

DO HARD THINGS - PURITY

1 Peter 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

BENEFITS OF A PURE LIFE:

- **SALVATION – Matthew 5:8** Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
- **SANCTIFICATION – 1 John 3:3** And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.
- **CONFIDENCE – Hebrews 10:22** Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.
- **ANOINTING – Hebrews 1:9** Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

In our sex-saturated society, pornography is admittedly not just a male problem anymore. However, essentially every study and statistic still reveals that it is predominantly an issue for men and only peripherally an issue for women. And the problem has grown exponentially over the past two decades with the accessibility and anonymity of the Internet. The number of people ensnared in this evil is staggering. Americans rent upwards of 800 million pornographic DVDs each year (one in five rentals), and porn far outpaces Hollywood's yearly slate of 400 movies with 11,000 porn films shot each year. Four billion dollars a year is spent on video pornography in the United States, more than its citizens spend on football, baseball or basketball. One in four Internet users looks at a pornographic website in any given month. Men on average look at pornography online more than they look at any other subject, and fully two-thirds of 18 to 34 year old men visit pornographic sites on a regular basis. And we are sadly naïve if we assume that this porn pandemic has not infiltrated our Pentecostal churches, when 57% of North American pastors say that this addiction is the most sexually damaging issue in their congregations, when 47% of Christian families say pornography is a problem in their home, and when the Internet is named as a significant factor in 2 out of 3 divorces today.

Fallen humanity has a tendency to embrace any and all pleasures that are devoid of responsibility; but, like all "cost-free" forms of pleasure, porn is habit-forming. The contemporary definition of pornography is "sexually explicit material intended to cause sexual arousal" – hardly a noble objective, to say the least.

Chuck Colson has called Internet pornography "Spiritual Crack Cocaine" because of how quickly people can become addicted to it and because of how destructive it is to the human soul. Men especially, because of their propensity to be tempted visually (Matthew 5:28), must be on guard against this sinful shortcut to sexual gratification.

Gary Brooks, a psychologist who studies pornography at Texas A&M University, has demonstrated that even "soft-core" pornography has a very negative effect on men because "it's voyeurism – it teaches men to view women as objects rather than to be in relationships with women as human beings." Massachusetts-based psychologist Aline Zoldbrod emphasizes that "there's good evidence that the more porn men watch, the less satisfied they are with their partner's looks and sexual performance." Sex in pornography is a commercialized product – devoid of emotion, stripped of humanity, an essentially empty experience.

Because pornography involves looking at women but not actually interacting with them, it elevates the physical while ignoring or trivializing all other aspects of the woman. She is literally reduced to her body parts and sexual behavior, utterly depersonalized and dehumanized. Little wonder that psychologists are increasingly encountering not only marriages devastated by pornography, but many individuals so scarred by porn that they lack the very capacity to engage in normal relationships. Ironically, men who become addicted to this "risk-free" form of sexual activity run a far greater risk – the loss of their ability to be content with a normal sexual partner in a normal marriage, and ultimately the loss of their own happiness.

Every year on prime-time TV, there are 65,000 sexual references. Seven out of eight of the sexual encounters in TV dramas involve extra-marital relations. Reality? A 1994 University of Chicago study showed that both sexual satisfaction and frequency is greater among married people than among single people. But in Hollywood, the only kind of sex that seems to be banned is intimacy between husband and wife!

Another landmark study in 1994 (Sex In America: A Definitive Survey) found that marital fidelity is much stronger than the media portrays. 80% of women and 65% of men had no other partners other than their spouses. The study's findings lend "no support to the notion of a promiscuous society." It also gave statistical support to the findings of several other studies showing that those who live together before marriage have less stable marriages if and when they do get married. 57% of respondents were either "extremely happy" or "very happy" with their marriages, another 30% were "generally satisfied," and only 13% were either "fairly unhappy" or "unhappy most of the time."

