

Article of the Month
April, 2019

Adultery versus Fornication

THE QUESTION

It is not unlikely that in our minds we all have rough definitions of these two words but have not taken the time to compare their Scriptural uses. If we ask ourselves, “What is the difference between these two words?” — we will probably think we have a clear differentiation in mind. But, just in case we have jumped to conclusions, the following is offered. (This study is based solely on New Testament usage.)

THE GREEK WORDS

When we begin to study using a Strong’s Concordance, we may feel a little overwhelmed by the fact that SO MANY Greek words seem involved for both adultery and fornication. However, there is actually ONE word for each — but that one word has various forms to account for verb, noun, and adjective applications — as well as for gender. The ROOT word for adultery is MOIKIA; the ROOT word for fornication is PORNIA. The various words (with Strong’s numbers) which have various spellings on the same root are these:

ADULTERY (*moikia*):

- 3428 — *moikalis*. Used in feminine and adjective uses: Adulteress; adulterous
- 3429 — *moikaomai*. Used as a verb: Adultery by result. I.e., “If you do this, you CAUSE adultery.”
- 3430 — *moikia*. The noun referring to the subject of adultery.
- 3431 — *moikuo*. Another verb form: To commit adultery.
- 3432 — *moikos*. Masculine form: Adulterers.

FORNICATION (*pornia*):

- 4202 — *pornia*. The noun referring to the subject of fornication.
- 4203 — *pornuo*. The verb: To commit fornication.
- 4204 — *pornee*. The feminine practitioner: A harlot.
- 4205 — *pornos*. The masculine practitioner: A whoremonger.
- 1608 — *ekpornuo*. A verb showing a devotion to fornication: = To give yourself over to fornication.

At the end of this article will be listed all uses of each of these words so that a comprehensive study can be made by those who wish to do so. However, the concepts of the subject can be summarized with a few Scriptural examples, and the exhaustive listing of the words at the end of this article will confirm the conclusions.

DEFINITIONS

Simply speaking, FORNICATION is the word for the entire subject. In other words, adultery IS a specific kind of fornication, even though fornication need not be adultery. As is often said of the Jewish Law, “All priests are Levites; but all Levites are not priests.” All adultery is fornication; but not all fornication is adultery.

Adultery is fornication by a married person. Therefore, adultery can be and IS also called fornication in Scripture. Perhaps the most famous texts to demonstrate this point are those in which Jesus, himself, uses “fornication” to MEAN adultery — Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. In both of these texts, Jesus uses both words, fornication and adultery. But it should be clear that the initial sin in these verses is fornication while married — which IS adultery. But Jesus wants it to be known that divorce for any other reason ALSO results in additional adultery if either of the formerly-married people remarries.

Fornication among the unmarried is not adultery. Thus, as stated above, fornication is a generic word for the act of sexual immorality, married or not. Adultery is the specific word for fornication while married.

VINE is consistent with this assessment of the words. He points out that ADULTERY is unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another. [We would question the restrictive nature of the last three words! Perhaps it would be better said that adultery is unlawful intercourse while married.]

VINE defines FORNICATION as illicit intercourse — and that the word can stand for and include adultery.

ALL NEW TESTAMENT USES
REGARDLESS OF TRANSLATION

Fornication:

4202 -----PORNIA = The noun referring to the subject of
of fornication

Matthew	5:32 15:19 19:9
Mark	7:21
John	8:41
Acts	15:20 15:29 21:25
Romans	1:29
I Corinthians	5:1 6:13 6:18 7:2
II Corinthians	12:21
Galatians	5:19
Ephesians	5:3
Colossians	3:5
I Thessalonians	4:3

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Revelation 2:21
 9:21
 14:8
 17:2
 17:4
 18:3
 19:2

4203-----PORNUO = The verb: To commit fornication

I Corinthians 6:18
 10:8

Revelation 2:14
 2:20
 17:2
 18:3
 18:9

4204-----PORNEE = The feminine practitioner: A harlot

Matthew 21:31
 21:32

Luke 15:30

I Corinthians 6:15
 6:16

Hebrews 11:31

James 2:25

Adultery:

3428-----MOIKOLIS = Used in feminine & adjective forms =
adulteress, adulterous

Matthew 12:39
 16:4

Mark 8:38

Romans 7:3

James 4:4

II Peter 2:14

3429-----MOIKAOMAI = Used as a verb: Adultery by result.
I.e., "If you do this, you cause
adultery."

Matthew 5:32
 19:9

Mark 10:11
 10:12

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3430-----MOIKIA = The noun referring to the subject of adultery.

Matthew	15:19
Mark	7:21
John	8:3
Galatians	5:19

3431-----MOIKUO = Another verb form: To commit adultery.

Matthew	5:27 5:28 19:18
Mark	10:19
Luke	16:18 18:20
John	8:4
Romans	2:22 13:9
James	2:11
Revelation	2:22

3432-----MOIKOS = Masculine form: Adulterer

Luke 18:11

I Corinthians 6:9

Hebrews 13:4

James 4:4 (The word in the KJV is spurious in this verse; only the feminine word exists within the verse.)

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