

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

Kent E. Brower

Jesus and the Lustful Eye: Glancing at Matthew 5:28¹

Dr Brower is Vice-Principal and Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Nazarene Theological College, Manchester.

Key Words: Antitheses, Head Coverings, Law, Lust, Righteousness, Sexual desire, Veils, Women's apparel.

With the possible exception of the Beatitudes, few parts of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (SM) have attracted more attention than the Antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48).² Two of them in particular have been important in the church over the centuries – the whole question of just war versus pacifism emerges from the sixth antithesis (5:43-48) while the vexed question of divorce and remarriage in the church in part stems from consideration of the third (5:31-32).

The second antithesis (5:27-30) has always been problematic. Nevertheless, apart from frequent reference to the hyperbolic nature of the language within it (5:29-30), it does not attract much attention.

-
- 1 This is a revision of a paper first read to the Ehrhardt Seminar at the University of Manchester. I am grateful for the helpful comments given by colleagues on that occasion.
 - 2 Interpretation of the purpose of the antitheses within the context of the SM as a whole has been varied. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 506-8 highlight four major approaches to the antitheses. The first focuses upon Jesus himself: 'The primary point at issue...is Jesus and the Torah, not...Jesus and Jewish opinion...' (506). The second position holds that 'Jesus' words are contrasted with the words of Torah, [but] the two are not contradictory' (507). The third view locates the authority of Jesus' declarations in his own person, so although the Torah supplies him with a point of departure, it does no more than this' (508). The final view acknowledges the importance of the Torah while arguing that '5.21-48 does not oppose specific interpretations of the Torah' (508). For a detailed critical reflection on the history of interpretation, with particular attention to continental scholarship, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3 - 7:27 and Luke 6:20-49). Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-43 as well as the bibliography on 643-663. As will become apparent, the term 'antithesis' is used in a conventional sense in this paper, rather than implying any view on the relationship of the sayings to the Torah.

Such discussion as does occur has usually been directed towards explaining Jesus' words. Is Jesus really suggesting that attraction between men and women can only be asexual? More seriously, is sexual attraction itself viewed as sinful for the disciples of Jesus rather than the act of adultery? Perhaps a closer look at the literary and cultural context of this antithesis can bring greater clarity.

I. Matthew 5:28 in its Immediate Context

The immediate literary context of this antithesis is the logion in 5:17-20. Behind that important passage stands the bigger question, 'Does the Torah have a place in the new covenant community?'

There can be little doubt that vigorous debate about precisely this question would have been alive in some contexts within the early church, particularly in places where Paul's alleged 'law-free' gospel came into conflict with a more rigorous adherence to the details of observance. In Graham Stanton's view, Matthew's gospel as a whole could well reflect a period in the history of the relationship between church and synagogue when the internal debate was becoming increasingly fractious or, alternatively, in the immediate aftermath of the partings of the ways.³

Although the *form* in which we find the SM in Matthew almost certainly reflects the work of the evangelist,⁴ the *probability* of such an interaction even in the lifetime of Jesus is good. Clearly, if Jesus is in some sense seen as fashioning a new community around himself, then it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that such a debate could have had its roots in disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees.⁵ Either way, the importance of this passage is clear. Hans Dieter Betz believes that Matthew 5:17-20 sets out the Matthean Jesus' own method of scriptural interpretation all designed to show that Jesus' teaching is not leading to the destruction of the law and the prophets.⁶

3 Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992).

4 Almost all scholars see the SM in its present form as heavily influenced by Matthew. See, for example, Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 87, who argues with respect to 5:28 that 'the evidence for composition by Matthew is overwhelming.'

5 See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1993), 288f; see also Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1984). E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) seeks to minimise the points of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

6 Betz, 173. He comments: Jesus has not 'set aside clear thinking in favor of emotional appeals. Instead, we are to assume that he knew what he was doing and that, purposefully, he spelled out his principles in the SM' (172).

If this is so, then the *interpretation*, not the *abolition*, of Torah is the focal point. Wright argues that all the antitheses represent a 'mode of Torah-intensification which is quite unlike that of the Pharisees. Instead of defining ever more closely the outward actions necessary for the keeping of Torah, ...Israel was challenged to discover the meaning of the commands in terms of a totally integrated loyalty of heart and act...'⁷

The debate in Matthew is not over whether righteousness is essential or not: Jesus and his opponents were agreed on that.⁸ Other interpretations of Torah are inadequate because they simply do not lead to that greater righteousness which Jesus demands. For Matthew, 'the love commandment stands at the center'⁹ of the whole SM. This antithesis depends on that central motif.

If this is indeed Torah intensification, Jesus sees it as in line with the true intention of the lawgiver.¹⁰ The point is frequently missed due to the usual translation of the phrase ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω as adversative which implies that Jesus is correcting the Torah if not actually opposing it. A more contextually appropriate translation might be 'And I say to you'. On that reading, the emphasis shifts to the authority of the interpreter rather than any putative deficiency in the Torah. As Keener puts it, 'we might read the passage thus: "You understand the Bible to mean only this, but I offer a fuller interpretation".'¹¹ The greater righteousness must be more than greater compliance with ever more exact rules.¹²

7 Wright, 290.

8 See Borg, *Conflict*, who argues that Jesus and the Pharisees are both proclaimers of holiness but take radically different directions on how it is to be lived. Betz, 193, note 173 argues that 'the evidence points to an inner-Jewish sectarian dispute.'

9 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, ET1989), 269.

10 Betz, 171, thinks that 5:17-20 may presuppose 'inner-Jewish discussions about the Torah that have somehow been stimulated or influenced by Greco-Roman thought concerning law and ethics, in particular the notion of equity.' According to Betz' reading of Aristotle, two critical aspects of Aristotelian ethics have relevance to this passage as well as the antitheses. First, all interpretation of written law 'has to respect the true and original intention of the lawgiver, and this to the extent that even modification of the laws became a possibility' (170). Second, true justice before the law is more than mere compliance with it and should be distinguished from 'a higher, ethically conscious justice, which in reality is the only justice deserving the name' (169).

11 Craig Keener, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 182.

12 This latter point is confirmed especially in Matthew's story of the rich young man (Mt. 19:16-22). This young man has kept all the commandments [τάς εντολάς] but when he asked what more do I need to do, Jesus' response is εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι - 'if you wish to go the whole way' (REB), he must not only love his neighbour but distribute his wealth to the poor and follow Jesus (19:21). See the use of τέλειος in 5:48.

The basis for Jesus' authority to offer this intensification emerges from the wider literary setting of the SM. Failure to consider this setting leads to a distortion of Matthew's perspective. Betz, for example, rejects any Christological emphasis in the SM. 'I do not think,' he says, 'that the SM attributes messianic authority to Jesus.'¹³ Rather, 'Jesus is viewed as a righteous man and a teacher who instructs with authority, as Matthew rightly judges.'¹⁴ Betz reaches this conclusion by his concentration solely upon the SM where this picture of Jesus as an authoritative teacher most clearly appears. This is precisely how Matthew pictures Jesus *when the SM is considered in isolation from its wider context*. But, as Stanton tartly observes, 'If removed from the context of the whole gospel, many other sections of Matthew contain little Christology.... The chapters which precede and follow the Sermon are profoundly Christological.'¹⁵

The chapters leading up to the SM establish the view that Jesus has the unique authority to offer this interpretation. From his opening words (1:1)¹⁶ and primarily through his use of scripture,¹⁷ Matthew sets out his thesis: in Jesus, the Davidic messiah, the eschatological purposes which God has had for his created order, flowing from the promise to Abraham (Gn. 12:1-3), are now to be realised through Jesus Messiah.

In what Kupp calls 'the Christological pivot of the Gospel',¹⁸ Matthew describes the conception of Jesus through a citation of Isaiah 7:14 (LXX).¹⁹ The focus here is upon the name of the child given before birth to indicate that his is not an accidental birth.²⁰ The name 'Jesus' is further explained by the statement, 'he will save his people from their sins' (1:21). And it is for this reason that the people will

13 Betz, 131, note 299, who disagrees with M Hengel, 'Zur matthäischen Bergpredigt und ihrem jüdischen Hintergrund', *ThR* 34 (1987). See also Guelich, *passim*.

14 Betz, 211.

15 Stanton, 317-320.

16 The interpretation of these words is uncertain. They may recall the opening of Genesis. See Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, NTT (translated by J Bradford Robinson, Cambridge: CUP, 1995ET), 24.

17 See R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1985) and R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1989).

18 David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 58.

19 See Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, The 1997 Didsbury Lectures (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) for a discussion of the Isaianic hope which informed the thinking of 2TJ.

20 See Kupp, 58. See 54, where he writes 'These heightened phenomena of God's presence in the now of the story are presented to the implied reader as a new era of divine immanence.'

call him 'Emmanuel'.²¹ Matthew emphasises the internalisation of God's purposes promised in a new covenantal relationship (see Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 37:26-27) by the phrase 'from their sins'.²² According to Matthew's birth narratives, Jesus, the messiah, is God with us and the eschatological hopes of Israel are about to be realised. This Christological context is crucial for their understanding this antithesis.²³ Although a new Moses motif may be here in a secondary sense, 'Jesus does not function like Moses; he is not simply a mediator with no independent voice of his own...he stands as it were with God as giver of Law.'²⁴ Later, Jesus proclaims the arrival of the kingdom calling on his hearers to 'Repent'. A turn to God is required because of the possibilities of a new covenantal relationship with God which is being established: Jesus saves his people from their sins.²⁵

This, then, is the context in which Matthew expects his readers to understand the SM. They are the words of the messiah, Jesus, son of God who teaches authoritatively because he is announcing the very word of God to his people. This antithesis needs to be seen in this context. Jesus' Torah intensification implies that mere compliance with the Torah is not adequate because that does not really reflect the intentions of the lawgiver. Matthew thinks that this moves beyond the debate between equal authorities because Jesus is the unique author-

- 21 See Kupp, 58, 'in fulfilment of the prophet's words a people will in the future call Jesus "Emmanuel", recognizing in his salvation that "God is with us".' The notion of salvation was widespread and clear enough. 'Restoration eschatology', expressed in return from exile and new exodus metaphors, took on political, even violent, overtones in the minds of many. Although the gospel has clear political overtones for Matthew every bit as much as it does for the other evangelists, his readers, generally thought to be closer to Judaism than the implied readership of Luke, would certainly understand the risk of violence against the oppressors of God's people in the aftermath of AD 66 - 70.
- 22 Matthew adds a similar phrase to the 'words of institution' in 26:28 (*cf.* Mark 14:24) and adds the phrase 'in spirit' to the first beatitude (5:3) to similar effect. This emphasis is far clearer in Matthew than in Luke, where the canticles in the birth narratives might possibly be read in terms of violent revolution.
- 23 R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Dallas: Word, 1982), 27-33, also uses ecclesiological, ethical and eschatological contexts in his analysis.
- 24 Brooks Stephenson, *Matthew's Community: The Evidence of his Special Sayings Material* JSNTS 16 (Sheffield: SAP, 1987), 76. Whether this can be taken further to suggest, as Stephenson does, that Jesus is 'not under the Law as given by God through Moses but is free to modify or abrogate the words of God as recorded in Torah' (76) is far more problematic.
- 25 In chapter two, Matthew again looks to the scriptures to comment upon the massacre of the innocents, perhaps after careful reflection on the whole of Jer 31 where the new covenant motif also comes to clear expression. See Davies and Allison, 268, for a plausible explanation of this process.

ity, Emmanuel and Messiah. In Matthew's view, Jesus came offering people a new relationship with the covenant God and each other,²⁶ based entirely upon their relationship with him as the representative of Israel and as God in their midst.

Here is Matthew's way of expressing 'new creation' ideas,²⁷ ideas that include the re-establishment of God's intended relationship between males and females. This was, however, no exercise in theological point-scoring. When considered in the context of the wider culture, it would offer a challenge to conventional wisdom.

II. Matthew 5:28 in its Jewish Literary Context

According to George Foote Moore, when Jesus said 'you have heard that it was said, 'thou shalt not commit adultery'; but I say unto you that whoever gazes at a woman with desire has already debauched her in his mind,' he was not only uttering a Jewish commonplace, but with a familiar figure, 'adultery of the eyes.'²⁸

Almost all scholars draw attention to a variety of scattered texts from the Hebrew Bible and the extra-biblical literature of the Second Temple period as well as to the Mishnah and Talmud to sketch the Jewish literary context.²⁹

Several texts warn about the eye but are not explicitly related to lust.³⁰ Ben Sirach 23:4,5 asks, 'do not give me haughty eyes and remove evil desire from me', a prayer not explicitly related to sexual lust. But other concerns about the eyes and the heart are reflected strongly in the wisdom tradition. Job 31:1, for instance, reads 'I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?' while in Job 31:9 we read about the heart being enticed by a woman. By contrast, Ec. 11:9 reads 'Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes', but puts a sting in the tail by saying 'but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.'

26 See Guelich, 29.

27 See Davies and Allison, 159.

28 George Foote Moore, *Judaism*. Vol 2. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1927, 270.

29 All English translations of the Bible come from the NRSV, of the Intertestamental literature from Charlesworth, *OPT*, of the Qumran Texts from Geza Vermes and of the Mishnah from Jacob Neusner. Parallels to the Mishnah and Talmud must be used with caution because of their date or their context. Nevertheless, these texts help dispel any exaggerated claims about the novelty of Jesus' interpretation of Torah.

30 For example, Nu. 15:39; Pr. 21:4; Ezk. 6:9; 18:6; 20:7-8.

Several Qumran texts also make general reference to hearts and eyes. 1QS 1:6-7 reads 'that they may practise truth, righteousness and justice upon earth and no longer stubbornly follow a sinful heart and lustful eyes committing all manner of evil.' CD 2:16 links the guilty inclination with eyes of lust, warning the sectaries 'not follow after thoughts of the guilty inclination and after eyes of lust.' According to 11QT 59:14, 'The king whose heart and eyes have gone astray from my commandments shall never sit on my throne' while 1QpHab 5:7 interprets the phrase, 'Too pure of eyes to behold evil' as 'this means that they have not lusted after their eyes during the age of wickedness.'³¹

But by far the most references are explicitly related to sexual lust. Ben Sirach 9:8, for example, advises to 'Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman's beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire'. Sirach becomes more explicit later in 41:19-22: 'Be ashamed...of looking at a prostitute, ...and of gazing at another man's wife; of meddling with his servant girl.' (In this passage he also warns against the sin 'of leaning on your elbows at meals', perhaps prompted by his mother!) The Psalms of Solomon comments on an early version of 'Men Behaving Badly' by stating 'His eye is on every woman indiscriminately.' But he also prays 'Restrain me, O God, from sordid sin, and from every evil woman who seduces the foolish. And may the beauty of a criminal woman not deceive me, nor anyone subject to useless sin' (Ps. Sol 16:7-8). Infidelity to the marriage covenant by stealing another man's wife – akin to his property – seems to be the implicit point of the shame.

But it is in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarch where a mine of interesting material may be found. Judah, Benjamin and Issachar all have some comment to make. Judah laments his relationship with Tamar but is quite prepared to place the blame his actions on the wine and the woman: *T. Judah* 12:3 reads 'Since I was drunk with wine, I did not recognize her [Tamar] and her beauty enticed me because of her manner of tricking herself out.' No wonder he later states, 'I command you not to love money or to gaze on the beauty of women' (*T. Judah* 17:1).

Benjamin and Issachar, by contrast, have kept themselves pure. Issachar reminds his children (*T. Issa* 7:1) 'I have not had intercourse with any woman other than my wife, nor was I promiscuous by lustful look. I did not drink wine to the point of losing self-control,' again

31 The references come from Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM, 1993), 33.

linking lust and drunkenness. Amongst his commands are several which include sexual issues: '[Repent] and do not commit more sin.... Do not kill with the sword, do not kill with the tongue, do not fornicate with your body, and do not remain angry until sunset.... Do not look at a woman with a lustful eye' (*T. Issa* 4:49-54). *T. Benj* 8:2 is remarkably close to the thought of Matthew 5:28: 'For the person with a mind that is pure with love does not look on a woman for the purpose of having sexual relation. He has no pollution in his heart, because upon him is resting the spirit of God.'

By far the most interesting comments are made by Reuben, who rues the day he had sexual intercourse with Bilhah, his father's concubine, while she was drunk and asleep. (We might well classify this as rape.) But here we encounter an explicit belief that women are seducers against which men have to guard themselves. His advice is really to stay clear of women as much as possible. Married women are clearly off-limits but women in general are to be watched – well, actually, not to be watched! He says, 'Do not devote your attention to a woman's looks, nor live with a woman who is already married, nor become involved in affairs with women. For if I had not seen Bilhah bathing in a sheltered place, I would not have fallen into this great lawless act. For so absorbed were my senses by her naked femininity that I was not able to sleep until I had performed this revolting act' (*T. Reu* 3:10-12). Here is a classic example of what Alice Bach calls 'the objectification of a woman's body.'³²

The theme of women as a problem to men continues in *T. Reuben*. One should not devote attention to the beauty of women (4:1), he advises, because 'the spirit of promiscuity resides in the nature and the senses' (3:3). The problem is not, however, with men – it's with women themselves. He states: 'For women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks' (5:1). This is not just his opinion, however. He says that 'An angel of the Lord told me and instructed me that women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men' (5:3).³³ The only solution is to 'flee from sexual promiscuity, and order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds' (5:5) and 'protect your senses from women' (6:1).

Not all sources in this period have such a jaded view of women. The

32 Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 130, commenting on the Bathsheba story.

33 Remarkably, Tertullian gives the same explanation for a similar view. (See below.)

story of Susanna places the blame for the elders' downfall squarely in their lust: 'every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. Both were overwhelmed with passion for her...their lust desired to seduce her' (*Sus* 8).

In light of this literary context, we can now take a closer look at Matthew 5:28. This particular antithesis follows a citation of Exodus 20:14 (20:13 LXX): Οὐ μοιχεύσεις. While modern definitions of adultery include extramarital sexual intercourse by either husband or wife, sexual intercourse between a man, married or not, and an unmarried woman or a prostitute was not understood to be prohibited by this command. A man could also have more than one wife as well as concubines. Clearly, as Strecker reminds us, this command

presupposes the patriarchal structure of society in the ancient orient. The man who seduces the wife of another man destroys her marriage, not his own. He is fundamentally entitled to have more than one wife (Deut. 21:15ff.). Thus, this Old Testament-Jewish legal practice rests on the viewpoint of polygamy; therefore, a wife cannot call her husband to account because of a marriage violation.³⁴

This perspective was not limited to the ANE, however. According to Elaine Fantham, the Hellenistic culture of the Greco-Roman world took a rather similar view.

Adultery was defined by law and custom as sex with a married woman other than one's wife; a free man still had sexual access legally to his slaves, to women whose work as prostitutes or barmaids put them outside the law's concern, and to concubines. None of these cases counted as adultery for him, although a married woman was an adulteress if she had sex with anyone but her husband.³⁵

Jesus, however, proposes a far broader definition. Adultery is not simply a matter of behaviour; it has to do with the inner disposition of the person.³⁶ Of course, Jesus' definition is as pointed as it is legally

34 Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* (Trans. O C Dean, Jr, Nashville: Abingdon, 1988ET), 71. Betz, 233, points out that adultery was restricted to one's wife because 'it infringed on the social authority of a husband over his wife. Only in the course of time did adultery become a moral issue. The translation of the Vulgate as *mulier* ("adult female") instead of *uxor* ("wife") shows further expansion and indicates a change that had enormous consequences in the history of Christianity, implying as it does the radical discreditation of any sexual activity involving women other than a man's own wife.'

35 Elaine Fantham, et al., 'The "New Woman": Representation and Reality', *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text*, (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 300.

36 See Betz, 231.

unenforceable: 'And I say to you that whoever looks at a γυναίκα with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'³⁷ This is a decision of the heart in which adultery is committed prior to the physical act, 'already' (ἤδη) 'in the heart' (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ).³⁸

Jesus is not here addressing the usual restriction of adultery to the wife.³⁹ Nor does he address this issue in the closely related 5:32 ('And I say to you that every man who divorces his γυναίκα except for πορνεία causes her to be an adulteress'): that statement on divorce continues to attach the label of adulteress to the divorced wife.⁴⁰

The attention to 'eye' and 'heart' put the command on an entirely different footing. While Jesus certainly uses traditional material in verses 29–30 to point out that the eye is the gateway and the heart is the seat of evil actions,⁴¹ his statement in verse 28 is rather more radical. Geza Vermes argues that Jesus is not alone in this more radical understanding. To be sure, the texts suggest that, in general terms, the outer performance of the person is a clear indication of the inner disposition. Sinful actions stem from sinful hearts and lustful eyes. This general perspective, argues Vermes, is actually 'the basic religious, as distinct from the forensic, outlook of contemporary and later rabbinic Judaism,'⁴² citing 1QpHab 5.7; 1QS 1.6; CD 2.16; 11QTS 59.140 in support of this view.⁴³ George Foote Moore cites some later rabbinic texts which accord well with this view. The *Mekilta de R Simeion ben Yohai on Exodus 20:14* reads 'You shall not commit adultery. Neither with hand nor foot nor eye nor mind.... From where do we learn that the eyes and the mind commit fornication? From the text, 'Do not go about after your mind and your eyes, after which you commit fornication.' In *Lev. Rabbah 23, 12* 'R. Simeon ben Lakish says: 'you are not to say (merely) that he who commits the

37 See Bernard S. Jackson, 'Liability for Mere Intention in Early Jewish Law', *HUCA* 42 (1971), 209, who suggests that Jesus is debating 'as to what the law should be, not disputing the scope of the traditional interpretation. Thus his views represent an ethic, not an existing norm.'

38 See Betz, 233.

39 *Contra* D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13. WBC*, Vol 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 120, who states that 'although in the OT and Jewish contexts lusting after the wife of another man was forbidden, in the present passage γυναίκα is probably to be understood more broadly to mean any "woman" and not simply the wife of another.'

40 It is, of course, arguable that the Mark and Luke do address this issue, but not here in Matthew.

41 Davies and Allison, 522, this '...could belong to the deposit of traditional wisdom materials which Jesus mined for his own purposes.'

42 Vermes, 33.

43 These are not especially close parallels.

physical act is called an adulterer; one who commits adultery with his eyes is called adulterer, as it is said, "The eye of the adulterer".⁴⁴

But even if the religious context needs to be heard alongside the forensic discussion, the generally forensic character of the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew's gospel cannot be ignored. Jackson argues that although intention was not considered actionable in a human court, 'merely to intend a wrong was itself wrong' in God's eyes.⁴⁵ To the extent that the forensic interpretations present in later rabbinic Judaism represent the discussions current in the period of the SM, the picture is more nuanced than Vermes allows.⁴⁶ Legally conceived, the whole debate about 'greater righteousness' could be narrowed to a forensic discussion about the effectiveness of the 'fence' around the law. This was the direction taken by the rabbis. They too intensified the seventh commandment but did so by ever more careful restrictions of contact with women. The evidence we have points to 'a tendency which was intensifying at the time, to keep women out of public life, even the religious life.'⁴⁷ As far as Matthew is concerned, such a narrow focus on legal devices simply leads to hypocrisy (see Matt 23).

Jesus therefore intensifies the law but refuses to do so by adding further legal strictures. This leads Guelich to argue that Jesus is going beyond the law. He acknowledges that the later rabbis interpreted the Torah in its broadest implications, but thinks that Jesus saw interpretation going beyond the Law.⁴⁸ A similar view is held by Davies and Allen. They admit that there is no contradiction between 'You shall not commit adultery' and Jesus' intensification but assert that 'Jesus does demand more than the decalogue.'⁴⁹ Strecker agrees: 'the counterthesis goes beyond the realm of Old Testament and contemporary Judaism.'⁵⁰

But are these readings correct? Does Jesus really go beyond the law? The crucial exegetical point here centres on Jesus' use of the verb ἐπιθυμῆσαι, the verb which is used in the LXX version of the tenth commandment and also in the parallel version in Deut 5:21

44 Moore, 268.

45 Jackson, 207.

46 Davies and Allison, 523 write 'in holding that intention is to be judged as deed the Jesus of Matthew is closer to the school of Shammai than to the house of Hillel'. They draw attention to the discussion in *b. Qidd.* 43a.

47 Luz, *Matthew*, 296.

48 Guelich, 242.

49 Davies and Allison, 522.

50 Strecker, 71.

(οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις τῆν γυναῖκα τοῦ πλησίον σου). Covetousness⁵¹ breaches the tenth commandment. It stands as the epitome of sinfulness as reflected in Paul's discussion in Romans 7.⁵² But even in its OT context, the tenth commandment addresses the inner disposition of the person in the covenant community. For Jesus, then, the law is being intensified precisely in its own direction.

The shift of emphasis from μοιχεύω to ἐπιθυμήσαι provides the link between this teaching and Jesus' positive commands. There can be little doubt that behind the prohibition of *coveting* is the appropriate relationship with one's *neighbour*. Those who have failed to see this connection have just not understood the intention behind the commandment. Here Betz thinks that 'the original intent of the legislator God was the principle of the love-command (5:43), which, in turn, is directly related to the Golden Rule (7:12). In other words, the Scripture texts, if interpreted by the love-command and the Golden Rule, lead to the interpretations given by Jesus.'⁵³ Luz does not think that this is a new connection. He suggests that 'already in Judaism the 6th [*sic*] commandment and the prohibition to desire the wife of the neighbor had come together' although he gives no evidence for this.⁵⁴ Indeed, the connection is implicit in the fact that coveting the neighbour's wife is explicitly noted in the tenth commandment. According to Exodus 20:17, the tenth commandment forbids coveting, first, the neighbour's house, then his wife and a collection of his other possessions. In Deuteronomy 5:12, interestingly enough, the order of the first two prohibitions is reversed – 'you shall not covet your neighbour's wife' comes first, then it turns to his house and his other possessions.

If further confirmation were needed that Jesus links greater righteousness and love of neighbour, Matthew gives it later. According to Matthew 22:34-40, a lawyer of the Pharisees attempts to test Jesus in debate about the greatest commandment. Jesus' response to the hostile question (καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν εἰς ἕξ αὐτῶν [νομικός] πειράζων αὐτόν) is to recite the Shema as the first and to emphasize the second: 'to love one's neighbour as oneself. On these two commandments', says Jesus, 'hang all the law and the prophets' (v 40; cf. 5:17).

