THREAT: FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE LUSTS OF THE HEART (PART 2)

INTRO

- The threefold enemy believers face is the world, the flesh, and the devil
- The flesh also belongs to the triad of temptations the believer faces as part of living in the world

1 John 2:16 ~ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1. Lust of the Flesh

- This refers to an ungodly desire springing from what our human flesh wants
- Not all desires are bad…many are good and spring from the blessings the Lord has given
- However, these lusts arise in the flesh, that part of our unredeemed humanness that remains after conversion
- They are desires, passions, and longings that arise from that part of us that is still sinful and hostile toward God…even though Christians have new hearts, the sin that still remains produces cravings that compete with God…they constitute those desires for things of this fallen world

2. Lust of the Eyes

- These are cravings that come through our eyes...the passionate desires that come through what is seen
- Practically anything we see can create greed within our hearts

3. Boastful pride of life

- This refers to the desire to be exalted, have control, be recognized, impress other people…a desire to have others recognize you for your accomplishments or achievements

- Notably, these were the same issues Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:5-11)
  - The first temptation (turning stones into bread) = the lust of the flesh
  - The second temptation (throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple) = the boastful pride of life
  - The third temptation (receiving all the kingdoms of the world) = the lust of the eyes

- And it is these same three temptations that Satan used in the beginning to tempt Eve

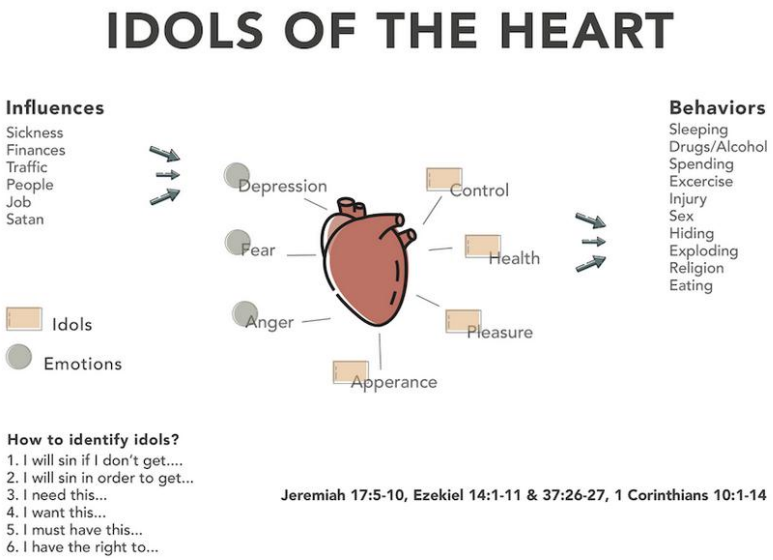
Genesis 3:6 ~ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

- Eve was tempted when she:
  1. "saw the tree was good for food" = lust of the flesh
  2. "saw it was pleasant to the eyes" = lust of the eyes
  3. "saw it was desirable to make one wise" = boastful pride of life

- In order to make progress in our pursuit of sanctification, we must understand how the flesh threatens it

THE IDOLATRY OF A LUSTFUL HEART

- "You may not be accustomed to thinking of your sin in terms of idolatry that begins in the heart. Your external behaviors – the things that you participate in and can be seen by others – are the problems that weigh heavily on your mind. But if you desire to deal with your sin biblically, earnestly seeking holiness and purity and cultivating a heart that is conditioned by a repentant attitude, you will need to know what the Bible teaches about heart idolatry."[1]



- "Many mistakenly think of an idol as only a physical object made of wood, or stone, or some other sort of material. Certainly, tangible objects can become idols, but idols consist of anything ruling your heart – whether an object or an idea, whether a statue or an intense longing…When self-gratifying pleasure dominates the heart, it has become an idolatrous ruling desire. You do not have to worship a physical idol to be an idolater…Too many Christians assume they cannot be corrupted by their desires, failing to realize how much these desires have already ensnared their hearts, ruled their thoughts, and now control their ambitions. Evil cravings are often comfortable cravings, easily finding a home in the unsuspecting heart."[2]

