

FOREWORD BY
HEATH B. LAMBERT

BIBLICAL COUNSEL FOR
STUBBORN SEXUAL SINS

PASSIONS
OF THE
HEART

JOHN D. STREET

“Don’t trust your heart; trust the truth of the Maker of your heart.’ John Street capably demonstrates that he has been diligently studying the truth of the Maker of our hearts for decades. So as he leads us through the *Passions of the Heart*, we can have confidence that what we read will lead us to lasting hope and joy. John speaks with great wisdom and unpacks Scripture in a beautifully relevant way. I commend this excellent book to all those who struggle with stubborn sexual sins.”

—**Amy Baker**, Author; ACBC certified counselor; instructor and counselor, Faith Biblical Counseling Ministry; council member, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“It is always a pleasure to read the work of a soul doctor who knows the ailment he is treating. As a precise surgeon of both Scripture and the soul, John uses biblical truth to cut deep, revealing the true nature of sexual sin. I finished the book praising God that a powerful Savior can liberate his people from sexual enslavement. May the Lord use this volume widely to help those in bondage by the power of the truths of Scripture.”

—**Ernie Baker**, Pastor of Counseling, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida; ACBC Fellow; Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Master’s University

“*Passions of the Heart* is the result of extensive and careful research done by Dr. John Street in the pages of the Holy Scriptures concerning the nature, expressions, reach, and consequences of sexual sin and all its enslaving desires. In its faithful approach, the work not only exposes the problem, but also offers hope and a way to restoration for all who struggle in this area. In days of such moral permissiveness, this book is a well-timed relief for all who long to live according to the sufficient provision of God through his Word. It is a must for those involved in biblical counseling.”

—**Jayro M. Cáceres**, Senior Pastor, Igreja Batista Pedras Vivas, São Paulo, Brazil; Director, NUTRA Biblical Counseling and Training Center; Director, NUTRA Publishing, a ministry outreach of Igreja Batista Pedras Vivas, São Paulo, Brazil

“Dr. John Street is a masterly exegete of both Scripture and the human heart. In *Passions of the Heart*, he skillfully and succinctly shows how the Word of

God is sufficiently helpful to those enslaved to sexual sin. While it speaks directly to the enslaved, it is also an encompassing guide for the counselor walking beside them. I will definitely be using this invaluable and practical resource in biblical counseling.”

—**Jenn Chen**, Adjunct Professor for Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling, The Master’s University; former Clinical Instructor, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA; ACBC certified biblical counselor

“In a society that is practically enslaved to sexual expression, *Passions of the Heart* is vital work for the student, the counselor, or any other reader seeking biblical means to help those trapped in sexual sin. It has theological depth, exegetical insight, practical applications, effective illustrations, and wise counsel that will benefit its readers and those who apply its principles. John Street’s extensive counseling and pastoral experience are evident throughout and complemented by a foundational desire to help people change for their own benefit and God’s glory.”

—**Carl A. Hargrove**, Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministries, The Master’s Seminary; Associate Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California

“In my many years of counseling, I have noted that sexual sins are the most difficult to overcome. I am thankful for this work, *Passions of the Heart*, written by John Street. The book is not necessarily a ‘how to,’ even though there are many biblical helps, but it is a ‘how come?’ Dr. Street gets to the real issue of why people are enslaved to sexual sin: the heart. He has given us an outstanding work on the depravity of man’s heart, which produces anger, self-pity, discontent, and fear—often leading to sexual (and other) sin. I was moved to think about my own heart and the need to make sure that I have rooted out all idolatry. I pray that this work aids many counselors in helping those enslaved to sexual passions, and I pray that it helps many men and women to overcome sexual sin.”

—**Susan Heck**, ACBC certified counselor; author and speaker

“We’ve come to trust the biblically wise advice from Dr. Street, and in this volume he applies his confidence in the Scriptures from years of experience

counseling those entangled in sexual sin. There is hope, and Street makes clear and practical the path to biblical freedom from the haunting and stern grip of sexual sin.”

—**Dale Johnson**, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Executive Director,
ACBC

“Blending together his decades of comprehensive Bible knowledge and seasoned counseling wisdom, John Street lifts the hood of our hearts to show us in thorough ways how our desires—even those that are initially legitimate or nonsexual—can subtly, progressively, and devastatingly lead to innumerable forms of sexual sin.”

—**Robert D. Jones**, Biblical Counseling Professor, Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary; ACBC Fellow and certified biblical
counselor; author, *Pursuing Peace and Uprooting Anger*

“Dr. John Street has done a marvelous job in writing a book that will assist pastors and others who counsel people struggling with various forms of sexual temptation. It will also provide good homework assignments for people who are being overcome by those same forms of sexual temptation and want to find deliverance. In this volume, John walks us through a thoroughly biblical and practical description of the nature and causes of what many in our world call ‘sexual addictions.’ In addition, he provides an explanation of the way of deliverance from these destructive practices. I thank God for this book and will certainly use it in my counseling practice. And I will heartily recommend it to my students and others who are either counselors or counselees or who just desire a solid biblical understanding of this increasingly common problem.”

—**Wayne Mack**, Founder and Professor of Biblical Counseling, SMTI;
Director, ACBC Africa; Member, ACBC Academy; author of
numerous books on Christian living and biblical counseling; Pastor of
Biblical Counseling, Lynnwood Baptist Church, Pretoria, South Africa

“Dealing with desires is a difficult challenge because they seem to come from nowhere and feel stronger than anything else. Sexual desires are no exception. People suffer from disoriented sexual desires and fall into a pattern of sexual

sin. Habitual patterns lead to sexual enslavement, bringing devastating consequences. If you are struggling with sexual issues or if you help people who struggle in the sexual arena, *Passions of the Heart* will help you. Dr. Street presents a biblical perspective of desires applied to sexuality. God's Word is light, and *Passions of the Heart* can help you understand how the Scriptures shed light into the darkness of sexual sin. This book will also help you understand what the Scriptures teach about the origin of sexual struggles, what has gone wrong with our sexuality, and the hope that we have in the Redeemer of our desires. There is hope; we can be sexually pure!"

—**Alexandre “Sacha” Mendes**, Pastor, Director for Vision and Expansion, Brazilian Association of Biblical Counselors (ACBC); ACBC certified counselor; member, Board of Directors, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“John Street has written a carefully researched and helpful book for both men and women who struggle with sexual sin. *Passions of the Heart* will be a helpful tool for biblical counselors dedicated to helping counselees recognize their heart motivations. Diagrams drive the truth home.”

—**Caroline Newheiser**, Assistant Coordinator of Women's Counseling at RTS, Charlotte; ACBC certified counselor; conference speaker

“When addressing sexual sin, John Street goes beyond ‘stop it’ to address the sometimes hidden or surprising inward motivations that lead to unrighteous expressions of passion. He combines extensive and careful use of scriptural teaching and examples with a wide range of specific contemporary cases that reflect the experience of a seasoned counselor. He also offers practical wisdom for counselors who are trying to help counselees stuck in slavery to sexual sin. This will become an important resource that will help many to be set free to honor Christ with their sexuality.”

—**Jim Newheiser**, Director of the Christian Counseling Program and Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte; ACBC Board Member and Fellow

“Dr. John Street is an experienced biblical counselor and a leader in the biblical counseling movement. As such, he believes that the Bible is sufficient in

addressing every counseling issue and superior to every other system in diagnosing problems, understanding people, and providing clear, life-transforming answers. In this book, Dr. Street takes the Scripture and does that very thing, tackling the nearly impossible problem of bondage to sexual sin. But he rightly understands that the problem is the heart, not merely the Internet and a culture steeped in sensuality. In *Passions of the Heart*, you will find the Bible's superior analysis of how lust works in the inner man to produce sexual bondage and the Savior's liberating answers that must be found there. Read and profit from this book, and learn the workings of your own heart."

—**Tim Pasma**, ACBC Board Member and Fellow; Pastor, LaRue Baptist Church, LaRue, Ohio

"‘Why do I do what I do, and how can I stop it?’ is a common question when it comes to sexual sin. The answer eludes us, and as a result we may be angry, confused, or hopeless. With solid exposition and practical applications, John Street provides a clear biblical answer, eliminating the confusion and giving us hope. If you want to conquer sexual sin and help others conquer it, then this book is for you."

—**Andrew Rogers**, Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator for Biblical Counseling, Boyce College; ACBC Board Member and Fellow

"Dr. Street has written a solid, pastoral, helpful word. He is clear, Christ-centered, and completely biblical. You will be helped by reading and working through this volume. While Street centers on sexual issues, the truths expounded, explained, and applied can help anyone with any enslavement to any sin. Get the book; wrestle through it; give it away! May the King use it to make Jesus Christ the passion of our hearts."

—**George C. Scipione**, Adjunct Professor, The Biblical Counseling Institute, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary; ACBC Board Member and Fellow

"There is nothing elementary about this book. My colleague and friend has, in heart-surgery fashion, unpacked well the many fleshly lusts and motivations behind sexual sin. The survey of diagnostic questions is itself worth the price of the book. Perhaps most distinguishing about the book are the

real-life stories woven among a study that clearly rests on the Word of God as its authority.”

—**Stuart Scott**, Author; Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Master’s University; ACBC Board Member and Fellow

“This is an incredibly important book for biblical counseling. The mantra of biblical counseling is to watch after one’s heart, and Dr. John Street has done a wonderful job in exploring the theology of the heart. This book reminded me of David’s prayer in Psalm 139:23–24: ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!’ David wanted an X-ray done on his heart so that he would be a genuine man of God. This book is a fantastic tool to make that happen.

“As I was reading the book, I had to remind myself that John was speaking to the issue of sexual sin. Yet the unfolding of the truth about the heart is for any malady of the soul. This book can instruct the reader to develop good devotional and Bible-reading habits to overcome the temptations of sin in all areas of life. This book contains so many jewels for understanding the heart that reading it will be like searching for gold. The search will surely render the reader richer. This volume is for singles and married people struggling with lust. It is for parents desiring to communicate biblically about sex to their children. And it is for counselors wishing to be biblical in their approach to sinners’ hearts.”

—**Bill Shannon**, Pastor of Discipleship Counseling, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California; ACBC Fellow

“*Passions of the Heart* by Dr. John Street is a masterpiece! I am not aware of a more thorough treatment of the Bible’s teaching about the heart, the well-spring of life. This examination of the heart is accompanied by an insightful description of the way that sexual sin and temptation work. Street masterfully draws out the connections between the passions of the heart and all manner of struggles with sexuality. This book is an invaluable resource both for people who are carried away by sexual passions and for the counselors who endeavor to help them.”

—**Tedd Tripp**, Author; counselor; conference speaker

“Any experienced biblical counselor knows that the only way to bring about lasting change is to successfully get the counselee to clearly understand and see his own heart motivations, and then in a practical and biblical manner help him use the Scriptures to bring about lasting change. If we cannot connect the counselee with the reality of his own heart and then with God’s solutions, there is little hope. In *Passions of the Heart*, Dr. John Street uses his superior Greek and Hebrew ability and his practical understanding of ‘the mechanics of the heart’ to tackle (in a simple and clear way) one of the most needy areas in biblical counseling today: that of purifying the heart in an immoral world system with the myriad of temptations that are defeating so many. He demonstrates how lust is fed, how heart idolatry is the real problem, and how the purification process happens. This material not only is comprehensive and biblical, but provides useful diagrams to help the reader picture the truth and practical solutions. Highly recommended for anyone desiring to help counselees with this present and weighty challenge.”

—**Allen Yoder**, Head, Master’s of Biblical Counseling Department,
SIBIMA Seminary, Fortaleza, Brazil

“When does a thought become sinful? Dr. John Street walks the reader through the deceitful steps along the slippery slope of enslaving sexual desires and sexual idolatry of the heart. Born out of years of the author’s pastoral counseling experience built on the solid theological footings of Scripture, this work masterfully addresses the issues pertinent to men and women caught up in the sexual revolution and the resulting gender confusion. Dr. Street not only addresses the issues, but also lays out helpful steps for the counselee and the biblical counselor in purifying the heart of sexual idolatry.”

—**David H. Zemmer**, Former missionary to Brazil, 30 years; current pastor, Riley Bible Church, Terre Haute, Indiana

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This book is dedicated to Christians struggling in the battle for purity, in the hope that they will find lasting change toward Christlikeness. It is also dedicated to biblical counselors who desire to use the Scriptures to help those suffering with enslavement to sensual sins.

Solus Christus

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FOREWORD

Several years ago on a trip to Montana, my youngest son and I decided to challenge ourselves by hiking to the top of a ten-thousand-foot mountain. We started with our group at the base of the mountain and noticed the flowing grass, gorgeous flowers, and flourishing trees growing everywhere. The longer we hiked up the mountain the more we noticed that the vegetation was becoming increasingly sparse. After hours of hiking we passed the tree line, where nothing else grew, and all we could see were the brown and gray of the mountain and the blue of the sky.

As we continued our trek to the top, we came around a corner and saw the strangest thing. Amid the gray expanse of rock, a small yellow flower stabbed through a crack in the mountain. Right where it was not supposed to be, a flower was growing. Exactly where you would expect to find nothing, there was life.

I think about that flower when I think of 2 Peter 1. The first chapter of Peter's second book is about being fruitful. The apostle had studied his Old Testament and knew that fruitfulness was the indicator of a man who was walking with God (Ps. 1:3). He was acquainted with the great prophet John the Baptist, who commanded his hearers to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8). With all his heart, Peter did not want the lives of Christian people to be characterized by the bitter curse of a failure to bear fruit in their lives before God. In 2 Peter 1:8 he talks about being "unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As Peter instructs his readers in the grace of fruit-bearing, he raises one of the most significant tensions in all of Scripture. In 2 Peter 1:4 he says of Christians that we have “escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire [lust].” Follow along with me as I make three observations about this all-important verse.

First, Peter admits that corruption exists. When he talks about corruption, he is talking about death. Death and corruption came into the world through the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:17). Now, because of that sin, all people are born dead in trespasses and enslaved to sin (Eph. 2:1). This death is cosmic—that is to say, it affects every person (Rom. 3:23) and every thing (Rom. 8:20–21). Every human being, including every Christian, lives in a fallen world that is defined by corruption and death.

A second observation about 2 Peter 1:4 has to do with the origin of this corruption. Peter says that the corruption present in the world is here because of lust. We often think of the word *lust* as having to do exclusively with sexual sin. But in Greek it is a neutral word that refers to any desire a human being could have. When Peter says that the corruption that is in the world is present because of desire, he is talking about a crucial function of the human heart. The heart wants, it longs, it desires, it lusts.

Nothing is wrong with desire itself, but as sinful human beings our desires can be distorted in *direction* (when we want things we should never want) or in *degree* (when we want good things more than we should want them). The point Peter is making is that the sin and death of the world in which we live is present because of distorted desires. We do not want the things God wants, and it kills us.

This reality is as old as sin itself. In Genesis 3, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin by using their desires against them. He appealed to a desire for greatness. He encouraged them to long to be like God in knowing what he knows. Of course, this was not God’s design. He wanted them to trust him, but in their greedy desire for more they reached for the fruit, ate of it, and began the process of corruption that we all experience and that Peter addresses in his letter.

That brings us to a third observation about 2 Peter 1:4. Peter says

that believers have escaped this desire-induced death. Christians are no longer imprisoned by the corruption that characterizes this fallen world. They have received faith to believe in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the great God and Savior of humanity (2 Peter 1:4). Jesus Christ has been good on behalf of those who failed to be good in themselves. He has obeyed the law for those who were imprisoned by their disobedience to the law.

As Christians believe in the righteousness of Christ, rich blessings are extended to them. They receive grace and peace in the knowledge of God and his Christ (2 Peter 1:2), they are empowered to live lives that are pleasing to God (2 Peter 1:3), and they are granted promises to share God's own holy nature and so escape the consequences of sin and death (2 Peter 1:4). The point is that Jesus Christ changes the hearts of Christians so that, through his work, they escape the corruption caused by their lustful desires.

I said earlier that Peter raises one of the most significant tensions in all of Scripture, and it is at this point that we really begin to feel the friction. Peter makes it clear that, through Christ, Christians have escaped the death of our sinful desires. We are new. We are different. We are saved. Yet in the very next breath he says, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue" (2 Peter 1:5). Immediately after declaring that Christians have escaped the corruption in the world by the righteous work of Christ, he tells us to be diligent to work. Specifically, this diligent work requires that we add to our faith in Christ a list of virtues including moral excellence, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Peter 1:5–7).