For Jesus, then, adultery defined as covetousness is the opposite of

51 Guelich, 194 writes that "'To lust" in English connotes accurately the sensual overtones but lacks the accompanying thought of possession inherent in ἐπιθυμέω.'

52 See the discussion in Francis Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 129-182.

53 Betz, 210.

54 Luz, *Matthew 1 - 7*, 291.

'loving your neighbour as yourself.' The intensification is exactly in the direction of the law itself. The greater righteousness is not contrary to the Law, nor is it ever more careful restrictions in order to avoid transgression of the law or its interpretations. Rather, it is a positive assertion that the greater righteousness in Jesus' new covenant community comes from within, where Torah is written on the heart. It cannot be attained by external adherence to a legal code. Commenting upon the whole logion, Guelich remarks: 'Apart from completely new relationships between individuals, not even the most drastic actions can protect one against evil...self-mutilation has no more effect than legislating against adulterous thought. The root of the problem lies within one's person, one's relationship with others. Jesus' demand therefore presupposes a new starting point in man-woman relationships.'⁵⁵

III. Matthew 5:28 in its Social Context

Jesus' interpretation of the law, then, does not go beyond the law but moves in its own direction. But does it still go beyond other attempts to intensify the law in Second Temple Judaism? Here we return to the lustful eye and deceitful heart. As we have seen, concern about the eye and heart are not in themselves novel. But set against the background of Jesus' culture and explicitly applied in this context, I suggest that this counter thesis does represent a rather daring assertion, a measure of cultural subversion. In popular culture as represented by some of the texts cited above women were to blame for any breach of sexual propriety.⁵⁶

Support for this perspective comes from reflection upon the significance of women's clothing within contemporary Greco-Roman culture in general and Palestinian culture in particular. In recent years, a number of studies,⁵⁷ have drawn attention to the importance of clothing as a statement of values. Three points could be noted. First, as Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones argues, 'veiling (the covering of the face and/or head) was a social necessity for women in the Greek and Jewish worlds.'⁵⁸ The precise significance of it is less clear. Léonie

55 Guelich, 243.

56 See Luz, *Matthew*, 296, note 44, where he cites Niederwimmer's view that there was an intensified "fear of concupiscence" in the Pharisaic Judaism of the time.'

57 See Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, 'Women and Veiling in the Ancient Greek World' (Unpublished PhD Thesis accept by Cardiff University, 2000). This thesis was drawn to my attention by Dr Llewellyn-Jones in a private e-mail (12.01.01) but has not been seen.

58 Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones in a private e-mail (12.01.01).

Archer, for example, sees it as the outward symbol of 'a woman's subordination to one man'⁵⁹ rather than an issue of modesty.⁶⁰ Second, we have evidence from texts for the 'New Roman Woman'⁶¹ emerging in the Republic who 'claims for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure.'⁶² These mostly upper class women would have eschewed the traditional form of dress. They were '...living a life of parties and self-gratification and choosing their own lovers.'⁶³ Third, we have the Augustan reforms which were an attempt to return to traditional values. No doubt stung by the sexual promiscuity of his own daughter, Julia (but with no thought about his own), Augustus Caesar instituted a programme '[including] new legislation on marriage and adultery.'⁶⁴ Augustus apparently legislated a dress code for the modest wife which would distinguish her from promiscuous women.⁶⁵ Such a code served the interests of husbands well, showing the power dimension of sexual relations in a patriarchal society. They could continue their own rather self-indulgent sexual practices while '...protecting their solitary rights to the beauty of their wives.'⁶⁶

This background is crucial for understanding Paul's complex discussion about head coverings in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Although some scholars suggest that Paul is asking the women to wear long hair,⁶⁷ Francis

59 Léonie J Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine*. JSOTSS60 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 212.

60 Archer, 213, note 3.

61 See Fantham, and Watson, *Agape*, above, as well as B W Winter, 'The "New" Roman Wife and 1 Timothy 2:9-15: The Search for a *Sitz im Leben*', *TynB* 51 (2000), 285-294.

62 Fantham, 281.

63 Fantham, 282.

64 Fantham, 296.

65 See Winter, 292.

66 Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 30.

67 Cynthia L. Thompson, 'Hairstyles, Head-coverings, and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth' *Biblical Archaeologist* (1988), 112, for example, states that 'the artefacts from Corinth that portray women suggest that Paul's advice that women wear their hair long was in harmony with Greco-Roman customs.' Two Mishnaic texts speak disapprovingly of loose flowing hair (see *Ketubot* 2:1 and 7:6). It is also interesting that the text in Genesis 38:15 reads 'he [Judah] thought her [Tamar] to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face' while the comment in *Gen Rabb* on 'When Judah saw her:' is 'He paid no attention to her. When she covered her face, he thought, "If she were a whore, would she have covered her face?" Said R Yohanan, "He planned to go right by, but the Holy One blessed be he, designated for him the angel who is in charge of lust; the Angel said, "Where are you going, Judah? From whence will kings arise, from whence will redeemers arise?" "He went over to her at the roadside" against his will, not for his own desire at all.' *Gen Rabbah* 85.8.2 on *Gen* 38:1-30