Ezekiel 14:3-5 ~ "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? 4 "Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, 5 in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols." '

1 Corinthians 10:5-8 ~ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

Colossians 3:5 ~ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

- Diagnosing heart idolatry (lusts of the heart) requires answering the following questions honestly and thoroughly[3]

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[1] John Street, *Passions of the Heart*, 29.
[2] Ibid., 33-34.
[3] Adapted from Street, *Passions of the Heart*, 35-40.

What wants/desires in your heart are opposed to God's wants/desires?

- Any want or desire that is contrary to God's will in his Word is a potential idol…and it possesses the capacity to rule over your heart if you don't turn away from it

- "While not every sinful desire becomes a ruling desire in the heart, the ones that captivate and enslave you are idols, which is one manifestation of heart idolatry. These ruling idols control your thought life and dominate your time and energy in fulfilling their endless demands. If you permit this heart idolatry to remain unabated, unrepented of, you will find yourself in full-blown rebellion against what God says is best for your life."[4]

- Sinful desires do not necessarily become idolatrous when they are repented of since no further thought is given to it
- The sinful desire is not allowed to rule over the person who puts an end to it

- However, "when such a desire has been allowed to become a deep longing of lust in the heart, when significant time has passed without repentance, then it has become a reigning, idolatrous desire – one that shapes and controls every aspect of life. Idols demand worship."[5]

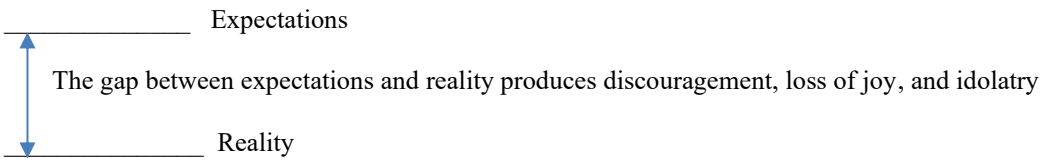
What does God want and desire that agrees with your wants and desires, but you want it so much you are willing to be ungodly if you do not get it?

- There are many desires that are godly – desire for marriage, children, salvation of children, etc.
- However, when these good desires become all-consuming desires, they can become sinful desires and therefore controlling idols of the heart
- This occurs when good desires become demanding desires

What are the controlling expectations that dominate your heart with evil thoughts, ungodly words, and sinful actions when they are unrealized?

- Hopeful expectations can easily grow into full-blown idolatry

James 4:1-2 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.



- "…not all expectations are evil or sinful. But the ones that overgrow the heart, crowding it, and taking over, these are the idolatrous ones. Like the kudzu plant…of the southeastern United States, expectations are hardy and robust and can easily grow to cover everything…What started as a good and wholesome expectation turned into a demanding desire."[6]

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[4] Ibid., 35.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 37.

What do you consider your "rights" to be, and how do you react in ungodly ways when denied?

- It is easy for a person's perceived "rights" to become idolatrous and demanding
- "Here are a few examples: I have a right to be loved, cared for, heard, respected, considered attractive, honored, promoted, to have a good-looking spouse, to be considered important, to have children, to have well-behaved children, to have children who are successful, to be sexually satisfied – the list could go on. There seems to be no end to what the human heart believes is its right."[7]
- When we assume our rights are deserved, we open ourselves up to idols of the heart

What specific standards have you set for your life that are not God's standards but have led you to sinful thoughts and practices?

- Having ambitions and goals is not necessarily wrong; however, when those standards for personal achievement rule your life more than God, they are false idols
- "Self-determination is a favorite principle promoted by the secular world. Many assume that they are in control of their own future, so they set certain standards for themselves to help them arrive at that desired destination. Many Christians fall into a similar pattern of life. Instead of setting biblical standards and goals for themselves, they adopt self-generated ambitions for life. For example, a person may say that 'by age forty I will be a millionaire.' When age forty arrives and he has not achieved his goal, he is devastated! He is overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy and failure. Some may even believe that life is not worthy living any longer. This artificial, self-contrived standard is an idol they have made for themselves. They may bow down and worship that standard for years."[8]

What mind-set have you adopted that is opposed to God's truth and leads you to sinful thoughts, plans, and intentions?

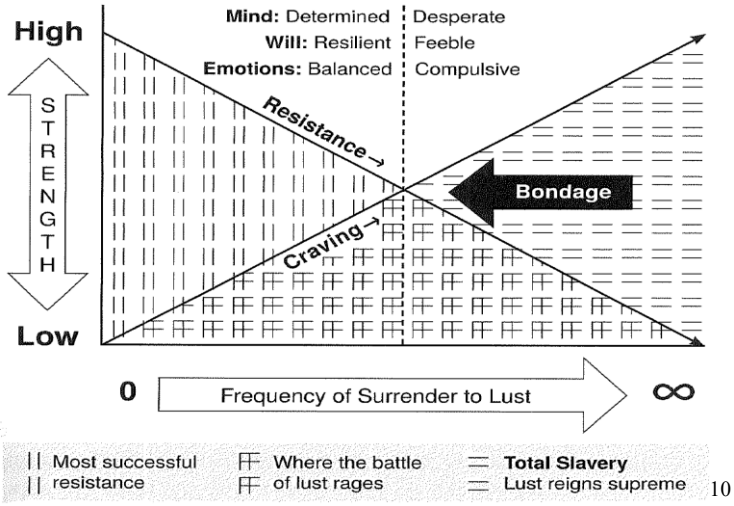
- It is possible to believe in the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God and yet still resist certain aspects of God's will
- "Once you have formed a mind-set that is opposed to God's truth in any matter, it will eventually result in suffering…For example, many Christian men and women enter into marriage with a worldly mind-set regarding their sexual relationship in marriage. It is possible for them to be sexually faithful (having regular relations only with each other) and still be practicing a form of sinful sex with their spouse. The mind-set that sex in marriage is for my personal pleasure and enjoyment alone is one example."[9]

THE PROGRESSION OF A LUSTFUL HEART

James 1:14-15 ~ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- James describes how our idolatrous heart desires lead to sin and its consequences

[7] Ibid., 37-38.
[8] Ibid., 38.
[9] Ibid., 39.



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Stage 1 – Temptation Occurs When Lusts Meet with Opportunity

James 1:14 ~ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

- A believer's real enemy is not merely the external opportunities that present themselves to him/her…these only provide the opportunity
- Rather, it is the lust that is resident within them that is the real adversary

- "Make no mistake, the vehicles of opportunity are indeed enemies of the Christian, but they require an ally within – your heart – in order to be effective…The human heart is rugged, full of stubborn crevices and caves carved out by years of sinful habits and practices…As a sincere Christian, you should be aware of your enemy's identity and method. You must be willing to invade your underground shelters – your hidden areas of the heart – in order to extricate him. Lust embeds itself within your heart behind rationalizations as you yield to its deceitful feelings of satisfaction and gratification. Eventually, lust becomes your closest companion, until you no longer view life as normal without indulging it. However, you have no one to blame but yourself for fraternizing with the enemy."[11]

