone else's spouse or not and whether consensual or not, is forbidden to the children of God.

Halakhic law clearly condemned fornication, consensual or not! Promiscuity was defined as "defiling ones' self" and, for a priest's daughter, was a capital offense.

- **Leviticus 21:9 HCSB** If a priest's daughter defiles herself by promiscuity, she defiles her father; she must be burned up.

Prostitution was defined as being debased and as defiling even the land in which it occurred.

- **Leviticus 19:29 HCSB** "Do not debase your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will be prostituted and filled with depravity.

The accusation of being sexually promiscuous before married carried serious consequences.

- **Deuteronomy 22:13-21 HCSB (13)** "If a man marries a woman, has sexual relations with her, and comes to hate her, (14) and accuses *her* of shameful conduct, and gives her a bad name, saying, 'I married this woman and was intimate with her, but I didn't find *any* evidence of her virginity,' (15) the young woman's father and mother will take the evidence of her virginity and bring *it* to the city elders at the gate. (16) The young woman's father will say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man as a wife, but he hates her. (17) He has accused her of shameful conduct, saying: 'I didn't find *any* evidence of your daughter's virginity, but here is the evidence of my daughter's virginity.' They will spread out the cloth before the city elders. (18) Then the elders of that city will take the man and punish him. (19) They will also fine him 100 silver *shekels* and give *them* to the young woman's father, because that man gave

an Israelite virgin a bad name. She will remain his wife; he cannot divorce her as long as he lives. (20) But if this accusation is true and no evidence of the young woman's virginity is found, (21) they will bring the woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city will stone her to death. For she has committed an outrage in Israel by being promiscuous in her father's house. You must purge the evil from you.

The very wages of prostitution were considered defiling or polluting and were not to ever be used in the payment of tithes, offerings or any vow to the Lord at all. The considers the earnings of prostitution to be detestable.

- **Deuteronomy 23:18 HCSB** Do not bring a female prostitute's wages or a male prostitute's earnings into the house of the LORD your God to fulfill any vow, because both are detestable to the LORD your God.

This view was continued into the New Covenant. Our Master said that sexual promiscuity was one of the reasons for which a person could rightly divorce and remarry.

- **Matthew 5:32 HCSB** **But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**
- **Matthew 19:9 HCSB** **And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."**

Even his enemies agreed with this view of fornication! They used fornication as an insult with the implied definition of it being wrong, sinful and socially unacceptable.

- **John 8:41 HCSB** **You're doing what your father does."** "We weren't born of sexual immorality," they said. "We have one Father--God."

Over and over again, throughout the New Covenant, the Apostles constantly taught that sexual immorality and fornication polluted the soul and should be avoided at all costs.

- **Acts 15:20 HCSB** but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood.
- **Acts 15:29 HCSB** that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell.
- **Acts 21:25 HCSB** With regard to the Gentiles who have believed, we have written a letter containing our decision that they should keep themselves from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from sexual immorality."

This wicked man Dave claims to have found liberty in Christ to practice sex outside of the bounds of marriage as long as he is not taking another man's wife. Even granting that implausible contention, just because we CAN do something doesn't mean that we SHOULD do something. Isn't it enough to understand that the Red Cross, a secular medical group, considers sexual promiscuity to be a high risk activity?

- **1 Corinthians 6:12-13 HCSB (12)** "Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is helpful. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be brought under the control of anything. (13) "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods," but God will do away with both of them. The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.
- **1 Corinthians 6:15-18 HCSB (15)** Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? So should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Absolutely not! (16) Do you not know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For it says, **The two will become one flesh.** (17) But anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (18) Flee from sexual immorality! "Every sin a person can commit is outside the body," but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.

- **1 Corinthians 7:1-3 HCSB** (1) About the things you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have relations with a woman." (2) But because of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. (3) A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. Apparently, the Apostle Paul considered sexual immorality to still be a sin worthy of God's judgment.
- **1 Corinthians 10:7-8 HCSB** (7) Don't become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, **The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play.** (8) Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day 23,000 people fell dead.
- **2 Corinthians 12:21 HCSB** (21) I fear that when I come my God will again humiliate me in your presence, and I will grieve for many who sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, sexual immorality, and promiscuity they practiced.
- **Galatians 5:19 HCSB** Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity,
- **Colossians 3:5 HCSB** Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 HCSB** (3) For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, (4) so that each of you knows how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, (5) not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God.

Not only should we avoid adultery and fornication, but even coarse and foolish talk! How can we reconcile such a standard to Dave from Phoenix' teaching?

- **Ephesians 5:3-4 HCSB** But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. (4) And coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.

I think that the Lord's rebuke to the Ephesian church is particularly relevant here. This teaching (that sexual immorality is victimless) is as old as Balaam. Just as it was originally used as a stumbling block to our people by the Midianites (Numbers 25:1-2; 31:16 cf Jude 1:11), so now the devil is using Dave to weaken and befuddle God's people. I also think that just as the Lord promised to destroy Jezebel, so He will destroy this perverse man.

- **Revelation 2:14 HCSB** **But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.**
- **Revelation 2:20-23 HCSB** (20) **But I have this against you: you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and deceives My slaves to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.** (21) **I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality.** (22) **Look! I will throw her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her practices.** (23) **I will kill her children with the plague. Then all the churches will know that I am the One who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.**

In one place (<http://www.libchrist.com/bible/Portlandradio.html>) Dave says, "... *love doesn't just have to be monogamous and many find more spiritual truth in Eastern beliefs that wonderfully integrate sexuality and spirituality much more compatible with their own spirits.*"

Hmmm... appealing to Eastern beliefs as support for his heretical views? Not particularly surprising. Paul's reply would be:

- **Colossians 2:8 HCSB** Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ.

And in regards to basing our theology on what seems to be “more compatible with their own spirits”, Paul would respond:

- [2 Corinthians 10:12 HCSB](#) (12) For we don't dare classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding.
- [2 Timothy 3:16-17 HCSB](#) All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I leave you with Paul's instructions to the Ephesian church:

- [Ephesians 5:5-12 HCSB](#) For know and recognize this: no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God. (6) Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for because of these things God's wrath is coming on the disobedient. (7) Therefore, do not become their partners. (8) For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light-- (9) for the fruit of the light *results* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth-- (10) discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. (11) Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead, expose them. (12) For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret.