THE QUESTION

Is it lust to desire your own wife?

Asked by a THF member on August 14, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 12 numbered quotations · the 30 early Christian passages and 153 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/is-it-lust-to-desire-your-own-wife

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

No. In these early writers, desire for your own wife is not the lust Jesus condemned. They describe sinful lust as wanting someone who is not your spouse, and they call married union clean. They also warn that passion needs self-control and should stay within the marriage bed, ruled by chastity rather than greed for pleasure.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	Jesus condemned lust for someone else's wife	**2**	**6**	Desire belongs inside the marriage bed	**4**
2	Thinking of your own wife guards against sin	**2**	**7**	Even in marriage, passion needs self-control	**5**
3	Married union is clean, not defiling	**3**		What these passages don't tell us	**5**
4	Husbands should love and prefer their wives	**3**		The Sources: 30 early Christian passages and 153 Bible verses, with links	**5**
5	Spouses owe each other married love	**4**			

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POINT 1 OF 7

Jesus condemned lust for someone else's wife

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Theophilus quotes the Gospel warning in a form that names a woman who is not the man's own wife. The Apostolic Constitutions read it the same way: the sin is coveting a neighbor's wife in the mind. Both treat the condemned lust as desire aimed outside the marriage.

1 “Whoever looks at a woman who is not his own wife, in order to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 13 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “Such a person is condemned for adultery, since he covets his neighbor's wife in his mind.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 23, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Thinking of your own wife guards against sin

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In The Shepherd, the angel warns against any thought about another man's wife. But he says that keeping one's own wife in mind is not a sin; it is the safeguard. Hermas later lists desire for another person's spouse first among the evil desires.

3 “But if you always remember your own wife, you will never sin.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “First of all is the desire for another person’s wife or husband, and for extravagance, and for many useless delicacies and drinks, and for many other foolish luxuries.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Married union is clean, not defiling

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions say that a husband and wife who come together in lawful marriage are clean and may pray without any special washing. They set this against the person who defiles another man's wife, who cannot be made clean by any washing.

5 “Therefore, when a husband and wife come together in lawful marriage and then rise from one another, they may pray without any special observances, and they are clean without washing.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 22, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Husbands should love and prefer their wives

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Theophilus describes a lawful husband holding fast to his wife, becoming one with her, and dearly preferring her. The Apostolic Constitutions tell husbands to love their wives as their own members and partners in life. Love and closeness to one's wife are praised, not blamed.

6 “For who is there that marries lawfully and does not set aside mother and father, and his whole family connection, and all his household, while he holds fast to his own wife and becomes one with her, dearly preferring her?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 28 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 8, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

7 “In the same way, you husbands, love your own wives as your own members, as partners in life and fellow helpers in the bearing of children.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 22, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

Spouses owe each other married love

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria explains Paul's words that it is better to marry than to burn. He says husband and wife should give each other what is owed and not deprive one another. He sees this as a help God gave within marriage.

8 "This is so that the husband may give what is owed to the wife, and the wife to the husband, and so that they may not deprive one another of this divine help given for the generation of children."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Desire belongs inside the marriage bed

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius says strong passions should be kept within lawful marriage, where a person may have what he desires without sin. He also tells the married man to be content with his wife alone and keep their bed pure.

9 "Whoever cannot restrain those passions should keep them within the bounds of the lawful marriage bed, so that he may obtain what he eagerly desires, and yet not fall into sin."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 23 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 28, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

10 "Let the man who has a wife seek nothing more. Instead, being content with her alone, let him keep the secrets of the marriage bed pure and undefiled."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 29, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Even in marriage, passion needs self-control

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Lactantius warns that too great an eagerness for pleasure is dangerous, and he wants desire kept within marriage and tied to having children. Clement speaks of couples who use marriage with self-control. Both teach that married desire is lawful but should be ruled by chastity.

11 "Let lust not go beyond the marriage bed, but be subject to the begetting of children. For too great an eagerness for pleasure both brings danger and produces disgrace, and, what must especially be avoided, leads to eternal death."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 62 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 27, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

12 "For he does not say this to those who use marriage with self-control for the sole purpose of having children, because of lack of self-control."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 13, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not give an exact line where ordinary married desire becomes sinful.
- Some writers, like Lactantius and Clement, tie married union closely to having children, and the passages do not settle how far that applies to every act.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 30 early Christian passages and 153 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–30, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 31–56, in Bible order), then 127 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are

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in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *30 passages from 11 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–3*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 3, page 2** I charge you to guard your chastity, and let no thought enter your heart about another man's wife, or about fornication, or about similar iniquities. For by doing this… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Shepherd* (1885 English) desire of wickedness arose within your heart. Is it not your opinion that a righteous man commits sin when an evil desire arises in his heart? There is sin in… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Shepherd* **Quote 4, page 2** "of all is the desire for another person's wife or husband, and for extravagance, and for many useless delicacies and drinks, and for many other foolish luxuries. For all… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (1885 English; on point 4) "be ye subject to your husbands in the fear of God… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 3) "took place] not as if the lawful union [of man and wife] were abominable, but such a kind of birth was fitting to God… [continues online] **read ›**

Minucius Felix, *c. 150–270 AD · source 6*

6 *Octavius* 24 (1885 English; on point 7) "the desire of procreating, we know either one wife, or none at all… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · sources 7–9*

7 *To Autolycus* 13 **Quote 1, page 2** "our thoughts. We must not even think any evil in our hearts, or look at another man's wife with lust in our eyes. So Solomon, who was a king… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *To Autolycus* 28 **Quote 6, page 3** Adam was driven out of Paradise, while he was in that condition, he knew Eve his wife. God had formed her for him as a wife out of his rib… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *To Autolycus* 35 (1885 English; on point 1) "shall not desire your neighbour's wife. So also the prophets… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 10*

10 *Resurrection of the Dead* 23 (on point 1) no relation to them, such as adultery, murder, theft, robbery, dishonor to parents, and every desire in general that leads to harm and loss for our neighbors. For the command… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 11–16*

11 *Stromata* 3 (on point 1) self-control by necessity, may not slip into sin, and while sparing his own marriage, may desire another's. For this reason, in the case of the man who thinks… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Stromata* 3 by the devil. These glorious boasters say that they are imitating the Lord, who neither took a wife nor possessed anything in the world. They boast that they have understood… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Stromata* 3 **Quotes 8, 12, pages 4, 5** beyond the goal of having children, lest, when our adversary is given too much room, he stir up desire for other pleasures. Or perhaps, since he resists those who live… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Stromata* 4.20 (1885 English; on point 3) "13:14-16 And then, as putting the finishing stroke to the question about marriage, he adds: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Instructor* 3.2 (1885 English; on point 1) "Lust not; or, Travel not by lust into adultery… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Instructor* 3.8 (1885 English; on point 3) "she did not take a husband in addition to a husband, But in the house the marriage-bed remains unpolluted… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 17–19*

17 *Against Marcion* 29 (on point 1) 1:28, but also, "You shall not commit adultery," and, "You shall not covet your neighbour's wife." He also threatened with death the impure, sacrilegious, and monstrous abomination of… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *On Monogamy* 11 (on point 5) it is for a man not to touch a woman; but, on account of fornications, let each one have his own wife." He shows that there were some who, having… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Against Marcion* 8 (1885 English; on point 1) "does not forbid connubial intercourse, but concupiscence… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 20*

20 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) "that say, You shall not covet, do you desire to corrupt the wife of your neighbour… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 21*

21 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (on point 5) the man who keeps away from his wife often makes her an adulteress when he does not satisfy her desires, even if he does this under the appearance of greater… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 22–25*

22 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quotes 5, 7, page 3** partners in life and fellow helpers in the bearing of children. For He says, "Rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her way of life be to you like… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 2, page 2** "said it in the law by Moses, but now I say to you myself—"Whoever looks at his neighbor's wife to lust after her has already committed adultery with… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) "1:31. We believe that lawful marriage and the begetting of… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 3) "19:14 and the Lord says: He that made them from the beginning, made them male and female… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 26–30*

26 *Divine Institutes* 23 (on point 6) all receptive to the man. This was clearly so that, if women resisted, lust would force men to desire something else, and by doing so they would not keep the… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 62 (1885 English) **Quote 11, page 5** "lust not go beyond the marriage-bed, but be subservient to the procreation of children… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Divine Institutes* 23 **Quote 9, page 4** handed over the weakness of youth, which needs protection, to be ravaged and defiled by their lust? This matter cannot be fully told because of the greatness of the crime… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 **Quote 10, page 4** "let this be kept in all the duties of life, and let it also be kept in marriage. For it is not enough if you keep away from another man… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Divine Institutes* 19 (on point 6) "these limits are. Cupidity is given to us for getting those things that are necessary for life. Concupiscence is given for the procreation of children. The affection of indignation is… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *26 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

31 **Susanna 1:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

32 **Susanna 1:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

33 **Matthew 5:28** but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. **read ›**

34 **John 2:16** To those who sold the doves, he said, "Take these things out of here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" **read ›**

35 **1 Corinthians 6:16** Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body? For he says, "The two shall become one flesh." **read ›**

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36 **1 Corinthians 7:2** But because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. **read ›**

37 **1 Corinthians 7:3** Let the husband give his wife the affection owed to her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. **read ›**

38 **1 Corinthians 7:4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. **read ›**

39 **1 Corinthians 7:5** Do not deprive one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **read ›**

40 **1 Corinthians 7:9** But if they do not exercise self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. **read ›**

41 **1 Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. **read ›**

42 **1 Corinthians 7:28** But even if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such people will have trouble in the flesh, and I want to spare you. **read ›**

43 **1 Corinthians 7:33** but the married man cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife. **read ›**

44 **1 Corinthians 7:36** But if anyone thinks that he is acting improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the prime of youth and it must be so, let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry. **read ›**

45 **1 Corinthians 7:37** But he who stands firm in his heart, who is under no necessity but has authority over his own will, and who has decided in his heart to keep his own virgin, does well. **read ›**

46 **1 Corinthians 7:38** So he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better. **read ›**

47 **Galatians 5:17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. **read ›**

48 **Ephesians 5:28** Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. **read ›**

49 **Ephesians 5:33** Nevertheless each of you must also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband. **read ›**

50 **Colossians 1:8** who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. **read ›**

51 **Colossians 1:11** strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory, for all endurance and patience with joy, **read ›**

52 **Colossians 1:14** in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. **read ›**

53 **Colossians 3:5** Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. **read ›**

54 **1 Thessalonians 4:5** not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who do not know God, **read ›**

55 **Hebrews 13:4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. **read ›**

56 **James 4:2** You lust, and do not have. You murder and covet, and cannot obtain. You fight and make war. You do not have, because you do not ask. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *127 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 1:12 · 4:25

Leviticus 15:18

Deuteronomy 8:18 · 20:5 · 20:19

Job 1:6

Psalms 24:4

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Proverbs 4:25 · 6:27 · 9:17

Isaiah 50:9

Jeremiah 13:1 · 23:24

Ezekiel 1:28

Amos 9:6

Zechariah 3:1

Matthew 5:8 · 5:31 · 5:32 · 5:42 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:21 · 10:2 · 11:18 · 18:3 · 18:20 · 19:3 · 19:4 · 19:6 · 19:8 · 19:9 · 19:10 · 19:11 · 19:12 · 23:9 · 24:19 · 24:37

Mark 10:9 · 13:17

Luke 6:30 · 6:46 · 8:18 · 14:26 · 16:18 · 17:28 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34 · 21:23

John 3:6 · 6:27 · 6:67 · 13:33 · 14:6 · 19:36

Acts 1:7 · 12:13 · 17:24

Romans 1:18 · 7:4 · 7:12 · 14:3 · 14:17 · 14:19 · 14:21

1 Corinthians 3:2 · 3:11 · 4:15 · 6:12 · 6:18 · 7:1 · 7:8 · 7:10 · 7:11 · 7:27 · 7:29 · 7:32 · 7:39 · 9:5 · 11:1 · 11:11 · 15:8 · 15:22

2 Corinthians 7:1 · 11:3 · 11:23 · 12:9

Galatians 4:19 · 4:26 · 5:13

Ephesians 1:4 · 2:12 · 3:9

Philippians 2:25 · 4:3

Colossians 2:18 · 2:20 · 3:2

1 Thessalonians 2:15 · 4:3 · 4:14 · 4:15 · 5:19 · 5:20 · 5:23

2 Thessalonians 3:14

1 Timothy 3:2 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:14

Titus 2:3

Hebrews 5:11 · 5:14 · 12:14 · 13:5 · 13:14

James 4:6

1 Peter 1:6 · 3:6 · 5:5

2 Peter 2:22

1 John 3:1

Revelation 4:1 · 17:3 · 21:10

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY