

AT THE  
ALTAR  
— of —  
SEXUAL  
IDOLATRY



STEVE GALLAGHER

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**At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry**

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## Endorsements

“This book has a straightforward, biblical approach to the sensuality of our culture. It dares us to believe that sexual addictions of any kind can be overcome through deep repentance, spiritual warfare and accountability. Thankfully, it does not just analyze how pagan our culture has become but also shows how we can walk down a different path to purity and freedom. This book is direct, helpful and hopeful for all who have been led to believe that victory over sensual sins is not possible.”

**Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer**, Pastor Emeritus, Moody Church, Chicago

“*At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry* is one of the best books out there on this topic. I recommend that you get this book.”

**Beverly LaHaye**, Concerned Women for America

“Our world ‘experts’ have diagnosed sin as *psychological* and prescribed therapy, *physiological* and prescribed drugs, *societal* and prescribed support groups. They have missed the one key element to any diagnosis of aberrant behavior. This important element that our world’s experts have missed is the key teaching in Steve Gallagher’s book *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*. Steve has delved into the root cause of all sexual deviancy, and reveals with his characteristic clarity: all sin is first and foremost *spiritual*. And because the diagnosis is accurate the prescription Steve presents is both accurate and life-changing: *the gospel*. In reading this book we learn what the world does not know, and we discover the solution the world does not provide. I highly recommend this book!”

**Mike Cleveland**, Founder and President of Gospel Growth Ministries

“Far more than any book I have encountered, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry* cuts right to the heart of the problem. Steve Gallagher has finally given the evangelical world a book that uses the Word of God to deal with this terrible epidemic.”

**Robert K. Wetmore**, Professor of Theology at Toccoa Falls College

“Over 20 years ago, when I was just beginning to plant a church, a friend gave me a copy of Steve Gallagher’s book, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*, and I couldn’t put it down. As a pastor and biblical counselor I was thrilled to see someone address this issue so honestly, so biblically, and so helpfully and hopefully. Books on sexual problems abound today but most never get to the heart of the problem like Steve does. This is a book you’ll want to read and re-read if you really want to help people get free from sexual

sin. Steve recognizes that sexual sin is false worship, so he goes after the sin beneath the sin, which is the only way anyone really finds power and freedom to turn from their sin and live for the glory of God. Read it and pass it on to others.”

**Brad Bigney**, Pastor of Grace Fellowship Church, author of  
*Gospel Treason – Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols*

“Evangelical Christianity is indebted to Steve Gallagher for turning the pain of his past into a path toward purity for those in bondage to sexual idolatry.”

**Dr. Richard Dobbins**, Founder, Emerge Ministries

“Sexual addicts destroy their lives and the lives of those closest to them. Despite the pain, hope is not lost. Redemption and forgiveness are available through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The ongoing work of God in a person’s life results in change—even among the hardest addict. Thankfully, the Lord has used Steve Gallagher, Pure Life Ministries, and *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry* as instruments in His hands for decades to communicate this message of hope. This book not only helps those in the midst of sexual addiction, but helps to equip the church to help those with sexual addiction.”

**Rob Green, Ph.D.**, Pastor of Counseling and Seminary  
Ministries at Faith Church, Lafayette, IN

“As Christians, we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, but this can only be done by first presenting our minds to God and putting off our idolatrous tendencies to worship ourselves. While genuine Christian men desire to worship God, the fact that we are a living sacrifice—one with a depraved nature—makes us susceptible to crawling off the altar and turning to idols. In this book, Steve Gallagher skillfully exposes one of the most prominent idols of our age: sexual perversion. He clearly presents from Scripture God’s plan for men to guard their hearts from temptation and sin and rightly praises the beauty and incredible benefits of sexual intimacy as God intends. This book and its detailed discussion are desperately needed in our homes and in our churches. The message is urgent yet simple: when sex is used as a means of glorifying self, it defiles, impairs, and destroys intimate relationships, but when sex is used and guarded as a means of worshiping God, it is an amazing gift that uniquely strengthens the covenant of marriage by revealing the love and holiness of God.”

**Dr. Daniel R. Berger II**, Author, Speaker, and  
Director of Alethia International Ministries

*This book is dedicated to my wife Kathy who  
“bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things.”  
Her love has never failed me.*

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## FOREWORD

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When Steve asked me to write the foreword for this book, I was honored at first, then struck with anxiety concerning what I could say, when he is the source of truth concerning this subject. Then I remembered that I had just written something the Holy Spirit had impressed upon me, and realized it would help in the solution to addiction.

The text of “washing the mind with the water of the Word” is found in a passage concerning marital relationships.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.  
(Ephesians 5:25-27, KJV)

The apostle, having mentioned Christ’s love to the church, enlarges upon it, assigning the reason why he gave himself for it, namely, that he might sanctify it in this world, and glorify it in the next: That he might



sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word (v. 26)—that he might endue all his members with a principle of holiness, and deliver them from the guilt, the pollution, and the dominion of sin.  
(Matthew Henry)

The reason for books such as this one of Steve's is to clarify, amplify or make understandable the Word of God to those in need, so that it can become at once the foundation for their faith, and the solution to their torments.

I wrote once, "The torment of the temptation to sin is nothing compared with the consequences of sin." The consequences can last for a lifetime or an eternity. It's the consequences that are so terribly tormenting.

The solution of course, as in everything with the Lord, is in the Word of God. God's Word is where every solution is found to every problem or issue that a man or woman faces. There is no place for help like the Word of God. All God's healing work begins with His Word.

The subjective emotion and thinking of the addict is, "I'm too unclean, too unworthy, too unholy, too undeserving to read the Bible." That is a lie! God's Word is written for such people, to show them the way Jesus Christ has made for them to get out of the pit or hole they dug for themselves.

Or they say, "I have failed so badly. How can I ever be good enough again so God can hear me?" You don't get good and get to God, you get to God and God makes you good. Getting to God is getting into His Word.

The Word does the work!

Read it when you feel guilty; read it when you don't get anything from it; read it in the face of the devil and his accusations against you; read it when you are not even sure you believe it, just read it!!

The Word does the work!

The Word of God washes the mind as soap does the hands. The Word is like soap in that it is only effective when used.

All you have is the Word!

Life's greatest failure is not your sin, but in failure to read the Word.

The only way the Word can wash your mind is when you read it. Reading the Word is the only way God can do His work in your life.

Christianity is not difficult to live, it's impossible. It is Christ living in you that is real Christianity. That is where the life of Christ is. Not what you try to do, but what He does in you.

The Word pays no attention to your sin, emotions, or actions; it merely does its work when you read it.

God's Word never changes, we do.

It doesn't make us feel guilty, we do that to ourselves. It gives us a way out of our feelings, habits, desires and wants. God's Word is our source of life and blessing.

The reason I am writing this foreword for Steve is that he has based everything in this book on God's Word. It is foundational, inspirational, confrontational—just what you need. I'm not talking just about you and your problem, but I am writing to you who desires to be a problem solver.

This is your book. Put the Bible and this book side by side—reading them—and let the Word do the work.

But if we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and *cleanse* us from every wrong. [And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins.]

When you do your part, God will do His. You can't do His part, and He won't do yours. Yours is to act on His Word, and let His Word do the work.

Thank God for a man like Steve Gallagher, who will tell the truth, and let the truth make us free. Live Free!

The Late Dr. Edwin Louis Cole  
Founder and President  
Christian Men's Network

# INTRODUCTION

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## Living in a Sexualized Culture

Unless you are at least 60-years-old, you probably do not know what it is like to live in a culture that *isn't* obsessed with sex. Prior to the late '60s, illicit sex was mostly confined to the seedy underworld or simply nonexistent. It was rare for a man watching TV to come across anything racier than a couple kissing or a vague suggestive comment. Pornography addiction usually amounted to nothing more than a *Playboy* magazine hidden under the bed. Promiscuity was rare and suburban America knew nothing of homosexuality. Immorality was considered, by and large, unacceptable behavior in the United States.

Today's environment for the average guy is different—much different. Nearly eight out of every ten primetime TV shows contain suggestive sexual content today, averaging almost six sex scenes per hour.<sup>1</sup> These are not quick snippets of bathing suits or couched comments about sexual matters, either. Passionate sex scenes (sans open nudity) have become commonplace on daytime soap operas. Primetime offerings and situation comedies (sit-coms) almost continually revolve around sexual storylines involving teenage promiscuity, extra-marital affairs, homosexuality and worse.

Even more alarming are the various ways that pornography is available via cable networks. For instance, DirecTV for several years offered free five-minute previews of soft-core pornography, which could be seen by anyone, “including children who might accidentally tune in.”<sup>2</sup> Some cable providers offer (not so) scrambled networks that provide XXX-movies 24-hours a day.

Magazine racks, where a guy might want to innocently peruse a copy of *Sporting News* or read up on the latest computer innovations, also offer men’s magazines with overt sexual themes (such as *Maxim* or *FHM*), or, at the very least, covers with nearly nude images or headlines like *A Day in the Life of a Teen Nudist*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is nearly impossible to approach a major retail chain checkout counter without being bombarded with images of girls in teensy bikinis.

Adding to these sensuous pictures men must face is the skimpy attire young girls wear. Fashion designers, like Abercrombie & Fitch, compete with each other to market the sexiest lines of clothing to teens. What guy can go out in public during warm weather and not be accosted by navels, low-cut blouses, skin-tight jeans or mini-skirts? Jaded young girls have come to understand that the more revealing their clothes, the more they will be noticed.

Young guys face an enormous degree of peer pressure at school to give up their virginity. Forfeiting one’s virginity has long since become the rite of passage into respectability among teens. The National Center for Health Statistics conducted a revealing survey of American teens aged 15-19. The results, indicating that over half of respondents had engaged in oral sex\*, reveal how X-rated the national mindset of our youth has become.

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\*This number jumps to 70% with 18-19-year-olds.

## Alarming Trends

Just where is our nation headed in regards to morality? The answer to that question can be found in the realm of technology and the internet—the new vehicles driving tomorrow’s lifestyle choices. We are rapidly moving toward a world where practically everything can be experienced instantly, virtually and on-demand. A single mouse-click opens an entire world of luscious evil before one’s eyes.

Today’s cyber surfer can literally choose from millions of sexual images of anything he could imagine—a veritable smorgasbord of perversion available at his fingertips. Nude pictures of people from every ethnic grouping are there for his pleasure. Enactments of practically any sexual fantasy can be explored and indulged.

In 2001, pornography’s annual revenues were approximately \$10 billion in the U.S. and \$56 billion worldwide.<sup>4</sup> This was projected to increase to \$70 billion worldwide in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Currently, about 4.2 million websites offer adult content.<sup>6</sup> Approximately “25 million Americans visit cyber-sex sites between 1-10 hours per week. Another 4.7 million in excess of 11 hours per week.”<sup>7</sup>

According to a 2004 online poll of over 15,000 people conducted by *MSNBC.com* and *Elle* magazine, 75% of men and 41% of women surveyed had acknowledged viewing or downloading erotic films from the web. The survey also found that one out of every five men had sexually interacted with another person via live webcam,<sup>8</sup> while women are twice as likely as men to engage in chat rooms.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently, much of this is going on in the workplace. Another 2004 survey reported that 40% of workers had seen a coworker viewing pornography on the job.<sup>10</sup> Yet another worker survey conducted by the Employment Law Alliance claimed that 25% said that “they or their coworkers visit pornographic websites or engage in sex talk or other sexually oriented internet

activities on their work computers during office hours.”<sup>11</sup> These figures seem to be supported by still another study which revealed that 70% of all internet porn traffic occurs during work hours.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that we are hurtling quickly into an era of virtual sex. A survey of 2,500 college students from across Canada found that 87% had admitted to using technology like instant messaging and webcams for sexual purposes. Noah Gurza, co-founder of the co-ed online dating service that conducted the survey, explains that “there has been a technological sexual revolution. With every new advent in technology, virtual sex evolves. With the increasing bandwidth and cheapness of procuring oneself with a webcam, it has added the dimension of video, which fundamentally alters virtual sex.”<sup>13</sup> (While it should be noted that the results of a couple of these surveys come from potentially biased groups, they still evidence an alarming trend emerging among the online crowd.)

The increasing trend of online sexuality is merely supplemental to the more traditional offerings of massage parlors, strip clubs, adult bookstores, “modeling” and “escort” agencies, homosexual nightclubs, and, of course, the ever present promiscuity among singles.

It is clear that America has adopted a wide-scale tolerance for immorality. Our collective conscience has become desensitized and seared. The “live and let live” mentality has evolved, replacing our traditional Judeo-Christian morals and values. When a recent television program polled its viewers about their perspectives regarding pornography in the U.S., 57% agreed with the statement: “I think pornography falls under free speech rights.” When MSNBC asked its audience whether their sex life was the government’s business, 93% said, “No, what consenting adults do in private is nobody else’s concern.” Only 7% believed that some sex acts should be outlawed.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that the “sex-is-everything” mindset of adult

entertainment has re-shaped the American persona.\*\*

## The Challenge for Believers

It is within this immoral climate that Christian men are expected to live godly lives. Not only must they deal with an environment of pervasive sensuality, they also must contend with a fallen nature that is powerfully drawn to it. Everywhere a man turns he is confronted with sexual imagery and temptation.

Evangelical men differ widely in how they deal with this visual and virtual onslaught. On one end of the spectrum are those who sincerely desire a pure thought life. They hate the fact that they must continually encounter girls wearing revealing clothing in public. They do their utmost to avoid situations (i.e. television shows, websites, magazines, etc.) that would cause them to stumble. They detest their natural awareness of female body parts.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who fill their minds with pornography throughout the week and unrepentantly sit smugly in church on Sunday. They have deceived themselves into thinking they can continue in sin without consequence. Jesus could easily have been speaking to them when He said, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.” (John 8:44)

Most of the Christian men I have encountered over the past 30 years fall somewhere between these two extremes. Part of the time they sincerely want to do the right thing. Other times they don’t seem to care. Sometimes they fight their natural inclinations to lust and sometimes they completely give themselves over to them. On occasion, they feel convicted

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\*\* The statistics cited throughout this section come from the early 2000s. More recently (April, 2016), Time magazine reported, “Today more than 100 million people in the U.S. visit adult sites monthly.” That is a third of the population! Furthermore, ordinary porn is no longer the only option. Nowadays, sexting, hook-up sites and virtual reality pornography have become increasingly commonplace in America. One can only imagine what future generations will face.



about their impure thoughts and cry out to the Lord for freedom, but most of the time they feel helpless to win this battle.

Adding to their sense of hopelessness are the authors and teachers who offer little more than faddish gimmicks like bouncing the eyes or snapping a rubber band on one's wrist when a pretty girl comes into view. More innovative teachers think that deeper freedom comes only as a man learns to forgive himself. Many Christian leaders have long since acquiesced to the notion that masturbation is a battle that cannot be won; therefore, God must not be too concerned about it.

It is clear where our culture is headed, but what's happening to the American Church? In 2014, the Barna Group conducted a pornography survey that found that 79% of 18-30 year-old Christian men view porn monthly<sup>15</sup> and 37% of Christian men view porn several times a week.<sup>16</sup>

What exactly does the Lord expect from believers in such an environment? Does He “wink” at men's struggles with lust and masturbation? Surely He understands how difficult it is for guys today!

And yet, in spite of the sexual onslaught in which we live, believers cannot escape the clear-cut words of Scripture. Peter wrote, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:14-16)

True believers—even those who struggle—know deep within them that the Bible is unequivocal about God's commandments. Its precepts remain immutable throughout all the fluctuating changes of morality that come and go through successive generations. Believers are expected to bow before such commands—no matter what the surrounding culture may espouse.

## Hope in the Midst of Overwhelming Temptation

To some, the idea of living a holy life in such an unholy environment can seem like a cruel joke. Such words as Peter wrote long ago seem out of place in today's world. I want to briefly respond to this brand of cynicism.

First, the Bible would not demand holiness if it were unattainable. The Holy Spirit is called "the Helper" because He is there to empower the believer in his pursuit of godliness. Unbroken and un-surrendered churchgoers do not understand what it is like to be carried by God's grace through the storms of temptation. Therefore, they are quick to write off His commandments as impossible to obey.

Second, it should come as no surprise that there are teachers who are quick to cave in to cultural pressures. Throughout Church history, false teachers have been the bane of God's people; their common denominator being teachings that appeal to one's flesh. No wonder Jesus thundered, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way." (Luke 6:26) The maxims espoused by those who minimize God's expectation for holy living should be considered dangerous twisting of Scripture.

Lastly, I want to testify that during more than 30 years of ministry I have personally witnessed countless numbers of men find real freedom from terrible addictions to sexual sin. Willie was set free from a 15-year addiction to pornography. Bill found victory over his exhibitionism at the Cross. Sam overcame homosexuality and went on to live a normal, Christian life.

Can a Christian man really maintain a pure thought life in the midst of a perverse generation? Absolutely! Can those who have become entangled in the web of online pornography really get the victory over it? Without question! Can a guy who regularly worships *at the altar of sexual idolatry* really break free from it? Yes! The life of victory is available for *any* child of

God who truly desires it.

This book possesses the spiritual keys and practical answers you need to maintain a pure heart before God. These solutions are not only biblically based but proven by years of experience.

## CHAPTER 3

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### THE SPIRAL OF DEGRADATION

If you are giving over to lust, fantasies, masturbation or pornography, you are on dangerous ground. The old adage is painfully true: Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay and cost you more than you can ever pay. Sexual sin in particular can be very intoxicating. The wise man understood its power to seduce and ensnare when he asked, “Can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?” (Proverbs 6:28)

All sin is extremely deceptive. It allows the person to feel as though he is in control, but this is merely an illusion. In reality, sin slowly and subtly, but surely, begins to master the person’s heart. The more it is indulged, the more its perspectives shroud the person’s thinking. It inflames and intensifies buried passions. It lures and tantalizes. Before the person realizes what has transpired, he is already sliding down a very slippery slope.

That slide is described in terrible detail in the first chapter of Romans. Nowhere else in Scripture is the vileness of sin more vividly contrasted with the glory of God. What a tragedy it is when someone comes to know God and yet remains in sexual sin. Some grow up in the church, but start dabbling in sin because they do not want to truly surrender to the Lord.

Before long, they are falling headlong into the great abyss of perversion. Others have been in bondage to sexual sin for years before coming to the Lord. The tantalizing call comes forth and the person is quickly pursuing the sin again. Often they will go even deeper into sin than before their conversion.

Something happens spiritually to the person who turns away from the light. Peter said, “For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘a dog returns to its own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.’” (2 Peter 2:20-22) Whether the person grew up in the church and became involved in sin or came to the Lord but returned to his old habits, the pattern of sin presented in Romans 1:21-32 still occurs. There are seven steps downward into sexual bondage. Let us take a look.

### Number One: Failure to Reverence and Give Gratitude to God

*“Even though they knew God,  
they did not honor Him as God or give thanks.”*

Losing a reverential, worshipful spirit is the first step down into the spiral of degradation. Most people fall in love with Jesus when they first become Christians. Jesus becomes their “first love.” Should the new believer retain that intimacy with the Lord, a fruitful lifetime can be expected. However, Romans 1:21 describes a person who has begun to turn away from the Lord in his heart. He may still continue to go through the outward motions of a believer, but something within him is drying up.

He is losing his sense of adoration for the God who has saved him. This waning of his first love is enough to allow an altar of sexual idolatry to be erected in his heart, and once established, he can easily turn from worshiping God to worshiping the perversion of sexual lust.

Another aspect is the old prideful nature which begins to re-emerge. Perhaps he had at one time been broken and repentant over his sin, but once he learns a few spiritual truths, he begins to exaggerate his level of spirituality. Before he realizes what is happening, he begins losing the awe (and the fear that accompanies it) he once had of God, and starts to develop a terrible pattern of *self-glory*. The honor and reverence that is due to God, and God alone, is soon lost as self becomes huge in his heart. Man's love for self replaces love for God. Belief in self supplants belief in God. Self-glory substitutes the glory that belongs to the Lord. Thus, the wandering away from God begins.

As pride begins to re-emerge, an attitude of ungratefulness rises along with it. Paul is specifically targeting the spirit these people were in toward God. Ingratitude is what infuriated the Lord with the Israelites as He led them toward the Promised Land. They were dissatisfied with what God had given them. They "murmured" against the Lord. Even after He had miraculously delivered them out of the hands of their cruel oppressors, they still had the audacity to complain. Their lack of thankfulness almost brought God to the point of annihilating the Israelites.

It is this attitude which sneaks in very subtly once a person takes his eyes off of God. If God's wonderful presence alone does not capture their devotion, how will they ever be satisfied with anything else? Such a sense of dissatisfaction leads people to seek other ways of satisfying perceived needs. It is a dangerous spirit to be in, for if God's wonderful provisions are not enough to hold a person's attention, what will it take?

## Number Two: The Darkening Heart

*“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.”*

The inevitable growing sense of inner emptiness unfortunately often leads a man to return to old, broken cisterns for satisfaction. Sexual fantasy begins to fill his mind. Before long he is indulging in masturbation. The law of diminishing returns begins to come into play. That spiritual maxim is based on the fact that sin does not satisfy. He can easily find himself plunging from one depth of darkness to the next until he is eventually saturated in despicable behavior. Sin is tightening its grip.

First, the sinner increasingly desires more of one specific activity. It may be fornication, adultery, masturbation, and so on. As the initial sex act begins to lose its thrill, the addict will attempt to maintain the high level of excitement he is accustomed to achieving by increasing the frequency of his behavior. Each time he goes back for more, the clutches of sin are strengthened. The more he does it, the more he wants it.

Eventually, however, repetition will not be enough to maintain his interest. He will begin to crave something darker, more degrading, more forbidden, and more evil. He becomes driven to recapture the exuberance he once felt in the beginning of his sin. Undaunted by any fear of consequences, his only aim is pleasure.

Whereas he was once gratified—even exhilarated—limiting himself to viewing pornography, he now begins to hook up with actual people. Perhaps he may have even cringed at the thought of homosexuality, but he now finds himself attracted to it. The thought of his wife sleeping with another man repulsed him at one time, now he finds himself fantasizing about it. As the person crosses the barrier of fantasy and enters into actual

behavior he discovers that he views things differently. He will eventually begin to have thoughts that are directly opposed to what he knows to be right. For instance, he might actually start thinking that most women really do want immoral sex but are just inhibited by the constraints of society. Once a person reaches this point, his life quickly begins to be governed almost exclusively by his sin. He no longer can be counted on to make sound decisions and his life is likely to quickly unravel. Sinful pleasure now dominates his mind. Consequently, he is getting paid within his soul the penalty he so richly deserves.

Many who pursue a course of sin convince themselves that they can simply repent and return to God afterwards. While it is true that genuine repentance does bring instantaneous forgiveness, also true is the fact that every sin committed bears a price. One of the great consequences of backsliding is that the further you move away from the Lord, the more difficult will be the return.

For instance, my wife once counseled a woman who was about 75 pounds overweight. Kathy helped her to develop a reasonable diet and an exercise regimen. Had she stuck to this plan, she would have gradually slimmed down, and in the process, become healthier and more energetic. Instead, she grew weary of the restraints and threw herself back into her gluttony. The last time my wife saw her she had gained an additional hundred pounds. The point is that it is much easier to lose 75 pounds than it is to lose 175 pounds. Although it isn't as visible, the same fact holds true for those who give over to sexual sin. It is much easier to overcome a two-year masturbation habit than one that has been going on for five years.

Every time a man looks at pornography or gives over to some other form of sexual sin, his mind becomes more polluted, his heart more blackened and his perspectives more distorted. Sin corrupts the soul and its vile touch doesn't simply disappear when a person stops the behavior. Every act of sin takes a person



further away from God and leaves a stain upon the heart.

### Number Three: The Suppression of Truth

*“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”*

Paul says that these people “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (Romans 1:18) Literally, he means to hold the truth down, or hold it in check. The picture here is that God is trying desperately to break through the darkness of their thinking with the light of Jesus. However, something rises up inside the person which causes him to turn away from the truth. The Holy Spirit keeps introducing convicting thoughts into the man’s mind, but he turns a deaf ear to them. He does not want to hear the voice of the Lord because he knows it would mean giving up what he wants. It is just what Jesus said, “Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:19-20)

Not only is truth ignored, but deception now enters the scene. The following statements are typical of what the deceived person tells himself in order to justify his sin or to keep from coming to grips with it.

*“I’m walking with God. I just have this one little problem.”* This is the mentality of someone who wishes to minimize the evil of his sin so that he may hold onto it. Consider the monstrous evil of pornography, for example. Even the person who has gone no further than occasionally viewing pornography and masturbating, is still giving up his mind and heart to wickedness. No one who is looking at pornography is walking with God! The man may occasionally have experiences with the Lord, but as we shall see later in this book, he certainly is not walking with Him. He is simply flattering his own ego and deceiving himself.

*"I'm going through a difficult period of my life right now. I'll come out of it."* This is someone who is simply waiting to repent, imagining that he can shut his sin down whenever he wishes. Perhaps he does not realize that sexual sin is a beast that grows in direct proportion to how much it is fed. The more the man gives over to sin, the more it demands. With good reason Paul exclaimed, "...now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" (2 Corinthians 6:2) The longer a person puts off repentance, the less likely it will ever happen.

*"I've tried to quit. I've tried to follow the steps this book outlines. Nothing changes. I'm just as addicted as I have ever been."* Many men who have vacillated between their love for God and their love of sin have sincerely believed that they have done everything they could to find freedom, but it just did not work. But those who are honest with themselves realize they have only made half-hearted attempts at changing. They might try to convince themselves that they really tried but the truth is that they did not.

#### Number Four: Given Over to the Lusts of the Heart

*"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity."*

Those who have experienced the unquenchable flames of burning lust can understand why the fathers of the early church regarded the worst aspect of hell to be that a person is left to his own lusts with no possibility of satisfying them. To a small degree, this can be seen by holding a piece of meat just out of reach of a dog. His eyes concentrate only on the object in view. His mouth begins to salivate and his heartbeat increases. The sight and smell of the meat leads him into almost a trance-like state as he fixes his gaze upon it. This is a representation of the addict as he contemplates his routine. Solomon describes the hypnotic spell of sexual temptation: "With her many

persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him. Suddenly he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it will cost him his life.” (Proverbs 7:21-23)

The man driven by lust loses all sense of reality. He completely forgets the costs involved with sin and will often find himself doing things in this altered state of mind that he would never otherwise consider.

For instance, he might perform degrading acts that would repulse or frighten him in a time of “sanity.” I have had men confess to me things they have done that actually left them nauseous afterwards. Some explained how their normal standards and morals flew right out the window as they entered that trance of lust. Men with a deep fear of arrest might solicit prostitutes while being driven by lust, while others expose themselves to women after their lust has been excited. Yet others will molest their own children while in this state of mind. The list goes on.

Lust and fantasy are both related to desire, which is the longing after something which appeals to a person. It is an expression of one’s will—the part of one’s inner self which dictates one’s own inclinations in life. Desire is one of the drives that God instilled in human beings to help them to function in life. People’s wants or desires are as diverse as the number of human beings on the planet. An individual’s temperament, background, and environment all contribute to what he may pursue in life. Included in this list are the natural appetites of the human body, which can become warped and/or get out of control, as in the case of sexual addicts. Appetites become corrupted by sin. Adam Clarke wrote:

If voluntary and deliberate looks and desires make adulterers and adulteresses, how many persons are

there whose whole life is one continued crime! whose eyes being full of adultery, they cannot cease from sin. (2 Peter 2:14) Many would abhor to commit one external act before the eyes of men, in a temple of stone; and yet they are not afraid to commit a multitude of such acts in the temple of their hearts, and in the sight of God!<sup>2</sup>

Paul called them “lusts of the flesh,” (Galatians 5:16) highlighting the fact that the lust comes from within. I once spoke at a series of men’s meetings in the Boston area on the subject of overcoming the power of lust. After one particular meeting, a curious, yet sincere young man came up to me with a look of bewilderment on his face. “Now, help me to understand this, Brother Gallagher,” he said. “How is it that we get rid of the spirit of lust?” I knew right where he was headed. He, like many others, had been taught that lust came from demons which plague the believer. Although demons do play a role in the bondage of habitual sexual sin, this young man’s fundamental understanding was wrong. I asked him to open the Bible in his hand to James 1:14 and to read it to me. He read, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”

“Whose lust is it that he is enticed by?” I queried. As I asked the question, a look of utter amazement came across his face.

“It’s my own lust, isn’t it?” he asked in response to this new revelation.

I said to him, “Listen, the devil can dangle a carrot in front of your face, but there is something inside you that actually wants that carrot. You aren’t lustful because some demon comes on you. You are lustful because you have within you a desire for what isn’t right.” As we discovered in the last chapter, ‘For out of the heart come evil thoughts...’ (Matthew 15:19) The devil can appeal to that lust, but he did

not *create* it. It's already in us.

### Number Five: Given Over

*"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions."*

One of the terrifying realities about this being, Jehovah, that we serve, is that He will give people what they have shown they desire. This can be seen over and over again in Scripture. Consider the time the Hebrews were wandering in the wilderness. God was trying to reveal His marvelous ways to them, but instead they repeatedly demanded to have the carnal lifestyle of Egypt. They did not want to be delivered from the darkness of Egypt; they just wanted to be freed from physical slavery. When they left the land of the Nile, they quickly forgot the horrors of slavery and focused their memories on the scanty benefits they had occasionally enjoyed. They longed for the "flesh pots" of Egypt. "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat. For we were well-off in Egypt...Why did we ever leave Egypt?" (Numbers 11:18, 20)

After having endured this attitude for so long, God finally became angry and said, "You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the LORD..." (Numbers 11:19-20) They were given exactly what they wanted. God is extremely long-suffering with His people, but a time will come, if they continue to resist His promptings and insist on sinning, that He will give them over to what they desire. Three times in this chapter in Romans we find the words, "God gave them over..."

This phrase is a translation of the Greek word *paradidomai*, which literally means to betray or give someone up. We find it used in the words Judas spoke to the high priest when he

said, “What are you willing to give me to *deliver Him up to you?*” (Matthew 26:15) Jesus used the same word when describing the persecution of the last days, “Then they will *deliver you* to tribulation...” (Matthew 24:9) The exact meaning of this word, as used in the context of Romans chapter one, is this: If you insist on having your sin, the time will come when God will surrender you up to the power of the enemy.

The picture being painted here is of a traitor being left to the enemy to fend for himself. The person, having deserted the Lord, actually finds *himself* to be the deserted one. What the apostle is illustrating is not so much the action of one handing another over, but rather the withdrawing of one’s protection over another. In the case of the believer, God withdraws the grace to keep him from sin. More than most realize, the Lord keeps people restrained from plunging themselves into unfathomable evil by His grace. Rejected once too often, that protective grace is eventually withdrawn and the person is allowed to have what he has shown he truly wants. This does not mean that God has totally given up on him, but that the Holy Spirit’s conviction no longer affects him. His mind no longer thinks sanely; his thinking has become twisted. He finds himself doing things that are literally insane because his mind has become depraved.

### Number Six: The Reprobate Mind

*“God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” (KJV)*

There is a wonderful word in the New Testament that I would like to take a moment to mention here. The word is *dokimazo*. It comes from another Greek word which means “to be tested.” In his first letter to Timothy, Paul uses this term to describe the kind of character a deacon should possess.

