

What Did Jesus Mean by Saying “Anyone Who Looks at a Woman Lustfully Has Already Committed Adultery With Her in His Heart”?

Matthew 5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

— *Matthew 5:27-28*

Understanding the Context

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining the deeper meaning of the Law. The Pharisees taught that sin was primarily about external behavior, like physically committing adultery. But Jesus goes further—He teaches that sin begins in the heart.

Looking at someone with lustful intent—not just noticing their beauty, but desiring them sexually in your mind and heart—is already spiritual adultery. Why? Because God sees our intentions (1 Samuel 16:7), not just our actions.

This teaching reveals God’s standard of holiness. He desires not

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only external purity but also internal righteousness—a clean heart and mind.

Is Desire Itself Sinful?

A natural question arises:

“Does this mean any kind of sexual desire is sinful?”

The answer is no. Desire in itself is not evil—it is God-given. God created us with the ability to feel hunger, thirst, and yes, sexual attraction. The key issue is how that desire is directed.

Paul teaches that our bodies and desires are not inherently bad, but they must be brought under God’s control:

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful.
“All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.

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— *1 Corinthians 6:12*

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.”

— *1 Thessalonians 4:3-4*

In other words, God created sexual desire to be fulfilled only within the covenant of marriage (Hebrews 13:4). Outside of that context, desire can become distorted into lust, which is self-centered and dishonoring to both God and others.

How Does Lust Begin—and How Can We Fight It?

Lust begins with small compromises: a lingering glance, a fantasy, watching something inappropriate, or engaging in flirty conversations. Over time, these habits shape our hearts and can lead to sin in action.

James describes this spiritual progression clearly:

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“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
— *James 1:14-15*

So how do we resist?

1. Guard Your Environment

Avoid places, media, or conversations that stir up lust. Like Proverbs says:

“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?”
— *Proverbs 6:27*

This includes:

- Watching sexually charged content (movies, music videos, social media).
- Engaging in casual flirting or chat messages with someone you’re not married to.

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- Being idle or bored, which gives the enemy room to tempt your thoughts.

2. Renew Your Mind

Fill your thoughts with truth, not temptation.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”

— *Romans 12:2*

This happens through:

- Reading Scripture regularly.
- Prayer and fasting.
- Christian community and accountability.
- Memorizing and meditating on verses like Philippians 4:8:

“...whatever is pure... think about these things.”

3. Redirect Your Desires

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God doesn't want to remove your desire—He wants to purify it. Sexual desire should lead us to God's design, not away from it.

If you're married, pursue intimacy with your spouse as a gift from God (see 1 Corinthians 7:3–5). If you're single, practice self-control and trust in God's timing. Jesus Himself lived a sinless, celibate life—He understands your struggle (Hebrews 4:15).

This Is Not Just a “Men’s Issue”

Lust is not limited to men. Jesus spoke to everyone—His teaching applies to women, too. Both genders are called to walk in holiness and purity.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

— *Matthew 5:8*

Final Encouragement

If you've struggled in this area, there is hope. Jesus not only

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reveals our sin—He also provides forgiveness and the power to overcome.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

— *1 John 1:9*

Don’t try to fight lust in your own strength. Rely on the Holy Spirit, stay in the Word, and set healthy boundaries. God cares more about your heart than your performance—and He’s able to help you walk in freedom.

May the Lord strengthen you to live a life of purity in thought, heart, and action.

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