Watson argues quite persuasively that the head-covering Paul envisages is the veil.⁶⁸ Rather than a return to traditional [Greek] values, a sort of 'back-to-basics' in Corinth, Watson thinks the veil as head covering is 'an innovation that Paul only now seeks to impose.'⁶⁹ Paul is not, therefore, trying to encourage the women in the Corinthian congregation to fit in with traditional societal roles and norms so that the church might be seen to be 'respectable'. Nor does it have to do with the suggestion that the women prophets [in the Corinthian church] have abandoned head-covering because they thought that gender differences had been abolished in Christ. Paul probably introduces this practice of head-covering or veiling from his own background.⁷⁰

But why? Paul's purpose, argues Watson, has nothing to do with 'male supremacy but to its overthrow...the problem to which female head-covering is the proposed solution is that of a male-oriented eros.'⁷¹ It should hardly surprise us that Paul, the highly educated Jewish missionary to the Gentiles, proposes this tack to eliminate potential lust. Although modesty in clothing was widely regarded in the ancient world as a preventative, it was especially so in Palestine.⁷² In short, for Paul the introduction of the custom, perhaps from his own background, stems comes from his own understanding of the social significance of women's head-covering – it was to prevent male lust.

68 Francis Watson, 'The Authority of the Voice: A Theological Reading of 1 Cor. 11:2-16', *NTS* 46 (2000), 535.

69 Watson, 'Voice', 526. *Contra* Jason David BeDuhn, 'Because of the Angels: Unveiling Paul's Anthropology in 1 Corinthians 11', *JBL* 118 (1999), 319.

70 See Thompson, 113, who writes, 'The explanation of this [why Paul insists on women covering their heads] may lie in differences of customs between Greco-Roman Corinth and the communities Paul was most familiar with, in southern Asia Minor, Syria, and Arabia. At Paul's time even more complete veiling of women was apparently "respectable" in Tarsus, Paul's native city' citing Dio Chrysostom, *The Thirty-third, or First Tarsic, Discourse*, section 48, from around 100 C.E. in support.

71 Watson, 'Voice', 530. BeDuhn labels the perspective Watson advances as 'wishful thinking'.

72 Llewellyn-Jones strikes a cautious note, writing in a private e-mail (12.01.01), 'It is very hard to know just what women in second-temple period Judaea were wearing; much would depend on class, wealth and social acceptance. Some women would have been thoroughly Romanized, no doubt, others may have opted for a more covered Greek style of dress or adhered more closely to localized forms of fashion.... The impact of Roman fashion may have altered earlier notions of female concealment.' Direct evidence of veiling comes from one Jewish source, Susannah 31 which reads 'Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes upon her beauty.'

This is the social context in which Matt 5:28 should be understood. The largely unspoken but implicit expectation is that women need to be properly clothed. Only this will diminish male temptation to illicit sexual contact. In particular, 'Jewish men expected married Jewish women to wear head coverings to prevent lust',⁷³ a pattern which still exists in traditional middle eastern cultures today.⁷⁴

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:28 presupposes this cultural context. Plainly stated, in this context the onus is placed upon women to prevent lust. But Jesus' words shift the responsibility to the inward being of men.⁷⁵ His words are addressed to men, recognising that 'men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession that is lacking in the female gaze.'⁷⁶ The prevention of adultery has nothing to do with the woman as temptress but with the covetousness of the heart.⁷⁷ Avoiding the act of adultery is not enough. Neither is covering up of the object of lust. (Nor, for that matter, is plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand (5:29-30), which have the same ironic absurdity as making anyone who says 'You fool' liable to the fire of hell (5:22).) The victim is not to blame. According to Matthew, the only solution to the problem is the greater righteousness, for which Jesus' disciples hunger and thirst, and made possible through following Jesus Messiah, the one who is making his followers into the new covenant community where the power relationships of sinful society are not to be the standard. As Guelich notes, in this new context Jesus demand 'calls for nothing less than a

73 Keener, *Matthew*, 187. See the literature cited in support of this view *loc. cit.*, note 81.

74 Haidar Hallasa, a colleague in Amman, writes in a private e-mail, 'the veil has to do with the lust.' Haidar's family is fairly traditional – his mother and grandmother dressed in a very traditional form with a dress which covered everything except the face and hands.

75 Llewelyn-Jones, in a private e-mail (05-02-01) draws attention to classical sources which put responsibility upon men as well. He writes, 'Men are often required to turn their heads away from shameful things, like women in public spaces. Men often take this further by actually veiling themselves. A very famous incident occurred in the Athenian lawcourts when a defendant named Timarchos exposed his body to the male assembly. This was inappropriate, and so the entire court veiled their faces.' But there are differences as well. The solution to avoid shameful things in these instances is turning the head and even wearing a veil, both external actions. Jesus thinks the solution is inward.

