

#196 “The Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Boastful Pride of Life”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

1 John 2:16 says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” We need only to go back to the first sin to see these three underlying facets of sin at work. Genesis 3:6 says, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” God told Eve that she couldn’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This would keep her from being aware of sin which would destroy her innocence and ruin her joy. Yet the serpent told her that she would be like God if she ate of the tree, appealing to the pride of life. She saw that the tree was “desirable to make one wise,” and she ate. This is the pride of life, a motive wrought in arrogance, boastfulness, and self-centeredness. Rather than bowing down, trusting, and worshipping God, the pride of life motivates us, as it did Eve, to want to see god in ourselves. Eve also saw that the tree was “good for food,” meaning that it looked like it would taste good and be satisfying and enjoyable to eat. But the pleasures of sin are temporary, and Eve fell for the lust of the flesh, trusting in her sensory modalities rather than in the word of God spoken to her. The lust of the flesh trusts man’s judgment, feelings, and temporary conveniences in lieu of God’s inalterable Word. Eve also saw that the tree was a “delight to the eyes,” for it was a beautiful creation of God. Sin does not necessarily appear as ugly, dirty, and destructive, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). The fruit that God told Eve not to eat was extremely enticing and attractive in its appearance. The lust of the eyes propelled Eve down the road of deception until she disobeyed God and incurred the penalties of sin. Both Adam and Eve learned the hard way that the knowledge of evil corrupted their natures resulting in distrust, fear, alienation, pain, and many other hideous things for the rest of their lives. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life all work in sinister collaboration to lead us astray, to keep us from trusting God’s Word, and to fall for the schemes of the devil.

The Bible uses the term “flesh” frequently to describe that which is left within us that opposes the Spirit of God within our hearts. There is a battle that takes place daily, even moment by moment, between the Spirit and the flesh. As Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Any time we give into the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, we are walking by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. As Galatians 5:16 says, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” However, the flesh can also simply refer to the body (e.g. Matthew 16:17). In 1 John 2:16, the Holy Spirit chooses to partition our generic fleshly lusts into three distinct categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The lust of the flesh is the lust of the body. Our bodies have needs for food, for drink, for touch, for intimacy, for healing, etc. The problem is not that the body has wants and needs but that it can fall prey to lusting for these wants and needs. Lust is differentiated by love in that it is a craving for what is

forbidden rather than for what is allowed. Love is a wholesome desire, whereas lust is a perverted one. Lust seeks sex outside of marriage, food in excess, healing through new age practices, etc. Trying to meet the desires of the body through the wrong channels is lust, and this is what the devil must trick us into doing. Satan's methods are similar when it comes to the lust of the eyes. God gave us eyes to see the wonders of His creative genius and to take in information to help us spiritually discern and make decisions. Our ability to see is a good thing that can be used in love and to further the cause of good, but Satan can trip us up if we use our eyes to lust. The world knows how to use lust to market things to us from ornate presentations in store windows to flashy lights at a casino. Sex sells for a reason. Satan is well-aware of the potent tool that he has in using our eyes against us. Finally, there is the boastful pride of life. Pride and arrogance are behind any sin, whether we are aware of them or not. The temptation to want "to be somebody" or to "do something our own way" is all about pride and boasting. Pride is an arrogant willingness to believe that we don't need God, that we can thwart God, that we can do better than what God has ordained for us, and that we can be a better god of our own lives. Pride may well be the underlying motivator for our choosing to lust, or it could be that our lust leads us to a position of pride. However sin takes root in our hearts, we can be sure that pride and lust are the fundamental building blocks.

Satan knows how to break us down, but now we have his playbook. May God make us quick to see the temptations of lust and pride so that we can choose life, freedom, and truth. Sin always brings pain and death (Romans 6:23), but God offers pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). The choice is really simple...if only we could remember that in the heat of the battle.