Stage 2 – Lust Conceives in a Heart When the Will Consents

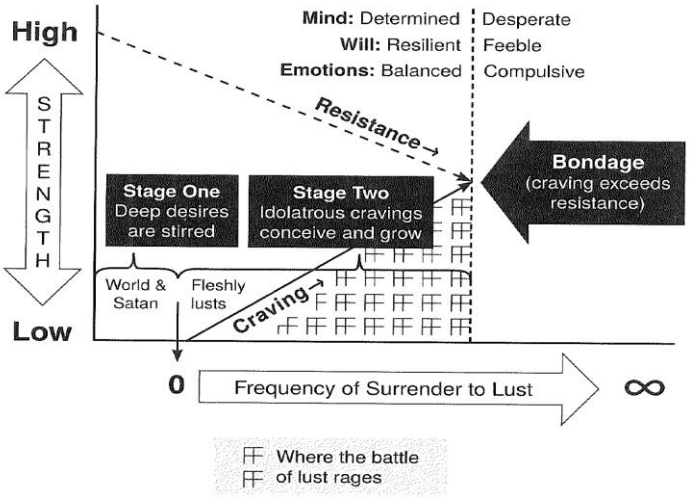
James 1:15 ~ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- This is when sin is sown in the heart…the temptation that arises from the world and/or Satan may stir the depraved desires…BUT…it is not sin in the heart until the will gives permission

- "The assumption made by James is that the heart is a fertile womb for lust's implantation and growth. The womb is perfectly analogous to the sinful heart that becomes the nurturing nest for lust's embryonic seed…After the will has surrendered to the initial temptation…, idolatrous craving is sown in the heart. Like a pregnancy, it begins to grow if it is not aborted by repentance. As the craving grows, resistance decreases and the struggle becomes less intense. Passion and desire within the heart and body beat hard with increasing intensity. At this stage, there has been no external action taken to satisfy that desire, but as the desire deepens, sinful behavior is not far behind."[12]

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[10] Ibid., 51.
[11] Ibid., 63-64.
[12] Ibid., 65-66.



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Stage 3 – The Lustful Heart Engages in Visible Deeds of Sin

James 1:15 ~ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- In this stage, the mind gives the body permission to act on its desire

- "This does not mean that the internal conception of lust in the heart is not a sin; indeed, lust in the heart is a sin. Like a full-term pregnancy, however,…lust take on a life of its own and is born as certain perceptible sinful deeds. Just as a baby is not fully seen until birth,…sin is not visible until it is born in outward acts of corruption…James teaches that the natural progression of lust is to seek outward fulfillment through an unrighteous activity. Growing lust will bear sinful behavioral fruits…lust will be born into the world when it has reached gestational maturity and the womb of imagination can no longer contain it. You may try to suppress its expression because of unpleasant consequences anticipated from the disappointment and disapproval of others. Yet it will initially seek a secretive outlet until you no longer care whether others know. It is what your heart wants. Lust cannot remain in the heart forever; it will demand to be brought into the world…lustful sin in the heart demands to be born."[14]

Stage 4 – Fully Formed Sin Ends in Death

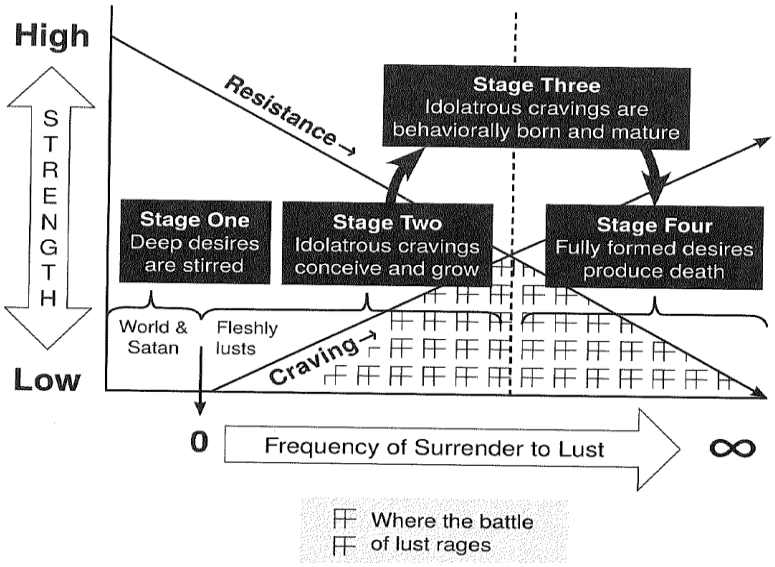
James 1:15 ~ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- Sin always leads to devastating and disastrous consequences

