

DEFEATING IMPURITY AND PORNOGRAPHY

But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. (Ephesians 5:3)

God's original design is for us to be in selfless intimacy with God and with other human beings, with the most intimate of all human relationships being that of a husband and wife.

When they wed, the man and the woman make rest-of-my-life covenant vows to each other in which they pledge unconditional loyalty and to love, honor, and cherish the other person. They also pledge to reserve their intimacy for their spouse alone.

The severest violation of these vows is rooted in impurity, resulting in sexual sin. Adultery—both emotional and sexual adultery—kills marriages, crushes hearts, and betrays both God and the one who has been wronged.

We often consider impurity to be about behavior. Yet when we examine the word used for impurity—especially how it is used in the company of other words—we see that impurity is more about motive than behavior.

In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us that we were “dead” in our sins because we “lived” in them (2:1f). Being dead in sin, then, is similar to how cancer cells ooze and seethe with a vicious and wicked vitality.

Paul says that as such dead people, we were busy “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (2:3). In Ephesians 4:19, Paul develops the same idea of lusts and cravings:

“Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.”

These are frightening unveilings of the human heart. Our sinful hearts have an insatiable appetite, always ingesting, always consuming. But they never find satisfaction in what they consume! There is always this sense of “just a little more and then I will have enough, then I will be satisfied.” But “enough” is never found.

Impurity is about motive—selfish, self-seeking motive—about what is compelling a person from deep in their heart. Jesus explains this idea for us in Mark 7:21-23 when He says

“What comes out of a person defiles him. For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, **sexual immorality**, theft, murder, adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. All these evils come from within and defile a person.”

There is a “covetousness of the flesh” that marks impurity, and its appetite is never satisfied, never sated, always seeking, always hungering with a predatoriness we are loathed to admit we are guilty of. Yet, when we get really honest and allow God to show us our own heart (Psalm 139:23-24), we have to concede that we have exactly the same propensity for carnality and debauchery as anyone else.

This is important for us to understand because, when we sit and counsel someone who is struggling with sexual sin of any kind, we need to be cognizant of the fact that it is the person's heart—their devotions, their desires, their longings, their passions, their worship—that is the real problem.

In the context of marriage, it is this impurity of heart and mind that drive all forms of infidelity, from emotional infidelity to adulterous sexuality, and everything in between.

Looking over the catalogue of sin categories that Jesus lays out in the passage in Mark, we discover an interesting word: *porneia*.

Porneia is the word used to talk about sexual immorality (the most common rendering), fornication, marital unfaithfulness, prostitution, adultery, even incest, and is a generic term for sexual sin of any kind.

Infidelity of any kind in marriage carries with of the same condemnation in God's Word as all of these other “lesser” and “greater” sexual sins, and all are just as devastating as the others. They all carry the same depth of betrayal and do nothing but wreak havoc in the human heart and in relationships.

PORNOGRAPHY

Now, this word *porneia* is at the core of the next topic we need to discuss and that is “pornography.” Pornography is at an all-time high in availability and usage.

Plus, it is no longer a “male issue.” Those of us who consistently counsel those battling sexual brokenness have seen about an 800% increase in the number of women in bondage to the besetting idolatry of pornography.

What Is Pornography?

There are dictionary narrow definitions of pornography and then there are broad legal pseudo-definitions of pornography. Perhaps the most succinct definition of pornography comes from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

CCC 2354 *Pornography* consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.¹

The first part of the word pornography, “porné,” can be rendered “female captives” or “prostitutes.” Morphed out to *porneia*, as we have seen, means immorality, especially sexual immorality. The second part, “graphe,” means to write, draw, or portray. Pornography is about picturing, imagining, and fantasizing about sexual immorality.

Pornography has been around for centuries. But the widespread availability of pornography means the problem touches more people than ever before. Soft core pornography is everywhere you look: television, movies, magazines, billboards, and even posters at bus stops. And it’s not just in the media. In our world, both men and women dress to attract attention and to elicit romantic or erotic feelings in others. We are all bombarded with pornography every day—it’s the atmosphere we live in.

And pornography isn’t just a male problem. Both sexes have immoral fantasies. Women might be more captured by romantic literature and men by erotic pictures, but the end result is the same—they are committing adultery in their thought life.

¹ http://www.catholic-catechism.com/ccc_2354.htm

The primary women's pornography of old, the romance novel, while still the more popular with those who are 40-somethings and above, has been replaced in the lives of younger women with the same type of pornography that men pursue. And it gets worse every day.

How Prevalent Is It?

According to compiled numbers from respected news and research organizations, every second \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography. Every second 28,258 internet users are viewing pornography. In that same second 372 internet users are typing adult search terms into search engines. Every 39 minutes a new pornographic video is being created in the U.S.