Do you see the tension? Why, if Christ's righteousness has allowed us to escape the corruption of the world induced by lust, do we now need to work to add virtue to our faith? If we have escaped the corruption of the world, why do we now still have work to do? Why can't we just take it easy and enjoy the escape from corruption that Christ has secured? In other words, why is there an ongoing struggle to be diligent?

The answer to those questions is found in the reality that God has chosen to delay the final judgment of all mankind to a future date

known to him alone, creating a gap between the inauguration and fulfillment of our salvation (2 Peter 3:3–15). God inaugurates our salvation with a unilateral work of grace in which we are justified—that is, declared to be righteous through the merit of Christ. But after our salvation is inaugurated, God continues our salvation with a bilateral work of grace in which Christians are called to participate with God in sanctification—our growth in holiness—until we are united with Christ.

Understanding the distinction between God’s unilateral work of justification and the bilateral work of sanctification eases the tension in Peter’s statement. God has, by the work of Christ, made a genuine escape for believers who are consigned to death by the lusts of their hearts. Yet, as we await the return of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of our salvation, we are aware that the desires of our hearts are not yet what they ought to be. We have received grace to escape our corruption, yet we must confess with the apostles that we need to grow in grace as it is multiplied to us (2 Peter 1:2).

That is the essence of 2 Peter 1 as well as the book you are holding in your hands. *Passions of the Heart* is about taking what Christ has done in his life, death, and resurrection and applying it diligently to our lives and hearts so that we grow in the grace that Jesus has accomplished. I am excited about this book because it is about the struggle of fighting, by faith, to grow increasingly in the grace purchased for us so that we look more and more like the Christ who died for us.

I am excited for you to read this book not only because of what you will learn but because of who you will learn from. John Street is one of the godliest, wisest, and most faithful men I know. He is a man who has exerted great diligence to supply faith with moral excellence. He is a man who has exerted great diligence in helping others to do the same. He is familiar with the battle, and he knows it is one that cannot be won by mere human effort but must be characterized by radical dependence on the Christ who gives energy and success to every effort we undertake.

As this book points you to the Book and helps you grow in the grace purchased for you by Jesus Christ, remember that flower I saw

Foreword

poking through the mountain in Montana. It was not there because of the mountain, but in spite of it. Against all odds, in a place where it should never be, there was life and growth. The same is true of your heart. The stony face of that mountain has nothing on your hard and sinful heart. You should never think that anything good would ever grow out of it. But, against all odds, in a place where it should never be, life and fruit can grow from your heart. By the grace of God this is exactly what will happen as you learn to grow in grace from this book. Have faith and be encouraged that this is precisely what will happen in your life, and never forget that the fruit of your transformed heart comes from the miraculous work of Christ causing fruit to grow.

Heath B. Lambert

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PREFACE

As I left my office one day, I was surprised to see a young raccoon in a nearby tree facing me at eye level. I had walked out this door a thousand times and had never been confronted with a sight like this before. He was perfectly still, glaring at me, and apparently awaiting my reaction. Somewhat startled, I froze in my tracks, not quite sure what to do. It was an unexpected standoff! Then I noticed his unfortunate predicament: his right hind foot was caught at the ankle at a fork in the tree branches, rendering him unable to escape. My emotions instantly changed from a gripping fear to tender pity. I had heard that some neighborhood raccoons carried rabies, but he looked so helpless. In fact, he looked desperate, afraid, and exhausted. Overwhelmed with sympathetic feelings, I stepped forward to see if I could quickly release his small hind foot from his hopeless situation and help him go about his day. He was *not* fond of my idea! Even in his exhaustion, he reared up with a growling hiss, showing his needle-like white fangs. I jumped back, momentarily thankful that he was incapable of launching an attack on me. At that point I realized this was not a job for me. I needed an expert, an animal control officer, to help my little raccoon friend. Within an hour, Mr. Raccoon was humanely removed from the tree and allowed to safely return to his freedom.

My reckless young raccoon friend reminds me of the many people I have counseled over the years caught in a stubborn sexual sin. They were willing to risk great danger in order to find some sort of sexual

satisfaction, only to get caught in an ever-tightening entanglement. You may know someone who is trapped like this animal, or maybe you are the one so ensnared. Perhaps you have tried everything you know to break the defeating grip it has on you, yet your entire struggle has simply served to tighten its crippling hold. As you read these words you relate to the emotional helplessness of being desperate, afraid, and exhausted. You personally understand the words of Solomon when he explains the experience of a person trapped in sexual enslavement: “The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin” (Prov. 5:22). This bondage is real and deadly.

The desperation of my little friend became acute when I appeared suddenly, unexpectedly exposing his problem. He was startled! Raccoons are mostly nocturnal creatures and love the darkness. The fact that they have a dark mask around their eyes only magnifies their notoriety for stealth and nighttime thievery. Nevertheless, now he was caught in broad daylight and could do nothing about it. There was no denying or hiding his difficulty. In a strikingly similar way, you may have been caught in your sexual sin while you were trying to keep it quiet and under the cover of darkness. You may have tried like Adam and Eve to remain camouflaged, covering yourself figuratively with fig leaves and loincloths when confronted with your sin. But your sin is now exposed for what it is. You are forced to deal with it and determine whether you are going to walk in the light (1 John 1:6–7). You have tried to cover it up and deny it, even to yourself, but now you know you have a serious problem. You need real help!

When I attempted to help that little raccoon, he became fierce and angry. He acted as if he wanted to attack me! I was only attempting to free him from his bondage, but he viewed my approach as a threat. Nothing was further from the truth. I was not intending to harm him in any way. Has someone you know placed this book into your hands as an act of kindness, compassion, and help? If so, what has been your response? Have you reacted to this gesture like Mr. Raccoon, taking a defensive posture and treating their kindness as a threat? In response to their attempt to provide you life-giving, timeless truths and much-needed help to release you from slavery to your sin, you may have

turned away. When you return evil to a person who is only trying to do you good, God has a warning: “If anyone returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house” (Prov. 17:13; cf. 2 Sam. 12:10). Being defensive, easily offended, and protective of your precious sin-child will not change your hazardous circumstances. This fearful attitude and hardness of heart will serve only to move you further away from the real help you need to free you from sin’s grip. You need to pray that our Lord will grace your life with a teachable spirit that is willing to accept sincere and loving biblical help.

Think carefully about the actions of King David after his ruinous sin of sleeping with and impregnating a woman who was not his wife (2 Sam. 11:1–21). He tried to get her faithful husband to come home from the king’s violent war so that Uriah would sleep with his wife and be deceived into believing the child was his. But Uriah, loyal to his king, refused to leave the battle. This was particularly significant because Uriah was a Hittite, not a part of Israel by birth but only a God-fearing Gentile. Yet he dedicated himself to serving the Lord and the king in this way, while David was dedicated to serving himself. What a vivid contrast: a Gentile who served the Lord and a high-ranking Israelite who disobeyed him. After David ordered Uriah killed on the battlefield, he deceitfully took Bathsheba as his wife, clear evidence of his self-love and unfaithfulness to his Lord. David’s sin with Bathsheba was detestable by itself, but his murder of Uriah magnified the hideousness of his sexual sin. Eventually David genuinely repented after being confronted with his sin by Nathan the prophet. Part of his repentance included this prayer to God for a teachable heart:

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Ps. 51:14–17)

David realized that God wants “a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.” Up to this time he was not open to help or advice. He was still trying to cover his sin. You might be like David, still trying to cover your sin, but it is time to repent! In order to do so, you first must have “a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.” Your heart must be teachable.

When I encountered Mr. Raccoon outside my office door, it did not take me long to discover I did not have the equipment I needed to really help him. Although I had good intentions and charitable desires for him, one of us—possibly both—was going to get hurt. I needed to call in someone trained to help his specific problem: in this case, animal control specialists who had all the right equipment and experience dealing with wild animals to handle his predicament in a humane way. The problem you face with sexual sin is going to require much more than good intentions to free you from its bondage. You need to rely on the expertise of God’s infallible and sufficient Word. Its transforming truths will bring you lasting change and restore purity to your life. You must learn to trust it as you have never trusted anything before.

This book is written to be a helpful resource in understanding and applying God’s truth to your stubborn bondage—so you can be freed! It is the culmination of over twenty years of personal study and many hours of counseling. I have divided it into three major sections. The first section is written to help you understand the complexities of your own heart from a biblical perspective. It is critical to gain God’s view of your heart before you move forward in dealing with its desires and the entrapment of lust. The second section identifies eight critical predispositions of the heart that set the stage for sinful sexual indulgence and bondage. A major failure in dealing with sexual sin is ignorance of how heart motivations tend to dominate thinking and behavior. It is too tempting to view the simple deed of sexual sin as the problem. Scripture tells us that the heart’s motivations and weaknesses are much more complex. The third section seeks to show how you can biblically address these motivations that fuel sexual sin. It is about the purity of your heart and shows how the misery of sexual bondage can be

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replaced with the blessedness of purity. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

I must point out that all names used for counselees, both in real cases and in composite case studies, are fictional names. This has been done to protect the privacy of others.

I must also point out that I have chosen to use the male gender when naming counselees. This supplies consistency throughout the book; however, the reader should understand my intent to be inclusive of females as it pertains to sexual problems. Similarly, I use the pronouns *he*, *his*, and so on when writing about counselees, purely for the sake of easier reading. I find it cumbersome to continually read *he/she* or *his/hers*. But this is not to imply that this book is only for males and their difficulties. Again, I expect the reader to apply these truths and principles to males and females since both genders struggle with sexual problems.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to several for their help with this book. I am most grateful to my wife, Janie, who has painstakingly pored over the manuscript, making sure that my grammar and word choice are appropriate for such a sensitive subject. In addition, I am grateful to Amanda Martin, Karen Magnuson, and John J. Hughes of P&R Publishing for their recommendations, assistance, and encouragement as I completed the manuscript. It was in the final stages of writing this book that my mother, Joan, was promoted to Glory. The grace given for extending the deadline for the manuscript was especially appreciated. Thank you, John!

I cannot express enough gratefulness to my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the life-changing grace of the gospel, which is the foundation of every critical transformation toward godliness in this life.

Soli Deo Gloria

John D. Street

PART 1

THE NATURE OF THE HEART AND ITS PASSIONS

PREPARING THE HEART FOR CHANGE

The heart of man—that inner being of the one created in the image of God—is by nature so complex that it has for centuries both amazed and confounded the greatest of philosophers and theologians. Invisible to the physical eye, the heart remains elusive and obscure, requiring much study and contemplation to understand its thoughts and intentions. How can anyone really know his own heart? This enigma becomes apparent when an exasperated Christian exclaims, “I can’t believe I would ever think such thoughts!”

The obscure nature of the heart is seen as Solomon asks the rhetorical question, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?” (Prov. 20:9). Scripture says that the human heart is deep, hidden, and clever: “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Prov. 20:5). It is also described as dishonest, calculating, and untrustworthy (Prov. 6:12–14). Here the heart is described as *purposing*. The Hebrew word used for “purpose” can also be translated “to plan.” Contrary to the world’s view of romance and emotion, the Bible says that the human heart purposes and plans.

Yet the heart’s chief unsettling characteristic is its capacity for self-deception. It is commonplace for the heart to assume that it is better than it really is; it is customary for the heart to believe its own innocence and to presume the goodness of its own motivations. A self-imposed form of blindness is endemic to the heart because of

the effect of original sin. The heart of man labors to hide its wicked intentions from being acknowledged or exposed. If its purposes were brought to light, then guilt would bring unwanted pressure, forcing a fundamental change of direction. People do not want to change when they are complacent—comfortable with their self-determined ambition in life.

Well-meaning voices can be heard telling you to “trust your heart” or “follow your heart,” words you have likely heard or read since you were a child. The latest societal push toward this dangerous advice asserts that you cannot be truly authentic or genuine *until* you trust your own heart. Trusting your feelings and allowing them to dictate your choices is the dogma of the day. Further, this culture says you must self-identify—because surely your own heart would not mislead you! A self-determined reality is the only trustworthy reality, according to the philosophical trendsetters. This social construction of reality theory declares that you cannot rely on anything external to yourself—you can trust only self. It is not difficult to see how the push for the “self-defining self” ideology is fueling a culture of self-indulgence and self-gratification. This is the heart turned in on itself, leaving havoc in its wake.

CAN YOU TRUST YOUR HEART?

To underline the critical importance of this issue to the Christian, let us carefully consider some preliminary questions. How much should you trust your own heart? Should you trust your heart at all? You need to resist the temptation to read past this question without giving it proper consideration. From a biblical perspective, the heart is the core of who you are. It is the control center of your life. We can also ask this question, using the biblical etymology of the word *heart*, in this way: How much *do* you trust your own plans, purposes, intentions, and motivations? This is a very difficult question to answer, especially if you are a sincere Christian who strives to be brutally honest with yourself. Consider the words of Solomon as he reveals the peril of self-knowledge: “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the

spirit” (Prov. 16:2). A few chapters later he writes, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Prov. 21:2).

Clearly, self-assessment tends to be intensely self-favoring, which is a manifestation of pride. The proud heart has no difficulty with portraying itself in favorable ways. In fact, this is part of its self-imposed blindness. Essentially, Scripture teaches that it is possible for the pride of your heart to deceive you (Jer. 17:9; 49:16; Obad. 3). Pride is the mask that the heart puts on. It keeps *true* self-knowledge hidden—the knowledge that it is deceitful, that it is wrong when it wants to appear right. Because it actually believes itself to be truly good, the self-deceived heart tends to be cavalier and crafty about the unsavory aspects of its plans, purposes, intentions, and motivations by highlighting the more respectable and honorable ones. This kind of self-assessment can be seen in the Christian who commits sexual sin occasionally yet pridefully evaluates himself based on the multitude of “good” things he does to serve the Lord.

Since you cannot be trusted to assess your heart accurately, you must seek to understand the truth of which Solomon spoke: “the *Lord* weighs the heart.” The penetrating truth of Scripture about the sensual heart can be seen in the words of Jesus Christ when he teaches that the heart of an adulterer and the lustful heart are the same heart (Matt. 5:27–28). The adulterer has acted out his lurid fantasies, and the luster has not—but they are the same in God’s eyes; no significant difference exists between them. It is dangerously easy to presume personal self-righteousness—until you, by means of Scripture, honestly look at your own heart. God is the One who genuinely sees your heart and all its intentions (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 20:12). What does God see when he looks into your heart? When God through his Word reveals the sinful attitudes and prideful assumptions of your heart, your so-called righteous works no longer have any credibility. These deeds are seen for what they truly are—a desperate attempt to excuse and cover up secret and sensual desires.

The heart’s natural inclination to judge itself favorably is a serious problem, not only for the openly self-indulgent sinner but even for the most sincere and dedicated Christian. For example, how do you

think about yourself when you read Paul's admonition, "As for the one who is *weak in faith*, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions" (Rom. 14:1). In leading numerous Bible studies through the years, I have listened to many discussions on this verse that demonstrate that Christians will inevitably view themselves as the *stronger* Christian. *Everyone* in the Bible study is the stronger Christian! Or so it seems. The prevailing opinion is that someone else is the weaker Christian. This illustration reinforces the truth that the heart tends to be willfully blind to its own weaknesses and sinfulness, casting itself in the most favorable light.

This tendency is epitomized in the person who, when caught in an egregious sin, immediately responds by pointing to someone who has committed an even worse sin. You do not have to look very far to find someone who has done something even more atrocious than yourself. The person who adopts this type of reasoning, and continues in it, lives with an ever-lowering measure for goodness in his mind. His self-made gauge for righteousness will eventually become the worst, most vile person who has ever lived. With this kind of thinking, nearly everyone should be able to feel good about themselves because they are, at least, better than the worst person who has ever lived. But that is not to be the Christian's rule of faith and practice! Instead, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Christian's judge of what is good and right; he is the perfect, sinless, and holy God-man whom we seek to please, emulate, and worship (Phil. 3:12–16). Yet this person's heart has led him to create a lower standard for himself than what Jesus demands. Indeed, your heart cannot be trusted!

KNOWING YOUR HEART

How is it that a Christian comes to blindly trust his unreliable heart—even above the authority and perfection of Christ? The person who trusts his heart assumes that he truly *knows* his heart. That leads us to our next question: How well do you know your own heart? Since the character and desires of your heart lead you in every important endeavor and decision in life, this is a critical question. For example,

it would be foolish to entrust someone with the care of young children whom you did not know well; it would not be wise to turn your life savings over to someone you did not know; it's not likely that you would eat, drink, or medicate yourself with substances from an unknown source. So when it comes to issues of the heart, why do you assume you know your heart well enough to entrust it with weighty matters vital to your very life and well-being? This assumption is particularly dangerous, given that Scripture demonstrates that your heart will not provide you with the most reliable information about yourself; it will even lie to you so that you are self-deceived.

IN GOD'S SCHOOL OF HEART-KNOWLEDGE

Since we have already seen from Scripture that the Lord God knows our hearts, we look further into his Word to gain *true* self-knowledge. So far, we have noted that the heart is

- Deep, hidden, and clever. “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Prov. 20:5).
- Dishonest, calculating, and untrustworthy. “A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord” (Prov. 6:12–14); “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?’” (Prov. 20:9).
- Self-favoring. “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit” (Prov. 16:2). “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Prov. 21:2).
- Deceitful. “The horror you inspire has deceived you, and the pride of your heart” (Jer. 49:16); “The pride of your heart has deceived you” (Obad. 3).
- Seen by God. “For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart”

(1 Sam. 16:7); “O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind” (Jer. 20:12).

But God goes even further than merely describing the heart of man. He goes to great lengths to reveal what he sees so that he can show us what we cannot see. He often does this by means of adversity, trials, and suffering. When you begin to see your heart through the light of suffering, it is both revealing and humbling.

Consider why God took Israel through forty years of wilderness sufferings. He explains his reason to them: “And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, *testing you to know what was in your heart*, whether you would keep his commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2). God did not take them through such difficulties so that *he* could understand what was in their heart. He is omniscient—he already knew what was in their hearts (Pss. 94:11; 139:4). Clearly, he took them through such a troublesome time so that *they* would know what was in their hearts.

The Israelites, like us, believed they already knew their own hearts. This prideful assumption was deceptive; understanding the deep motivations of the heart begins with a settled and convinced attitude of humility. Israel needed their prideful blindfold removed, and it took forty years of hardship to remove it. This suggests that humility is often less a *destination* than it is a progressive learning *process*. Difficult trials, hardships, and afflictions test your spiritual vitality and reveal long-hidden imperfections of your heart. Our God is a God who tests hearts in this way (Prov. 17:3). Why must God test the human heart? Because hardship forces you to look at your own heart honestly, more realistically.

HEART LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING DAVID

After King David’s secret disgrace with Bathsheba was revealed by Nathan the prophet, David later explains why this uncovering of sin needed to happen: “Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,

and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart” (Ps. 51:6). God desires truth in your innermost being. But your secret heart is naturally foolish, and wisdom is foreign to it. A few verses later, David explains why it is important for God to take you through the difficulty of these trials: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Your heart needs to break for it to no longer be fake. When you are finally humbled by adversity, you are willing to take a more honest look at yourself, regardless of the consequences. This kind of distress reveals a clearer view of your heart’s true intentions and motivations.

The remainder of this book will not have the necessary impact until your heart has been broken by your secret sins. The heart crushed by grief and sorrowing over sin is the prerequisite for real and substantive change. If you are more concerned about the consequences of acknowledging your sin than of the purity of your own heart, then your heart is not ready for change. David was so broken by the awfulness of his secret sin that he cried out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). He knew what you need to know: that mere external or behavioral change is not enough. It is the heart that needs to change.

On another occasion David, recognizing the craftiness of his heart and its secret intentions, asks and answers this critical question: “Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults” (Ps. 19:12). David agonizes because he knows that there are hidden faults within himself that he will not see. Within the context of Psalm 19, the answer is clear: it is only God who can truly discern—that is, reveal man’s errors and hidden faults. Mankind can do this only through careful attention to God’s Word (Ps. 19:7–11). These “hidden faults” are the critical missing aspects of self-knowledge that are deeply hidden within the heart. David eventually learned that he could not trust the promptings of his own heart. Why? Because they are hidden behind layers of self-righteous rationalizations.

Consider the overall story of David’s life in the book of 2 Samuel. As you read the first ten chapters, it seems that everything David does is a resounding success. You could liken him to the character King

Midas in Greek mythology; everything he touched turned to gold. In 2 Samuel, chapters 1 through 5, David wins the civil war going on in Israel and successfully succeeds Saul as king. This helps to establish his enormous popularity as the king of Israel who fights and wins impossible battles. Yet, somewhat parenthetically, the text adds, “And David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel” (2 Sam. 5:12). Some translators, in order to heighten the sense of the Hebrew text, write, “David realized that the LORD had established him as king over Israel” (NASB). Could there be a ring of self-righteous pride growing in David’s heart over what he had accomplished? Did David falsely assume that he was extra special in God’s eyes because he had been chosen as Israel’s king? It is difficult to say at this point in the narrative, but the story continues. In chapters 5 through 7, he defeats the occupational forces of Jerusalem and brings the ark of the covenant to his new capital. At that time he receives the covenant from God (2 Sam. 7:8–17). Israel is finally united and now has the leadership of a king who is a skilled military commander. David appears to have the unique blessing of God over all his reign. Following this, he marches out to meet the remaining enemies of Israel (chapters 8–10). He defeats the Philistines, the Moabites, the Arameans, the Edomites, and the Ammonites. There is no battle that David loses; every battle he engages, he wins soundly. Finally, David takes a vacation from his battles (2 Sam. 11:1). He sends out his army to fight his battles under the capable military commander Joab, and David stays in Jerusalem to relax. After winning so many hard-fought battles, David surely believed he had earned his holiday.

The latter half of 2 Samuel is radically different, changing from victorious celebration to devastating heartbreak and discouragement. This begins in the middle of chapter 12 when one of David’s young sons dies not long after birth. In chapter 13, David’s son Absalom kills his brother Amnon for raping his half-sister Tamar. Then Absalom turns on his father and incites a bloody civil war to rob him of his kingdom. This causes David to flee for his life from Jerusalem, being pursued by the son he dearly loved. In chapters 14–19 Absalom is eventually

caught and killed by men loyal to David, who is deeply grieved over losing his beloved son. In chapter 20 another bloody rebellion arises worse than Absalom's, known as Sheba's revolt, which had to be put down by Joab. Then David finally comes to the end of his reign, fighting the Philistines again. But instead of a great victory, like his defeat of Goliath, David becomes exhausted and must be rescued. Other people have to win the battle that day (2 Sam. 21:15–22). Finally, in chapter 22, David writes a psalm of the Lord's deliverance instead of a psalm regaling his great victory. He had become a humble and broken man.

What was the critical turning point of David's life? This occurs in chapters 11 and 12. It is David's sin with Bathsheba! Not only does he sleep with a woman who is not his wife, but upon finding out that she has become pregnant with his child while her husband has been off fighting his battles, he plots to cover it up. If Bathsheba's pregnancy were known, she would be disgraced for cheating on her husband. So David devises a plan for Uriah to return home from the front lines to sleep with his wife, intending to misrepresent the baby as being Uriah's. But when Uriah refuses to leave his responsibilities as a good soldier, David's plan was frustrated. Uriah could not go to enjoy his comfortable home and beautiful wife while the ark of the covenant, Israel, and Judah were still living in temporary shelters. This is even more remarkable since Uriah was a Hittite, meaning he was a Gentile convert to Judaism. This foreigner was more concerned about the honor of the Lord in Israel than was his Jewish king. With David's first plan destroyed, he proceeds to place Uriah on the front lines so that he will most assuredly be killed. Murder—yes murder!—is conceived in David's heart to cover up his sexual sin. This plan succeeded (2 Sam. 11:17), and David thought the cover-up was a complete success.

A secret sexual desire in the heart of David, now acted out, became the turning point of his life. Prior to his sin with Bathsheba he had made numerous compromises in his life (e.g., 2 Sam. 3:1–4; 5:13). Earlier he had fathered six sons by six different wives. He had already collected in his harem many concubines even though God had warned the future kings of Israel not multiply many wives to themselves: "And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away"

(Deut. 17:17). But it was David's pride that prompted him to ignore God's commands. He believed in his own righteousness, which motivated his sinful compromises, adultery, and eventually murder. Before David's sin with Bathsheba he was the hero of Israel, but afterward he became a weak and pitiful king. What was the core of his problem? He trusted his own heart, though its sinful cravings were well hidden under several layers of pride, manipulation, and self-righteous rationalizations.

