

The Pernicious Effects of Pornography

by ATRI Staff Writer

Let's begin with definitions. According to the 1986 Attorney General Commission on Pornography, pornography is any material that is "predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal." The Commission went on to define hard-core pornography as material that is "sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose." [1]

In our modern day and age, material that fits those descriptions can be found virtually everywhere: television – even during prime time, the internet, in magazines, on billboards, and in books. Joe Dallas explains,

Erotic images pose a challenge. I dare you to try to escape them. There was a time you could do so pretty easily just by avoiding pornographic magazines, but those days are long gone. Take a drive and you'll see some model flashing her wares on a billboard. Thumb through a magazine – a regular magazine, mind you – and you'll get hit with clothing ads that show more flesh than clothes. Watch television and you won't get away from sexual themes no matter what channel you turn to. Try as you may, you can't get away from, erotic images without going into hibernation. [2]

Now that we know what pornography is, and how pervasive it is, we need to know the damage it can do psychologically and socially. In his article "The Pornography Plague," Kerby Anderson gives just a sampling of the negative effects of pornography upon our society:

- Women Against Pornography estimate that about 1.2 million children are annually exploited in commercial sex (child pornography and prostitution).
- Psychologist Edward Donnerstein (University of Wisconsin) found that brief exposure to violent forms of pornography can lead to anti-social attitudes and behavior.
- Pornography (especially violent pornography) can produce an array of undesirable effects such as rape and sexual coercion. Specifically studies have found that such exposure can lead to increased use of coercion or rape, increased fantasies about rape, and desensitization to sexual violence and trivialization of rape.
- Researchers Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant showed that continued exposure to pornography had serious adverse effects on beliefs about sexuality in general and on attitudes toward women in particular.

- One study demonstrated that pornography can diminish a person's sexual happiness.
- Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves prior to and during their assaults.
- Police officers have seen the impact pornography has had on serial murders. In fact, pornography consumption is one of the most common profile characteristics of serial murders and rapists.[3]

Scary? It should be. But the news gets even worse (if that's possible). So far we've been talking about society at large. How about in the church?

In 2002, a *New Man Magazine* online poll reported that **75 percent of Christian men** have viewed pornography in the last three months, and 43 percent have done so repeatedly. **37 percent of pastors**, in a *Christianity Today* survey, admitted that they struggle with Internet pornography.[4]

54 percent of pastors said they viewed porn within the past year in a Pastors.com survey... in a 2003 Focus on the Family poll 47 percent of respondents said porn is a problem in their home.[5]

34 %....[of the] readers of Today's Christian Woman's online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn in a recent poll. While many women wrote in to explain they'd accessed these sites to better understand what was luring their husbands time and again, it was the other e-mails—from **Christian women who shared about their own Internet porn addiction**—that caught our attention. Apparently online sex addiction isn't just a male problem anymore.[6]

In other words, pornography is an issue no Christian can afford to ignore. And it's one that is seriously impacting the Church today. Many Christians have accepted the world's standard for sexuality, ignoring or reinterpreting what the Bible says about God's standards. Mike Genung explains,

In a 2003 Barna survey, 28 percent of Christians said looking at pictures with nudity or sexually explicit behavior was morally acceptable. God's standard, found in Matthew 5:28, is that lust in the heart is the same as committing adultery. The married man who uses porn is sinning against God – and is unfaithful to his wife. Christians aren't immune from our culture's "if it feels good do it" mentality, and those who've allowed this lie to influence their thinking need to hear God's truth.[7]

It is important for Christians to remember that God has called us – and empowered us – to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; Phil. 4:13). So we need to establish God's standard for sex within the context of holiness. In both the Old and the New Testament, God illustrates the spiritual dangers of premarital and extramarital sexual activity. In that context, He also forbids those practices. For example,

1 Corinthians 6:13-18 – The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Job 31:1-3, 9-12 – I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong?... If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest.

Jesus also shut the door on that “look but not touch” loophole so many Christians try to invoke. In Matthew 5:27-28 Jesus explained, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:27-28).

The Bible certainly has a lot to say to Christians, both single and those who are married, about their sexual behavior. He tells us what to avoid and how to steer clear of the dangerous consequences of inappropriate sexual activity.[8] But God also promises to help those who come to Him. Perhaps Christians should commit these verses to memory so they will be immediately available in times of temptation:

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place” (Eph. 5:3-4).

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 4:7- 8)

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (Rom. 6:11-12)

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

“Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18) [Pastor Jeff Miller pointed out that the Bible tells us to “resist” the devil but to FLEE sexual immorality. Don't stand around looking at it – if you do, it will snare you.[9]]

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is

excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

The Holman Bible Dictionary explains,

One’s sexuality is a vital part of Christian holiness and not a necessary evil to be rejected. Within the limits of marriage, sex is for procreation of children, the enhancement of the one-flesh relationship, and the pleasure of the married couple whose love can be nourished thereby. Outside of the limits established by God, sex becomes an evil and destructive force in human life, calling for God’s redemptive power to deliver humans trapped therein.[10]

If you are starting to feel guilty now, that’s a good thing. You can’t – or won’t – start dealing with your pornography problem until you admit you have one. And as Dr. D. James Kennedy pointed out, “indulging in pornography leads to a terrible bondage of the soul.”[11] Once you are ready to take steps toward conquering this problem in your life, there are a number of ministries available to help you, including online resources such as New Life Ministries, founded by our guest Steve Arterburn (www.newlife.com).[12]

Remember too that a pornography problem is not the “unpardonable sin.” Richard Strauss offers this encouragement to anyone struggling with any type of sin in his or her lives:

The hymn writer put it like this: “Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?” That great God of grace stands ready to pardon you. Listen to the Prophet Isaiah: “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:6, 7). Listen to the Apostle John: “If we confess our sins. He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It matters not how grievous your sin may have been. God stands ready to blot it out. Acknowledge it to him, then accept his gracious forgiveness.[13]

Don’t wait! Don’t let that bondage to sin continue. Accept Jesus gift of forgiveness and freedom by taking the first steps toward dealing with your pornography issue today!

Notes

1 Kerby Anderson, “Pornography,” Probe Ministries, www.probe.org, quoting *Final Report of the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography*, ed. Michael McManus (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986), p. 8.

2 Joe Dallas, “Visual Stimulation and Sexual Integrity,” <http://www.newlife.com/Articles/Article.asp?libid=518>.

3 Kerby Anderson, “The Pornography Plague,” www.probe.org. See this article for documentation for these statements.

4 Dr. Paul Dean, “A Call to Sexual Purity,” <http://www.christianity.coin/faith/1416327.aspx>, emphasis added.

5 Mike Genung, “How Many Porn Addicts are in Your Church?,” <http://www.crosswalk.com/1336107/>, emphasis added.

6 Ramona Richards, “Dirty Little Secret,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2003/sep/oct/5.58.html>, emphasis added.

- 7 Mike Genung, "How Your Church Can Take on the Porn Epidemic," <http://www.crosswalk.com/1344894/>.
- 8 See for example the Holman Bible Dictionary entry for "Immorality," <http://studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T2988>.
- 9 See his series "Sex: A 12 Step Program for Men" at [bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
- 10 Butler, Trent C. Editor. "Entry for 'SEX, BIBLICAL TEACHING ON'". Holman Bible Dictionary. <<http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5613>>. 1991.
- 11 D. James Kennedy, "The Christian and Pornography," http://www.purelifeministries.org/Unchained/2007/June_07/Articles/060407_James_Kennedy_Christian_And_Porn.htm
- 12 Other resources include www.blazinggrace.org, the ministry of Mike Genung, and Steve Gallagher's Pure Life Ministries (www.purelifeministries.org). In addition, Probe Ministries (www.probe.org) has many some good information.
- 13 Richard Strauss, "Caught in the Tempter's Trap - The Story of David and Bathsheba," at www.bible.org.