It's big business. The pornography industry has larger revenues than Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple and Netflix combined. 2006 Worldwide Pornography Revenues ballooned to \$97.06 billion.

42.7% of internet users view porn, and 25% of all internet search requests are for some form of pornography. The breakdown of male/female visitors to porn sites is 72% male, 28% female. There are 1.5 billion peer-to-peer pornography downloads each month (which is 35% of all internet downloads).

With an estimated 4.2 million pornographic websites and approximately 420 million pornographic web pages, it is clear that pornography is a major influence on our society, in general, and on marriages, in particular.

Research also shows that women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex or affairs.

How Are We to Think About Pornography?

One of the odd things about any discussion about pornography—or any form of sexual brokenness and sin—is the difficulty we have shifting our focus away from the sexual component in order to see what the foundational issues are.

Pornography is not about sex; it is about power and control. The underlying issues are heart issues, and they find their home in idolatry.

² <http://www.divorcewizards.com/Divorce-Statistics-Pornography.html>

And it isn't an idolatrous relationship with sex or intimacy that is the main idolatry, either. These are two of the "secondary" idolatries at work, but they are not the primary idolatry that has to be addressed.

In the fantasy world of pornography, the pornographer (and we use this word to cover everyone in relationship with pornography on any level) is always a winner, always a conqueror, always desired, never rejected, never overlooked, never not chosen, always preferred, always the hero, and never a "zero."

In the fantasy world, there is absolutely no risk—EVER—of being seen or treated like a loser. There is never any risk of disappointing or letting the "partner" down. There adoration and admiration—even a sense of being worshiped.

When we look back in Genesis 3 and see that the original sin was the desire to be worthy of worship (can we say "sovereign"?), and when we recognize that this is the core of all idolatry, we can understand how quickly pornography can take a person's heart captive.

Add to this the supercharge of sexual excitement, intense-though-false-intimacy, erotic entanglement, and the final intense experience of sexual gratification, and the reward centers of the brain are becoming trained to seek this same behavior the next time any of those negative emotions rise to the surface. Plus, research shows that masturbating to pornography actually *weakens* the cingulate cortex of the brain—the region that is responsible for moral and ethical decision making and willpower.

The Biblical Paradigm: All expression of sexual intimacy outside the confines of the marriage relationship is sin—no exceptions.

When pornography enters the picture, selfish personal sexual satisfaction replaces the God-ordained surrender of one's sexuality to one's spouse (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). Nearly all of the elements of true sexual intimacy are absent, especially the relational aspect that is at the core of the "one flesh" majesty of the marriage relationship.

On top of this, the real world cannot compete with or measure up to the fantasy world. Real world and real mate are increasingly compared to fantasy world and mate, falling short more intensely every time the fantasy world is entered.

Eventually, the real-life relationships lose their attraction and their promise until the pornographer can no longer even connect in authentic intimacy. People realize too late that they have bought the lie of pornography and that it has failed to deliver on its promises.

They have traded true intimacy—which they intuitively know that they need—for the lie that sexual gratification is what they need, which results in them becoming more and more isolated from real relationships with real people.

The need for feeling like a winner and for affirmation and adoration increases, pornography and the masturbation it produces are sought once again, and shame and disappointment follow.

They have a mental “harem” of luscious naked, cooperative trophy-women—or at least, some of their body parts—at their beck-and-call anytime, anywhere. And they look at every other woman seeking to add to their treasure trove of trophies, objectifying and dehumanizing more and more as time goes on.

There are neurobiological factors (highly charged pleasure centers and sexual gratification) that add to the bondage that then create another idolatry, which is the entitlement to satisfy these selfish desires without interference.

We have adultery of the mind and heart (Matthew 5:28), sin against God by defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:12-20), sin against one's own flesh (1 Corinthians 6:17), and we defile the image of God in all parties involved, even if some of those parties are virtual and not actual.

The more pornography is viewed, the further into depravity and away from sanctification a person slides, they become more and more enslaved to sin, and more and more disobedient to the will of God.

We could spend a solid week discussing pornography and its effects on the pornographer, but what about the spouse? Since stories can be more effective than statistics and lecture, let me introduce you to Laura and April.

Laura³

It couldn't have happened at a worse time.

After the trauma of preterm labor, a month of bed-rest, and a three-day long delivery, I was a new mom who had to constantly hold, nurse, or pump milk for our premature daughter. The around-the-clock care didn't ease up after the first couple of weeks like they said it would. I was so exhausted that I felt delirious. You might know the feeling.

To top it all off, I could tell our marriage was strained and I felt compelled to check my husband's computer. I knew that in the past, when I had been sick, weak, or occupied with something else, Ryan would struggle more intensely with pornography. We had been going around and around with this problem for the full three years of our young marriage.

