



# The truth about sexual lust; Part 13.

## *Religious Lust, Part 1*



To the authors of *Every Man's Battle*, sexual desire ("lust") is the worst kind of desire existent. Never mind that, without it, no one ever marries; without sexual desire, the race dies. Never mind that those who abuse sexual desire are a minority. Compared to all the earth's inhabitants who get hungry every day, only a minority become clinical gluttons.

Because Arterburn and Stoeker consider sexual desire a spiritual enemy rather than a natural function, they strive to condemn it. Historically, religion engages its victims with battling legitimate instincts (thus, *Every Man's Battle*). Religious people hoping to please God mistakenly assume that God hates life's basic pleasures. Religious people are

so busy trying to please God, they are unaware that God could already not be more pleased with them, through Christ.

Religion addicts typically fear their flesh, and can only have a good day when they imagine that they are conquering it. Whenever their flesh betters them, away goes their peace. Thus, their peace is based, not upon Christ, but upon controlling their flesh.

Arterburn and Stoeker, I am guessing, were raised in a "Thou shalt not" religious environment that condemned natural instincts. Either that, or they were raised in a healthy family and were eventually waylaid by a law-keeping church. I contend it is religion that makes addicts out of normal people. It is the strapping of unnatural restrictions upon people's backs that makes these people desire—to an unhealthy degree—that which is prohibited. We will discuss this truth further in a future installment.

### **The temptation to achieve**

The power-hold of religion turns nice people into insufferable finger-pointers. The most difficult people in this world are those who think they've arrived at some plateau of moral perfection, then wonder why the rest of us can't imitate them. These kinds of people cannot help looking down their noses at the poor sinners "farther down the mountain." When this religious spirit runs amok, a mere looking down the nose is not enough. Since God does not seem very good today at condemning "lazy Christians," the morally superior person will take that duty upon him or herself. The sinner *will* be punished, either by snubbing, backstabbing, or—where the religious spirit infects a nation or a mob—murder.

Today, religion is a profitable business conferring power upon willing workers. These days, those addicted

to attaining God's favor can *officially* set themselves as judges of the rest of us. With a little work, the religious achiever can back up his or her moral assumptions by earning a robe, attaining a white collar, or starting a church. Others can obtain more degrees than Nebuchadnezzar's oven ("Master of Divinity" has a particularly devastating ring to it), and then write books. There is nothing like an "M Div." notation after one's name to shush the rabble into awe-struck silence.

Thus, sexual lust is *not* the most powerful lust in the world, nor the most dangerous. Neither is the lust for drink. There is a far stronger lust ensnaring far more people and wreaking far more havoc upon the world than that which merely craves gin or g-strings. The lust of which I speak is so insidious, and yet so subtle, that those under its influence claim God as their greatest ally.



At its most common level, this lust condemns. Later, it kills. Throughout, it walks upon water (or thinks it does), unaware of people drowning at its feet. On Monday through Thursday, it prays in pious tones. On Friday, it kills God's Son.

The most powerful lust in the world is religious lust.

Religious lust is the desire to "do something for God." It is the public manifestation of an inner self-righteousness. It is the desire to stand above one's fellows and say to God, "Look at *me*; see what *I* have attained; notice how *I've* outperformed *them*."

It is religious lust that made the Pharisees of Jesus' day throw out their chests and diminish others. Jesus described it well in Luke 18:9-14—

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

It is religious lust that made these same Pharisees stand beneath the cross and mock the Sacrificed One. Matthew 27:38-44—

At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

This same kind of religious spirit infects the authors of *Every Man's Battle*. Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker challenge other men to save themselves from what they believe to be a terrible sin: "*You are a Christian; why don't you just behave yourself!*" Fred in particular considers himself a paragon of sexual self-control, and he not-so-subtly mocks other men for either an inability or unwillingness to meet his standard.

**"Why can't you be like *us*?"**

A photo on the last page of *Every Man's Battle* shows 12 tightly-knit men pointing accusingly at the male reader, daring him to join them. The caption says: **"Join the thousands of men who have taken the next step, call today."**





Without “the next step,” which turns out to be an all-out war against God-given instincts, a man cannot be right with God. Remember, Fred Stoeker considers sexual purity (defined by his own standards) a necessary key for admittance into God’s presence. From pages 17-18 of *Every Man’s Battle*—

By worldly standards, I was doing great. Just one little problem. By God’s standard of sexual purity, I wasn’t even close to living His vision for marriage. Clearly I’d taken steps toward purity, but I was learning that God’s standards were higher than I’d ever imagined and that my Father had higher hopes for me than I have dreamed. It soon became clear that I’d stopped far short of holiness ... *I could never look God in the eye*, I could never fully worship Him.

Once Fred had at last worked his way back into God’s favor and attained what he considered to be a 100% sexual purity, he felt compelled to write a book from this moral mountaintop, cajoling and even shaming other men onto his course. This is the way of religious lust. First, it pushes a person toward self-made holiness. Next, it makes that

person want to convert others. When the others want nothing to do with it, religious lust “*humphs!*” and dismisses such non-followers as “willingly disobedient.”

Here is Fred under the section titled “Counting the Cost,” on pages 56-57 of *Every Man’s Battle*—

And what about you? Now that you’ve heard about God’s standard of sexual purity, are you willing, in the spirit of Josiah, to make a covenant and hold to that standard with all your heart and soul? Will you tear down every sexual thing that stands in opposition to God? Can you see that you’ve been living the mixed standards of mere excellence? Stopping short but still looking Christian enough? Or have you aimed for obedience and perfection, where you’re called to go?

“Called to go” by whom? Certainly it is not the God Who, through Paul, informed us in Romans 8:8 that, “those who are in flesh are not able to please God”—surely it is not *this* God Who, subsequent to the cross and the death of His Son for sin, supposedly now calls us to moral perfection.

Our deliverance from sin cost Christ greatly. The normal, spirit-filled reaction to this is peace and thanksgiving. Religious lust, on the other hand, condemns its victims to a false sense of responsibility, resulting in a great struggle, or moral battle. The victims of religious lust imagine that Christ's sacrifice

the cross and say: "That is the end of my flesh; there is nothing I can possibly do to please God." Religion makes people overlook the cross and say: "I must still atone for my sins. God cannot look at me until I do what Jesus did. Further, I will outstrip my contemporaries in this vital regard; I will measure myself against their failure."



Once a person believes that he or she has attained this plateau of sinlessness (this can only be a relative attainment; they surely cannot be comparing themselves to God), it belittles, then challenges others to "join the cause." The irony of this is that these "others" are in fact more spiritual than those belittling them; these poor "sinners" have successfully dodged the premier fruit of religiosity: pride.

### **Satan wears the cloak of religion**

Stephen and Fred provide a fine window into the spirit of religious lust and, by

must be added to, improved upon, or at least equaled. Since this is impossible, victims of religious lust suffer continual frustration. This leads to greater and greater feats of religious asceticism and suffering—witness the Filipino Catholic zealots who have themselves literally nailed to crosses every Good Friday. Such an extreme exercise has apparently not yet occurred to Fred Stoeker, but does not the following passage from page 71 of *Every Man's Battle* walk a similar line?

Given that Jesus is sinless, I suddenly realized that Jesus not only never touched a woman with dishonor, He never even *looked* at a woman in dishonor. Could I say that?

### **The essence of religious lust**

The essence of religion is: "Look what I am doing for God; why can't *you* do it?" The essence of the cross, however, is: "Look what God has done for me; *no one* could have done that." People are supposed to look at

extension, the method by which Satanic deception operates today. Satan is today disguised as a messenger of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), and his modern false apostles are being transfigured, not into obvious ministers of darkness, but rather into apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13). Satan wants people working, not resting; he wants people adding to the work of Calvary, not reveling in it; he wants people monitoring their flesh, not giving up on it; he wants people continually doubting God's satisfaction with them, rather than trusting His favor.

Satan's most effective means of attaining all this is religion.

*Every Man's Battle* is the spirit of human accomplishment, disguised in a choir robe. It is, at its root, satanic. Religion is the greatest cloak "salvation-by-self" ever had, and *Every Man's Battle* is a nicely-formatted cloak for religion.

### **Calling good "evil"**

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. —Isaiah 5:20



What an indictment there in Isaiah against *Every Man's Battle*. One has to wonder if, somewhere deep inside, Fred Stoeker himself doubts the sanity of his own counsel. On page 148, he warns readers of the lies Satan whispers into men's ears, hoping to lure them from the prescriptions of *Every Man's Battle*. Rather than being Satanic lies, however, these whispers are in fact the voice of reason. That these things have occurred to Fred indicate, to me, that the counsels of reason live somewhere within the man. Unfortunately for Fred (and for the rest of us), religious lust has shouted down the reason.

Shouted-down reason, however, is not reason banished. Since sanity refuses to disappear, Fred must mentally transform it from a friend to an enemy; he therefore attributes it to Satan. He *must* do this, otherwise the premise of *Every Man's Battle* self-destructs, and the whole nasty business must be repented of. Here, according to Fred Stoeker, are the chief lies by which Satan dissuades men from *Every Man's Battle*: (pgs. 144-145)—

1. "God made [women] beautiful on purpose. Of course you should look. He intended that for you!"
2. "It won't hurt anything ... you're only looking. You aren't really lusting yet."
3. "Life is unbearable to live by such tight standards. God could not possibly have intended that for you. Go ahead and look. He loves you and wants you to live life more abundantly."
4. "I know your wife is bothered when you look at other women, but she's immature. *She* has the problem, not you! She needs to grow in knowledge and freedom. Jealousy is a sin, and she obviously has a sin problem."

All these statements—attributed by Fred to Satan—are, in fact, the voice of reason and sanity; God *did* make women beautiful on purpose, so of course we should look at them; no, it *won't* hurt anything to admire beauty, it only hurts to call good "evil"; yes, life *is* unbearable when lived according to the tight standards of man-made religion, and of *course* God loves you and wants you to live life more abundantly—*duh*; and yes, jealousy *is* a Scripturally-stated sin, whereas looking at beautiful women is nowhere condemned in God's Word. (More on the sin of jealousy in a future edition.)

Satan's world is a mirror-image of truth. Remember, Satan disguises himself today as a messenger of light, not darkness (2 Corinthians 11:14). In a Satanic construct, therefore, evil

appears as good, and good as evil. This diabolical principle underlies every page of *Every Man's Battle*. In the example at hand, Fred Stoeker paints the light of reason black and glorifies the human desire (religious lust) for moral perfection.

### Satan in the mirror

Under the heading, "Purity Always Brings Spiritual Opposition," Fred writes—

While there may not be spiritual oppression involved in your battle, there'll always be spiritual *opposition*. The enemy is constantly near your ear. He doesn't want you to win this fight, and he knows the lies that so often break men's confidence and their will to win. Expect to hear lies and plenty of them. What we've told you is truth. There *is* peace and tranquility for you on the other side of this war. There *is* immeasurable spiritual gain. The deceiver will tell you that Steve Arterburn and Fred Stoeker are crazy, and that you'll



soon be as crazy as both of them combined if you follow their ideas.

—Pg. 111, *Every Man's Battle*.

We must not measure this paragraph by the sincerity of these men, nor by their supposed moral attainments. Neither must we measure it by Fred's assertion that, "What we've told you is truth." Anyone can assert that. We must measure this paragraph by God's Word alone. Measured by this standard, Fred writes lies.

The section-title itself is a lie—not as it reads, but as Fred intends it to read. Fred thinks a man's battle for fleshly purity makes Satan run in to oppress him out of it. It's just the opposite. Satan hits the scene before the battle, not after it. Thus, Satan *inspires* the battle. He oppresses a man *into* it, not out of it. Even this oppression pales compared to the oppression resulting *from* the battle.

Fred insists that a man can only obtain peace and tranquility and "immeasurable spiritual gain" by entering into and winning a war against his flesh. Nothing could be further from the truth. There has already been a great war fought against flesh, and it had nothing to do with mortal human males battling bras and bikinis. Rather, it was the war God's Son waged against sin and death. It is His victory over sin and death, not our victory over fleshly tendencies, that has already procured for us the peace, tranquility, and immeasurable spiritual gain we crave.

The following is Ephesians 2:13-16, from the *New American Standard Bible*—

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. *For He Himself is our peace*, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus establishing peace*, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Jesus Christ established peace; *He* did it: "For *He Himself is our peace*." Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross, "*thus establishing peace*." Peace and tranquility and spiritual gain, therefore, *has* been gained; it does not now need gained by self-made moral wars and ascetic feats. On the cross, our Savior "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" by abolishing our enemy, which was "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances."

In *Every Man's Battle*, these damning ordinances get dragged back into play. In spite of the cross, spiritual gain yet eludes the man who either cannot or will not conquer his flesh. Are you still looking at beautiful women? Then you nullify Calvary. What power you have! See how important you are! Subsequent to the cross, the boons of peace, tranquility, and immeasurable spiritual gain await the perfect sacrifice: *yours*.

Could the cross of Christ be more obviously ignored? More obviously discarded? More obviously made void? Is it not the chief lie of Satan that the cross alone, unaided by



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human flesh, leaves damnation on the table? Is it not the chief lie of Satan that human obedience is required, not only to validate the cross, but to activate it? It is as Paul said to the Galatians, "Having begun in spirit, are you now being perfected by flesh?" This was the contention of the legalists. As large a lie as this was, not even the Judaizers vexing the Galatian ecclesia made human behavior the *beginning* of spiritual gain. If the apostle Paul called down an anathema upon *them*—what would he say to Fred Stoeker? —MZ (To be continued.)

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