Sensual desires are deceptively hidden within the heart. They are often excused or explained away by a person who has power, prestige, or wealth, any one of which enables him to indulge his provocative fantasies. Many others who do not have great influence or wealth also have the same sensual desires but lack the means to fulfill them. They may delude themselves with self-righteous thoughts, believing they are better than those who have had the opportunity to indulge their secret passions, when the truth is, were they given the same opportunity, they would indulge their lust just as quickly. Indeed, they are no better off. Remember, Jesus said that the heart of a luster is the same as the heart of an adulterer. The major recurring failure here is not taking seriously the sinful condition of the self-favoring heart, whether the lust is acted on or not.

THE CATASTROPHE OF TRUSTING YOUR OWN HEART

The tragic events of King David's life have been replayed countless in the lives of many men and women throughout the centuries. Much like David's is the story of a Christian man who ran a massive and profitable business. In the world's estimation he was a huge success in everything he did. Together with his beautiful Christian wife and five wonderful children, they all weekly attended a great church. What more could a man desire? But his whole life changed on the day he was arrested in a police sting for hiring a prostitute, who was an undercover police officer. The following day this devastating revelation was the lead story on all the local television news programs. These broadcasts dragged his name, his family, his business, and his church through the

mud. His embarrassed children refused to go to school. His business sales dropped 85 percent in a week, resulting in the layoff of several of his employees. After several months, the banks foreclosed on his business and his home.

All of this occurred even though he fully repented to the Lord, his wife, and his children. Repentance does not always exempt you from the consequences of your sin. While in biblical counseling in his church, he confessed to having years of secret sexual fantasies that he never acted on. These hidden passions had been buried deeply in his heart, artfully disguised as innocent, stress-relieving times of escape. It was not until he had the means and opportunity, afforded to him through his profitable business, that he could indulge his secret pleasures. His years of secret, sensual sins eventually cost him dearly. He was, like David, a seriously broken man!

Of course, these devastating sins of the heart are not limited to men. A Christian lady in her twenties became engaged to be married to a delightful Christian man. The oldest of four children, she came from a solid Christian family; her three younger siblings all looked up to their older sister. She excelled in both athletics and academics at her university. Her fiancé was studying to be an attorney in a prestigious graduate program. Two months before graduation, and three months before her wedding, a young woman living in the same dorm openly confessed to having a lesbian relationship with her. When confronted by her Christian friends, this engaged woman tearfully confessed to her sin. Her parents and siblings were in shock when they heard the news. She lost her athletic scholarship and her grade point average took a severe hit in her last semester. In disgrace, she dropped out of college, her testimony for Christ in ruins. Her fiancé was devastated and quickly ended their relationship when he heard the news. The wedding was canceled. Later in counseling she revealed that this was something she had kept secret for several years and passed it off in her own mind as innocent curiosity. But she had allowed the influence of worldly culture to feed and nurture her sexual curiosity until she had the opportunity to personally explore this in her dormitory. How could she give up so much as a Christian? The answer to this question rests

in the fact that she had permitted and even cultivated these sexual fantasies in her heart for a long time. The mind is like a garden; whatever you permit to grow and cultivate will eventually produce behavioral fruit (Gal. 6:7).

In these examples, dangerous assumptions of self-trust led to major moral failures. Neither of these two individuals, at the very beginning of entertaining sexual thoughts, planned to fall into the outward sins of adultery and lesbianism. Both were convinced that they were strong Christians—strong enough to resist giving in to this kind of temptation. This is a fatal error in a Christian’s thinking, a grave miscalculation when it comes to the purity of the heart. The apostle Paul understood that such assumptions could be misleading and potentially destructive. He did not trust his own conscience (i.e., heart). He confessed to the Corinthians believers, “For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:4). In other words, he was not aware of any wrongdoing or unconfessed sin in his life at that time, but that did not make him innocent. His natural, self-approving outlook and insight into himself could have easily blinded him to his own faults. Only the Lord is qualified to be the final judge. Unlike most people in our culture today, Paul rightfully *distrusted* his own heart. The human heart is full of self-justification and self-righteousness (Gen. 8:21; Prov. 16:5). You cannot trust your heart! Its self-diagnostic capability is hopelessly corrupted by the deceitfulness of sin (Prov. 20:9). The righteousness of Christ is the sole standard of what is pure. Like the humbled desire of King David after his failure, there must be a deep longing for a proven purity of heart (Ps. 26:2).

The insidious self-righteousness of the heart and its false presumption of its own goodness is often revealed when unexpected events arise, resulting in reactions that occur automatically and without forethought. These are the unintended words and actions that reveal the false assumption of the heart’s innocence. After David was anointed king of Israel, consolidating Israel into one nation and effectively ending a bitter civil war, the Philistines decided to attack. With the Lord’s help, David achieved a glorious victory over them (2 Sam. 5:17–25).

With great celebration and rejoicing David ordered the ark of God to be transported to Jerusalem. The ark was placed on a newly built cart pulled by oxen, although the Old Testament law had required the sacred ark to be carried by the sons of Kohath (Num. 3:30–31; 4:15; 7:9). During transport they encountered rough ground near the threshing floor of Nachon, causing the oxen to stumble and the cart to careen sideways. As the ark began to fall to the ground, a man by the name of Uzzah (possibly the grandson of Abinadab, keeper of the ark; cf. 1 Sam. 7:1) reached out his hand and took hold of it to steady it and keep it from falling (2 Sam. 6:6). In that instance Uzzah believed he was doing a good thing. He believed his action would keep the ark from being broken or soiled by the unclean ground. But surprisingly, Scripture says in 2 Samuel 6:7, “And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.” This was alarming considering the righteous intentions of Uzzah.

Why was the Lord so angered with Uzzah? What does the Lord’s response reveal about the heart of Uzzah? Our Lord’s quick action treated his deed as a capital offense, even though Uzzah was fully convinced he was doing a good thing. David himself became angry at what had happened, so much so that he named the place Perez-uzzah (2 Sam. 6:8). The Hebrew literally means “outburst against Uzzah!” It is possible that David was angered at himself for allowing such carelessness in transporting the ark by a clumsy oxen cart. But that does not settle the issue of the Lord’s anger at Uzzah. To the contemporary mind the Lord’s action seems to be entirely unjust, yet this is not the case at all. The Lord brought a death sentence on Uzzah because of his false belief about his own goodness. Uzzah had the audacity to believe that his hand was more holy than the dirt of the ground. He presumed himself to be better, holier than he really was. The Israelites were to treat the ark as perfectly holy; no one was supposed to touch it, under penalty of death (Num. 4:15, 19–20). Uzzah’s false belief in his own righteousness, confirmed by his good intentions, betrayed him. If in his heart he believed that no man was worthy to assist the Lord, and that his violation of God’s command would defile the ark, he would

not have dared to touch it. His attitude toward the goodness of his own heart's intentions became deadly. His heart had deceived him.

He is a fool who believes in the goodness of his own heart. He is a fool who believes that the heart is a reliable guide for life. The biblical doctrine of total depravity means that every intention, plan, and purpose of the heart, no matter how good it may seem, is tainted by sin. This does not mean that the heart is as bad as it could be. Every heart has the capacity to become even worse. But it does mean that the heart is known as being unreliable and untrustworthy because of its sinful mind-set against God in every aspect of its desires. Even the heart of the Christian cannot be fully trusted. The apostle Paul did not trust his heart (1 Cor. 4:4), and the biblical author of Hebrews writes, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12).

Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy about his zealous care over the flock at Ephesus so that he might avoid endless disputes and arguments with doctrinally unsound teachers: "So flee youthful passions [contextually: compulsion to argue] and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). If Timothy's heart were reliable, then Paul's warning is unnecessary. But the apostle understood the sinful propensities of his heart and Timothy's chief inclinations. As a young and passionate pastor-theologian, Timothy was inclined to engage these false teachers in debate. He could easily rationalize his purpose as being good. After all, he wants to set these men straight from the standpoint of their bad doctrine and free the church from their influence. Like Uzzah, Timothy's intentions were good on the surface. But you do not win over people to God's purposes by dispute or debate (2 Tim. 2:23–26). That is not the way of the Lord, even though it may seem reasonable to human thought.

THE HEART NEEDS FORGIVENESS AND CHANGE

The Christian will battle evil desires within the heart. This is a truth theologians have understood for a long time. Before a person

believes in Christ, his heart is wholly dedicated to sin, fully depraved, and in need of redemptive forgiveness (Rom. 4:3–8; Col. 2:13–14). Such a person is unable to please God from the heart. When God redemptively forgives the unbeliever, theologians call this *judicial forgiveness* because the unbeliever's primary relationship to God is that of Judge. However, after a person becomes a believer he still needs forgiveness from specific sins. Theologians call this *parental forgiveness* because the believer is a member of God's family; God is the believer's loving Father.

When Christians sin, they are not removed from the family, but they will suffer temporal discipline because of God's chastening (Prov. 13:15b, 21; Matt. 6:12; Heb. 12:5–11). These are sins that come from a sinful heart that has been redeemed but still possesses evil lusts and desires. This is a heart that has been judicially justified and placed in union with Christ, so from God's perspective it is perfectly holy—viewed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. But from an earthly perspective it is in the process of becoming more like what it has already been declared to be in Christ. The heart is still growing, changing, and becoming more Christlike through progressive sanctification even though it continues to struggle with pervasive evil desires and lusts. The internal battle of sin in the heart is a reality for the believer. For the unbeliever, there is no real battle, for his heart has not yet been redeemed and given over to God. He remains in bondage to his sin and has no life in him for the battle.

The author of Hebrews describes God's work in the believer's life this way: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). When he writes that the believer has been "perfected for all time" (perfect, active tense of τελειόω), he is referring to *judicial sanctification* in Christ. This is a believer's salvation. All sin past, present, and future is paid and atoned for by Jesus Christ. When the author refers to believers as "those who are being sanctified," he changes to a present tense (present, passive tense of ἀγιάζω). This is *parental sanctification* in Christ. Once the believer is saved, God is not finished; he continues to sanctify him to make him more like Christ. It is the very nature of God to finish a task

(Num. 23:19; Isa. 55:11). He does not abandon the believer or leave the responsibility of sanctification incomplete. God will see it to the end by revealing the evil desires of the heart, bringing about repentance and a clean heart until the believer's desires are God's holy desires.

THE TRUE NATURE OF THE HEART

What is the nature of the person who continues to harbor known evil desires in his heart even though he claims to be a Christian? Given the character of God and his sustained sanctifying work in the believer's life, such a person has good reason to question whether he is a genuine believer (2 Cor. 13:5). A true believer who persists with lustful desires in the heart will be miserable under the chastening hand of God. This discipline is intended to open his eyes to the truth of his hidden heart desires and to lead him to repentance and a purging of those desires—once and for all—from his life.

The experience of the one who only professes to be a Christian will be different. As time goes on, he will grow increasingly comfortable in his sin because of the hardening of his heart and searing of his conscience. Any unhappiness or misery is the result of difficult circumstances that are a natural consequence of living in sin, not because he is displeasing to God. Perhaps his spouse has discovered his secret, sordid fantasy life and the home is now a place of strife and unhappiness. The unregenerate person, regardless of painful external pressures, will continue to follow the lurid imaginings he has come to crave. Through the deceitfulness of his heart, this false believer will withdraw, retreating to the secret world of his lusts as a comfortable place of escape from the critical eye of disapproving family and Christian friends. Real motivation for change is nonexistent because he is not truly living to bring glory to Christ. Having given himself over to his lust, he lives solely and intensely for self-pleasure. Any claim he makes to be a Christian is due to pride, social expediency, or because he fears death and hell. If you are this type of person, the biblical truths of this book will not bring about the change you need until you sincerely repent and place your faith in Christ alone as Savior and Lord. Pick up the Bible and

read the Gospels of Mark and John. You need to know Jesus Christ and become a true follower of him!

In marked contrast, the genuine Christian will mourn the impure desires of his heart. Pleasurable sin is short-lived for the one who is truly “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17). His misery will come from an internal sense of guilt and from knowing he is living a life that is displeasing to the Lord he claims to love. Although he may become deeply mired in his sin, he fights it at every turn. His greatest discouragement is found in his apparent inability to overcome serious temptation and sin. His weakness grieves him, and he seeks help even while he is seemingly bound by the cords of his iniquity. If you are this miserable Christian, whom even now the Lord is convicting, then this book is written for you—to bring you hope and biblical change. You *desire* a pure heart because of the Spirit of God within you, but you must also *pursue* a pure heart (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14).

God in Christ Jesus will provide you with the grace you will need for the purification of your heart (Prov. 3:34). But, as I suggested earlier, grace will not come without brokenness. “Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (James 4:6). Your soul must be overwhelmed with your vileness and impurities before any real change can take place in your heart and its desires. If this brokenness before God (not just before men) is not present, then you need to cry out to God to restore sensitivity to your conscience, which has been seared by repeated, unconfessed sin. This is a vital prerequisite to substantive heart renewal.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:7–10)

A heart that is broken because of its sinfulness is a humbled heart. It is a heart that cares about how offensive it is to the holiness of the Lord

and that is now ready for real and lasting change. Such a heart becomes keenly invested in purging its sinful and dominating desires. This must be true of your heart before you move forward.

THE HEART'S REPENTANCE: GODLY SORROW OR WORLDLY SORROW?

There is an important distinction that should be made between feeling bad about your heart's impurity and being broken over it. A husband may be horrified and ashamed because his wife has discovered his secret indulgence of pornography on his computer and cell phone; does he feel badly for being caught, or is he broken over his sin? A wife might have been caught in an extramarital affair; is she angry that she has been found out, perhaps even agonizingly grieved over how her sin has injured her husband and children, or is she grieved that she has dishonored the Lord Jesus? A sorrowful pastor might confess to having a homosexual relationship once the evidence is uncovered; is this man in serious depression and anguish over the loss of a place of honor, his position in the church, and his family, or is his heart truly broken over his sin? Many more such true stories could be told. Often the guilty party has a certain feeling of sorrow over his sin, but it is not a sorrow that is according to God; he is not broken in his heart. It is critical to understand the necessary spiritual distinction between *worldly sorrow* and *godly sorrow*. "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10). The original New Testament language of this verse demonstrates that genuine repentance belongs to the realm of true salvation. Worldly grief or sorrow cannot repent, because it lacks regenerative grace that softens and breaks the heart.

Consider the numerous examples in Scripture of worldly sorrow:

- Genesis 4 records the first murder. Cain kills his brother because he is envious of God's approval of Abel's sacrifice. God judges Cain, and this judgment is so severe that Cain is severely distressed. "Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment

is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13). Yet he does not repent (1 John 3:12).

- Esau, Jacob’s older brother, was sorrowful over the careless disregard of his birthright when he sold it for a momentary meal. He shed many tears over his loss, but he was not truly broken and repentant (Gen. 27:34; Heb. 12:16–17).
- When King Ahab’s practice of idolatry was revealed by the prophet Elijah, “he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly” (1 Kings 21:27, a public and ancient sign of remorse and sorrow), but he was not broken and repentant, because he continued to consult false prophets (1 Kings 22:6).
- After betraying the Lord Jesus Christ, Judas was full of remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders of Judaism. He even confessed to them, “I have sinned” (Matt. 27:4), but he did not repent. Instead, he proceeded to hang himself.

Being distressed, sorrowful, mournful, dejected, and remorseful are not the same thing as godly repentance. Even though these attitudes may *accompany* genuine repentance, they are not to be confused with it. True repentance is what King David expresses after Nathan the prophet revealed his adulterous sin with Bathsheba: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). This must be a reality in your heart for genuine cleansing to occur.

EVIDENCES OF TRUE REPENTANCE

THE PURSUIT OF PURITY

What will be the evidence that genuine repentance has taken place in your heart? How will you know the difference between “godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow”? The answer to these questions is summed up by the apostle Paul after he contrasts these two types of sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10. In the following verse Paul continues to describe

the person who has godly sorrow and repentance: “For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!” (2 Cor. 7:11). There will be an earnestness and eagerness to pursue righteousness in your life. Repentance sows an undeniable desire in the heart to proactively seek righteousness and do what is good. A broken and repentant heart is not in a static state; it is active—boldly and aggressively pursuing purity. This eagerness then turns to the pursuit of clearing yourself from the remaining stigma of your sinfulness. This does not mean you deny sin’s stigma but rather that you seek to remove yourself from any association with your previous sins. In doing so you work to restore the trust and confidence of others who have been hurt or betrayed by your sin. Prior to your repentance you were indifferent and complacent concerning the impurities of your heart, but now you are alert and conscientious to any hint or suggestion of their return.

THE PRESENCE OF RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

Another characteristic of a repentant heart is anger! This is what the word *indignation* in this verse means. Your heart is angered over the reproach of your previous evil desires. The fuel of your anger comes from the fact that the sinful desires of your heart have brought shame on the Lord and his people. This is often called righteous indignation or holy anger. It is anger motivated by righteousness in a world filled with unrighteousness. Sometimes you may hear a Christian say in anger, “I can’t believe I thought that!” Righteous anger does not make such a self-favoring statement; self-righteous anger does. If you really understood the depth of the sinful desires of your heart and frailty, you would say instead, “I can’t believe I don’t think that more often!” A broken and repentant heart is easily angered at its own inherent propensities toward unholy desires.

THE PURSUANCE OF A HOLY FEAR

Still another unexpected characteristic of a repentant heart, according to 2 Corinthians 7:11, is fear. The object of this fear is not

explained in this immediate verse but can be understood by the surrounding context. There are two equally valid understandings of what should strike fear in the heart broken by repentance. The first is built on the second. The first is the fear of repeating a sin because of the weakness of the flesh. A repentant heart does not want to sin again, but it is fearful because it knows its own careless habits. Second, a repentant heart has a deep and abiding reverence for God that comes from a holy fear of him. He will bring a temporal chastening and judgment on his children. He will not remove a child from his heavenly family, but he will bring hardship into that child's life (Heb. 12:7–11). The repentant person knows that God's chastisement comes from his love for his children. In the first verse of this same chapter Paul explains this more fully: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). When Paul speaks of the "body and spirit," he is referring to the outer man (body) and the inner man (spirit). Your heart is at the very core of your inner man.

Fear and love are two sides of the same coin. What you love the most, you will also fear the most. It is like a young man who is seriously in love with a young lady. Because he loves her, he is fearful of doing anything that would displease her. Godly sorrow always involves full and complete repentance, and this includes a fear of God that grows out of a deep love for him. You cannot say you love God if you are not fearful of displeasing him. Anyone who truly loves God will be fearful of harboring any sensual impurity within the heart. Therefore, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The repentant heart is a biblically fearful heart.

THE PALPABILITY OF A DEEP YEARNING

Yet another characteristic of a repentant heart in 2 Corinthians 7:11 is a deep yearning, which is an intensely passionate desire or longing to restore those relationships that were broken and damaged by your sin. As a Christian, sin harms your relationship with God. It disrupts but does not sever it. You still have a parent-child relationship with him as your heavenly Father, but it suffers greatly from this disruption. The

conscience of your heavy heart is plagued with guilt; repentance is the necessary step to restoring it. When you are repentant you will make every effort to ensure your relationship with God is restored to a better and more intimate state than it was prior to your sin. This eagerness will extend to your attempts to restore any relationship with others that has caused great hurt, difficulty, and alienation. Rebuilding trust is like laying siege to a fortified city (Prov. 18:19). Your broken and repentant heart will do whatever is necessary, for as long as it takes, to rebuild the relationship. Restoring damaged relationships becomes the yearning of a repentant heart.

THE PROPENSITY FOR ZEAL

Still another characteristic of a repentant heart is zeal. This characteristic also comes from a sincere love of God and others (Matt. 22:37–40). Your heart is zealous for God, and you will hate anyone or anything that would bring reproach on him (Ps. 139:21–22). A deep passion for righteousness will grow in your heart that was missing when you were still rationalizing and excusing your sinful desires. You will cringe and be repulsed by all injustice. A burning passion in your heart will motivate you to see that righteousness and goodness prevail. This is not a zealous defense of personal rights that is often fueled by selfish desires; rather, it is a passionate defense of good for others and the righteousness of God. A broken and repentant heart is not passive; it is actively zealous.

A PLACE FOR PUNISHMENT

The last characteristic of a repentant heart in this verse is closely associated with zealousness because it passionately desires justice. It is translated as “what punishment” and means a desire to see punishment applied where it is necessary and appropriate. Sometimes it is translated as a desire for “avenging of wrong.” This final characteristic is a critical aspect of a heart changed through repentance. The heart that hides all types of sinful and sensual desires is guarded and self-protective. But the repentant heart does not seek to protect itself. It is so willing to see sin punished or avenged that it does not matter what it personally

costs. This heart is open to experiencing whatever consequences that may come about as a result of its sin.

An important qualification is necessary concerning a heart that is eager to see personal sin punished: a rightfully repentant heart needs to understand the theological problem of penance. Some Christians will indulge in self-flagellation when they know they have committed a vile sin. They feel they must pay a kind of emotional penance by experiencing some type of self-imposed suffering. Whether it is through self-denial or by imposing on themselves an attitude of perpetual despondency, they believe they have to pay God back for what they have done wrong. This will often cause a person to wallow in self-pity and adopt a “woe is me” attitude toward life. Good theology will not allow a believer to do this. Jesus Christ has already paid for all the sins of the believer (Heb. 10:10–12). To assume that you can add more payment for your sins by your self-imposed suffering makes the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ meaningless. It is a gross violation of good theology because it undermines the atoning work of Christ. Furthermore, it will not be helpful in the prevention of future sin. “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:23). When Christians practice penance for their personal sin, they betray a misplaced trust in the flesh in order to gain favor with God. This fleshly indulgence in self-appointed suffering will not gain God’s favor, neither will it be sufficient to restrain future temptation. Real repentance denies that the flesh has the capability to pay for and conquer sin; instead, it is zealous to see God’s justice served even if it involves a personal cost.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

You cannot trust your own heart to know itself. The only reliable guide for self-knowledge is the Word of God. Your sinful heart is not only difficult to understand but also deceptive—it will lie to you (Prov. 28:26). It is as full of rationalizations for sin as it is prone to cast itself and its motives in the most favorable light. Godly men throughout

Scripture have learned to distrust their hearts while relying only on God's revelation to understand the heart's central motivations (Eccl. 7:20). God is the only righteous judge of your heart. Any dominating desire of the heart that replaces the desire to love and serve God foremost is an *idol*. It may not be an idol of wood or stone, but it is just as destructive. A heart idol will demand worship (1 Cor. 10:6–14). Your heart is full of controlling voices that will call for your complete allegiance. Chief among them are the voices that awaken your sensual desires. They will promise you pleasurable fulfillment but will deliver only death (Prov. 16:25). Your soul dies! Your relationships die! Moreover, your body may die from a sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is time to identify your idol and repent. The remainder of this book provides you with the biblical wisdom and insight in deciphering the impure desires that dominate the worship of your heart. The Lord can purify you of sexual idolatry when you permit the Spirit of God to use the truth of his Word to change your heart.

KEY CONCEPTS

heart of man
obscure nature of the heart
“trust your heart”
self-knowledge
self-favoring self-assessment
self-deceived
self-righteousness
blind to weakness
heart crushed by grief
judicial forgiveness
parental forgiveness
presumption of innocence
total depravity
mourning impure desires
pursuing a pure heart
repentance

godly sorrow
worldly sorrow

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Using a teaching or example from Scripture, discuss why this statement is true: “The heart’s natural inclination to judge itself favorably is a serious problem.”
2. Using a teaching or example from Scripture, explain why it can be deadly to “assume you know your heart well enough to entrust it with weighty matters vital to your very life and well-being.”
3. God makes it clear to the Israelites (Deut. 8:2) that he took them through the wilderness wanderings so that they would know what was in their hearts. Read the following three passages; then describe what was revealed to be in the Israelites’ hearts in each case.
 - Exodus 14:10–14
 - Exodus 16:2–29
 - Exodus 32:1–6
4. “Humility is often less a *destination* than it is a progressive learning *process*.” Give three examples of people in Scripture whose failures due to pride demonstrate this truth.
5. In your own words, contrast the person’s heart and desires who merely makes a claim to be a Christian with the person’s heart and desires who truly is a Christian.

FOR FURTHER READING

Disclaimer: The listing of books and articles in the “For Further Reading” sections of this book is not necessarily an endorsement of every position that each author presents.

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