No amount of disappointment, hurt, anger, conviction, or counseling had solved the problem. The solutions we had tried only lasted until the temptation crept up again. I ignored the internal warning several times. I felt too drained to admit that Ryan might be looking at pornography while I was caring for the baby or enjoying any moments of sleep that came my way. I thought, I can't take care of another person's problems; he's supposed to be strong for me.

And yet the prompting continued. Check your husband's computer.

When I finally scanned the history on Ryan's computer, I found some images that he had recently viewed. Even though I wasn't surprised, I did feel freshly hurt and betrayed. I felt the familiar rush of jealousy, of wanting to look intently at every two-dimensional woman to discover what she had that I didn't have, what she did that I didn't do, or what she was that I couldn't be. I clenched my jaw and set my heart in disgust towards my husband: my heart was filled with bitterness toward this man who wasted our time, energy, and resources on lust while I worked so hard to take care of our family.

April⁴

I met Darren at the young age of nineteen. My mom had just moved us to a new town after her 32-year marriage ended in divorce from my father—a man who

³ From *Hope After Porn: 4 Women's Tales of Heartbreak and How Their Marriages Were Saved*. Covenant Eyes, 2014

⁴ Ibid.

was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive. Darren was older than me, and came from a tight-knit family.

But most importantly Darren could make me laugh. Darren is funny—you know, that sarcastic-Ben-Stiller funny. I fell in love with him from day one.

We married in 1993 and moved away from our families in St. Louis so Darren could attend Dallas Theological Seminary. I was so excited to see him get prepared to do church ministry.

It gave me a sense of safety knowing that I was married to a good man who wouldn't hurt me like the men in my family had done. Darren and I were best friends, we did everything together, and we both loved it.

One rainy, October night I was home alone and Darren was in one of his classes. I'm not sure why I looked at the history on our computer: I guess I wanted to prove my gut instinct wrong.

What I saw that night changed me forever—it changed me as a person, as a woman, and as a wife. I scrolled through hundreds and hundreds of websites that proved to me that my “godly” husband was just as broken as all the men in my family. I had two choices: to accept that fact, or to try to force him to change.

I don't even remember driving in the rain those 40 miles to his school. I just remember walking up to the classroom door in my pajamas and the look in his eyes that said he knew he'd been found out.

At first he lied, then he apologized, then he said he'd never do it again. No one wanted to believe that more than me. I didn't want anyone to know that my marriage wasn't perfect. I didn't want anyone to know that Darren was looking at women in this way.

Something inside of me said, “April, boys will be boys. He's been caught now. It's over. Let's laugh and joke and get back to your great marriage. You don't want to live life like your parents, do you? Holding grudges, silent treatments—that's not you. Just move on and put it all behind you.” And so I did...for eight more years.

Each time I caught him he got better at hiding it. Each time I caught him I died a little more on the inside. My respect for him was dying, too. We were both hiding who he really was because neither one of us wanted to face the truth, albeit for different reasons.

My reason was pride. At the end of the day, I didn't want anyone to judge me, my husband, or my decisions. I didn't understand that Darren had been using pornography since he was 13 years old. (He used to sneak into his neighbors' basement next door to look at his magazine collections when they were gone.)

I didn't understand the scope and magnitude of the problem. In fact, I thought his problem was because of me. I was the one from the troubled home with all the baggage. Maybe if I was skinnier or taller or blonder or more endowed he wouldn't need to do this anymore. I honestly believed that I was the damaged one.

I spent those 10 years trying to change for him, trying again to meet his needs in every way. Surely, I could find the combination or the cure that would get rid of this issue forever.

No one knew: not my family, no one at church, no close friends, nobody. We never talked about these types of issues. I even remember calling a Christian radio talk show and just crying to the person who fields the calls. I was so brokenhearted, but I wanted to remain anonymous. I wore that smile and laughed at all the jokes, and no one could have ever imagined the darkness that was overtaking me daily.

A Hard Truth

Those who use pornography deny the *imago dei* in the "performers," dehumanizing and objectifying them solely as resources for them to use to get their "needs" met. The hard truth of the matter is that they are just as much a sexual predator as any rapist.

Pornography is vicarious rape. That person in that video did not consent to have you engage with them in sexual activity. In fact, chances are excellent that they were being sexually assaulted when the filming was taking place!

Rape, like pornography, is not about sex, but about power and control.

Both the pornographer and the rapist hunt for the most desirable victim to target, strategize on how to bring their intended victim under their control, and then sexually devour their victim without any regard for that person's dignity and worth as a human being created in the image of God.

And never mind the oppression and abuse the victim is subjected to, including the degradation of being another sexual trophy for the perpetrator to use to prove how powerful and how much a “winner” they are.

Slaying the Dragon

The idolatry of pornography and sexual sin became entrenched in your life over time. We live our lives based on what we believe to be most true—we cannot do otherwise.