76 Bach, 131.

77 See Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 37, 'The responsibility for such sin is placed on the male, and consideration is given to the woman, often labelled the more suspected party in a male-oriented society.'

totally *wholesome* relationship between men and woman in which evil itself is no longer predominant.⁷⁸

This is entirely consistent with Jesus' attitude to women.⁷⁹ Such evidence as we have from the gospels suggests that his treatment of women was of a piece with his concern for the marginalised in society. His willingness to eat with prostitutes, to touch women who were ritually unclean, to accept the support of women in his ministry and to enter into sustained theological discussion with a disreputable woman are shown in various levels of the tradition.⁸⁰

Here then is the radical nature of Jesus' teaching: the responsibility for preventing covetousness is not placed on the woman. It is actually placed on the man who is coveting the woman. 'Jesus' intention', says France, 'is therefore to prohibit not a natural sexual attraction, but the deliberate harbouring of desire for an illicit relationship.'⁸¹ Sexual attraction remains. But as Watson puts it, 'the reconciliation of man and woman is also the reconciliation of *agape* and *eros*.'⁸²

IV. Conclusions

Two conclusions may be drawn from this study. The first is quite unremarkable while the second is tentative. First, Jesus agrees with his contemporaries in their desire to avoid adultery. He also agrees that the action is proceeded by the thought. But he goes beyond this to suggest that the thought is itself the problem and is as culpable as the action itself. Second, Jesus places the onus on the one lusting, not the object of desire. According to this antithesis, it is not the covering of a woman which is the solution; it's the new relationship between men and women within the new covenant community, a relationship that does not mirror the gender-power axis of society. Hence, his teaching is somewhat subversive of the prevailing culture. This conclusion is consistent with the pattern of Jesus' teaching and action in affirming women along with the other marginalised members of his society.

But that leaves a few final questions. First, is sexual attraction itself

78 Guelich, 242.

79 See Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 2000) for a thorough discussion of the place of some women in the gospel narratives.

80 Moore, 270 notes 'the surprise of the disciples of Jesus, as narrated in John 4, 27, at finding their master talking with a woman was quite in accord with rabbinical ideas of propriety.'

81 France, *Matthew*, 121.

82 Watson, *Agape*, 259: 'the original and normative context for *eros* is *agape*.' (253)

wrong for the new people of God? Clearly not. Lust, a distorted natural attraction perverted by selfishness and self-indulgence, must not be confused with healthy sexual attraction. In the new covenant community being created by Jesus, sexual relations are to be based upon the Creator's intention of the proper relationship between men and women.

Second, if Jesus takes this perspective, why does Paul try to solve the problem of male lust in Corinth by precisely the kind of external action which Jesus implies is inadequate? Watson anticipates just this kind of question by reminding us of the resistance to Paul's instructions which seems to be implied in 1 Cor. 11:16. If Paul's readers did offer resistance, they would 'confirm our own judgement that his concern about the erotic potential of the uncovered female face was unnecessary and demeaning to both women and men. Yet', Watson continues, 'the original symbolism of the veil retains its theological value. The Pauline veil speaks of the possibility of a male/female relationship based no longer on eros and a corresponding male-oriented asymmetry...'⁸³

Third, does this mean that Jesus' teaching here implies that *no* responsibility accrues to women in fostering appropriate sexual relationships? That is unlikely. A new starting point for male-female relationships places responsibility for appropriate sexual attitudes and actions on both genders. Hence the sexually provocative attire of the new Roman woman would be as inimical to Jesus' new relationship as is the lustful male gaze.⁸⁴ Consideration of the references to women's apparel in the epistles, however, should not detract from the direction of Jesus' teaching and his placing of the responsibility for male lust precisely where it belongs.

Fourth, how did the later church respond to Paul's teaching and the significance of Jesus' second antithesis? One example is Tertullian who, by the second Christian century, is calling for the severest strictures on women's apparel. In his treatise *On the Apparel of Women*, he begins by saying that proper Christian women should 'go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve – the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin and the odium

83 Watson, 'Voice', 536.

84 The advice on apparel given to women in 1 Tim 2:9 and 15 and in 1 Peter 3:2-3 may be best understood in the context of the new Roman woman (see Winter, note 61 above).

(attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition'.⁸⁵ Christian women, therefore, should not only abstain from enhancing their beauty through apparel, 'but that of even natural grace must be obliterated by concealment and negligence, as equally dangerous to the glances of (the beholder's) eyes.'⁸⁶ No doubt in Tertullian's mind where the problem lies, it seems.

He also puts together a lengthy case for the veiling of virgins. He writes, 'Arabia's heathen *females* will be your judges, who cover not only the head, but the face also, so entirely, that they are content, with one eye free, to enjoy rather half the light than to prostitute the entire face.' In Tertullian's mind, this was not a matter of personal opinion. Rather, it is the consequence of a revelation from the Lord. Again he writes, 'To *us* the Lord has, even by revelations, measured the space for the veil to extend over. For a certain sister of ours was thus addressed by an angel, beating her neck, as if in applause: "Elegant neck, and deservedly bare! It is well for you to unveil yourself from the head right down to the loins, lest withal this freedom of your neck profit you not!"'⁸⁷

It seems that, for Tertullian, the solution to male lust remains the time-honoured one of masking the symptom rather than treating the disease.

Abstract

The literary setting of Matthew 5:28 shows that Jesus is intensifying the Torah in its own direction but not by adding further restrictions on women's apparel. In this sense, Jesus' antithesis is counter cultural, placing the responsibility for lust in the heart of men rather than holding women responsible for its control. Appropriate relationships between genders in the people of God are founded upon the new relationship between God and his people established by Jesus. Paul introduces the issue of head coverings in 1 Cor. 11 from his own background but not to assert male authority. Other references to female apparel in the epistles may well be understood in the context of the 'new Roman woman'. However, Tertullian seems to have urged the more traditional route of restricting women's clothing as the remedy for male lust.

85 Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.1. All citations of Tertullian are taken from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

86 *Apparel*, 2.2

87 *On the Veiling of Virgins*, chapter 17.