In Romans chapter one, he uses the term *adokimos*. The “a” in

front of the word corresponds to the English “un-”: (e.g., *unholy*, *unloving*, *ungodly*, etc.). Thus, in this sense, it means that God has thrown up His hands, so to speak, and given them over to be men *without character* who are likely to say, do, act, and pursue anything or anyone under the sun in their burning lust.

Becoming reprobate means the person’s conscience has become hardened. Although he is likely to still have some comprehension for doctrinal truth, *the* Truth has been effectively shut out of his heart. Elsewhere Paul spoke of those who were “seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:2), and those who “because of the hardness of their heart (have) become callous.” (Ephesians 4:18-19) Both metaphors—the seared conscience and the hardened, calloused heart—describe the same condition.

A good way to illustrate the conscience is to compare it to the human nervous system. When a person is wounded, he *feels* pain—the body’s inherent means of alerting him that something is wrong. Likewise, when a person sins, the human soul has a warning system that sounds an alarm because the person’s actions have *wounded him spiritually*. This soul-alarm trumpets, “Mayday! Mayday! Something is wrong!” He senses that his actions are not only wrong but will also result in destructive consequences.

The person who habitually gives himself over to sin loses the ability to feel the spiritual “pain” of sin. What happens to people who lose this sense? Consider lepers who experience a similar thing physically. Having lost sensation in their extremities, they are often terribly hurt and can even die because they are unaware of a bodily injury. In the spiritual realm, this is a picture of the hardening that takes place inside a person who remains in unrepentant sin. As his heart becomes increasingly calloused, the spiritual system God constructed within him slowly loses its ability to detect the damage being done to it. It’s little wonder that Christian men in habitual sexual sin can sit in church week after week, singing songs of worship to a God they continually

defy. “Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13), their entire beings are riddled with a leprosy of evil which they can no longer even detect!

In such cases, as their conscience undergoes a constant searing, these men are gradually desensitized to the guilt of sin. If left unabated, this process will eventually lead to the death of conscience. As one writer stated it, “Such men must have won that most disastrous of victories — the victory over conscience.”<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to have one’s conscience seared? To answer that question, I consulted the godly writers of yesteryear. Adam Clarke described it thus: “One cauterized by repeated applications of sin, and resistings of the Holy Ghost...”<sup>2</sup> The Fausett Bible Dictionary explained it as, “...a hardened determination to resist every spiritual impression...”<sup>3</sup> The Pulpit Commentary said it is “the gradual deterioration of sensibility produced by (habitual sin).”<sup>4</sup> John Wesley likened it to “drunkenness of soul, a fatal numbness of spirit...”<sup>5</sup>

If a person remains in sin long enough, he can reach a point where he is no longer influenced by the Holy Spirit. He has become so hardened that he will not listen—does not want to hear. I believe this phenomenon is that which the Bible terms apostasy.

### Number Seven: Filled with All Unrighteousness

*“Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil...  
and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice  
such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also  
give hearty approval to those who practice them.”*

Left to himself, the sinner hurls himself into darkness. Burning with an intense flame of lust, he finds himself no longer able to restrain himself. Deeper and deeper he sinks into the foul cesspool of depravity. Nothing is too gross, shameful, or forbidden. The cup of iniquity is now full. Sin has been given



complete reign over the man's mind. The only thing that keeps him in check is whatever fear he might still retain for God, the law, his personal safety or the possible loss of loved ones.

Having reached this place, he finds himself enjoying the company of others who live in the same degradation. They have their filthy desires in common. They not only enjoy each other's company, but give hearty approval to the degrading acts of others. They all have found a way to rationalize their lifestyles. Swingers talk about how they have the courage to step out and have some fun, while the rest of society is too inhibited. Homosexuals convince each other that they were "born that way." Pedophiles claim that children have minds of their own and have the right to decide whether or not they want to have sex. They surround themselves with others who will help them escape responsibility for their sin and support their ways of thinking. They have all gone over the edge. Their minds have become depraved and their consciences seared. They have allowed darkness to rule their lives; thus they are filled with all unrighteousness.

This entire section of Scripture is a giant arrow pointed downward. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." (John 8:34) Paul said, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" (Romans 6:16) Solomon said, "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin." (Proverbs 5:22) And the Psalmist said, "There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High." (Psalm 107:10-11)

Could there be a more terrible picture of slavery than that of the believer who worships the idol of sensuality inwardly and serves its lusts outwardly? There is no slavery worse than that of lust. It is impossible to satisfy its demands. Sin is never satisfied.