- "Birth usually results in life. But in this case, lust's child grows as though it is alive, but its maturation yields death. Its growth is like that of malignant cancer; ever growing yet leading to death. The effects of death are evident everywhere in the sexual slave's morbid existence – hopelessness, uselessness, dead conscience, broken relationships, wasted time, squandered resources, ungodliness, and diseased and dying bodies…When allowed to live and thrive, lust grows in its skills and abilities as time progresses. It is not dormant, static, or passive; rather, it is constantly learning and adjusting as it seeks satisfaction from its environment. Like a child whose arms and legs are growing and gaining kinesthetic skill, lust develops proficiency in acquiring what it wants. Since its desire is never fully satisfied, it must be driven on to find other sources and avenues for its fulfillment. "[15]

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[13] Ibid., 67.
[14] Ibid., 67-69.
[15] Ibid., 76-77.



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- James is very clear that sin does not happen merely when the lust is acted on externally
- Instead, he teaches that the internal desire feeding the sinful act is the sinful source and cause of outward acts of sin

- This is consistent with what Jesus teaches about the dangers of lust

Matthew 5:27-28 ~ You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- "Preexisting impurities of the heart are embedded in covetousness. In fact, covetousness is what makes the heart/womb so fertile for…temptation. Impurities of the heart twist [good desires] into covetous, dominating, and demanding desires. Once these desires captivate the mind and enslave the body, the sense of bondage overwhelms the lustful person, and he or she believes there is no hope for lasting change."[17]

THE PORTALS FOR A LUSTFUL HEART

- Often the lusts of the flesh and the idols of the heart manifest themselves as a result of a displeasure with other things in life
- These other "portals" can provide opportunities where temptation and sin can gain entrance into our lives
- There can be complicated and hidden layers of idolatrous desires in the human heart that provide portals to temptation and, therefore, must be addressed for purposes of sanctification

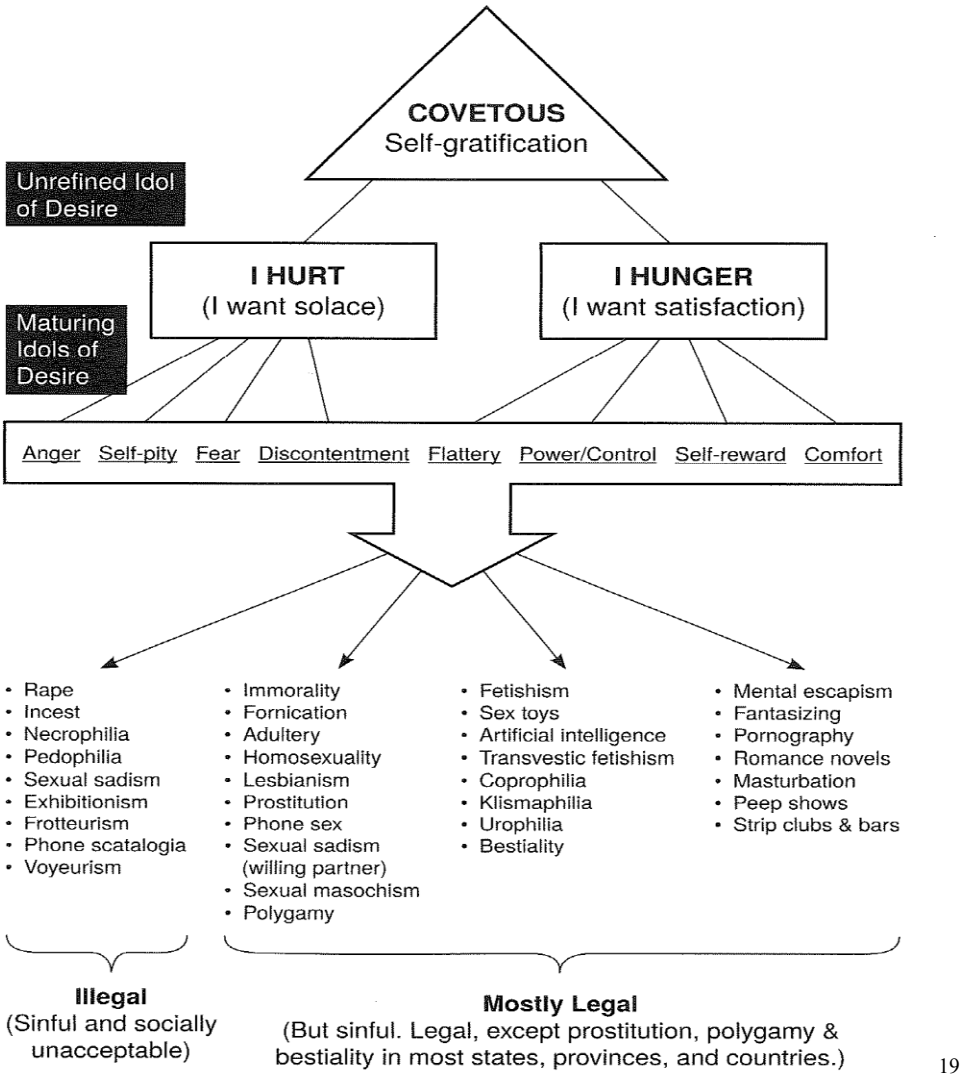
- This is evident in how the Israelites conducted themselves…which Paul refers to in 1 Cor 10

1 Corinthians 10:6-10 ~ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

- Their previous heart idols (desire for comfort and ease) became the portal for their sexual immorality

[16] Ibid., 78.
[17] Ibid., 84.

- "These Jews, having lived their entire lives under the harsh extremes of bondage and hardship, longed for the indulgent pleasures enjoyed by their taskmasters. The effect of the Jews' punishing labors instilled within them more than a desire to be free to worship the God they served; they wanted to be free to enjoy unrestricted pleasures. But God had delivered them to be his people, not the people of good times. Obviously, their desires became greater than loving and serving God, despite the fact that he had miraculously freed them. Once delivered, the Jews soon gave themselves to serving idolatrous gods: the Egyptians had patterned for the Jews an enjoyment of sensual fulfillment through indulgent living…Ancient Israel's experience in Egypt had stirred up certain heart expectations and desires that made her vulnerable to sexual idolatry when freedom was acquired…it is clear that their sexual immorality had a context and was fed by cravings for comfort and easy living, which they believed had been denied them in Egypt."[18]



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- This shows that covetousness is at the root of many sins…and it produces in the heart new and additional idols of the heart
- Serving and gratifying self are its chief aim…which amounts to greed…and manifests itself in a variety of different attitudes and expectations

[18] Ibid., 94-95.
[19] Ibid., 102.

THE DECEPTIVENESS OF A LUSTFUL HEART

- It is imperative to remember that lust is deceptive and it often lies to us

Ephesians 4:20-24 ~ But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with **the lusts of deceit**, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

- Self-centered lusts are deceitful because they promise joy but fail to provide it
- They are sugar-coated poison

THE HOPE FOR LUSTFUL HEART

- God is always faithful to his people, even in the midst of temptation…the temptation that believers face is never beyond the resources the Lord provides to enable them to resist it

1 Corinthians 10:13 ~ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- The Lord always provides a way out of a tempting/trying situation, even if it means going through it and persevering accordingly