The authors of this study encountered “a palpable fear of what sex researchers might discover” – in other words, past researchers didn’t want to reexamine their conclusions in light of the actual statistics! These authors presented an exceptional picture of the damage that BAD survey data can have on an entire nation. For example, the incredibly ill-designed surveys of the past (like the Kinsey Reports in the 1950s) warped America’s views on sexuality and helped birth the “free love” of the 1960s. Alfred Kinsey’s work is frequently referenced to support the notion that 10% of the American population is homosexual. The truth? Only 1.4% of women and 2.8% of men are homosexual OR bisexual!

UCLA sociologist James Q. Wilson points out a curious fact: On city streets where broken windows have gone unrepaired, the crime rate immediately soars. Why? The broken windows make an announcement to the public: Here, standards have broken down. Here, no authority applies. Do what you like, without consequences. That is what the media has done to us! TV and movies have become a gigantic broken window to the world. The portrayal of life without standards and behavior without consequences sends out a message that impurity is normal!

The sad thing is that the distinction between the world and so-called “Christianity” is quickly evaporating. With the Internet providing both instant availability and the appearance of anonymity, pornography is one of the fastest growing addictions plaguing our society. A recent George Barna survey revealed there is no statistical difference in pornography use between those who regularly attend church and those who don’t.

To arrive at a biblical perspective of this problem, we must consider what pornography accomplishes – sexual gratification outside of the marriage relationship. That is the very activity the Bible forbids when it commands us to abstain from – and even flee – fornication (“porneia”) in verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 1 Corinthians 6:18. The “sex without persons” that pornography offers is a dangerous dismissal of God’s divine design for sex in the first place. God gave the gift of sex to be expressed only within the intimacy and holiness of marriage for the threefold purpose of procreation (having children – Genesis 1:28), recreation (mutual enjoyment – Proverbs 5:18-19), and identification (bonding physically, psychologically and spiritually as “one flesh” – Genesis 2:24). Pornography accomplishes absolutely none of God’s purposes, and it can be empirically demonstrated that it also serves as a diabolical gateway to many other sins.

The real power of mass media in our day is the power to redefine “normal.” The sinful behavior that we see glamorized not only conveys powerful messages of what is accepted, but what is expected. The fictional world of the media becomes, over time, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Nowhere is this more true or more tragic than in the addictive arena of pornography. It is a virus that kills intimacy, dignity, reality and spirituality. It snuffs out the soul of everyone it touches, because it reduces humanity to a commodity to be used – exactly what the devil has been doing since time began. And while a man may keep his porn addiction secret, he cannot keep it silent – it colors his perception of the life partner God gave (or wants to give) him, it assassinates his own character, it impacts every interaction with the opposite sex, and it annihilates his relationship with God. Pornography is soul poison!

Ever since Adam’s failure in the Garden of Eden, men have been plagued with out-of-control appetites (lusts) within their own bodies that war against holiness. The Bible has much to say about lust because it destroys our spiritual life. And since the appetites that can cause lust cannot be removed from our lives (that would make us less than human), there is only one way to deal with lust – it must be subdued by something more powerful. Only as we yield to God will we be able to not yield to lust. It is a battle we must win – the happiness of our spouses, the heritage of our children, and the health of our souls depend on it.

HOW TO AVOID SEXUAL TEMPTATION:

- **Recognize the consequences of sexual sin.**

Proverbs 6:32 But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.

- **Accept responsibility for yourself.**

We make excuses based on the false assumption that we can never change our actions until we first experience a change of feeling. ***(changed feelings = changed thinking = changed behavior)***

The practical truth for someone in bondage is actually the reverse! ***(changed behavior = changed thinking = changed feelings)***

- **RUN!**

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

Joseph was a COWARD when it came to sexual temptation. He didn’t try to see how strong he was. He didn’t play with it. HE RAN!

If you've messed up, that's what the grace of God is for. Don't go back to your sin. Don't even look back. LEAVE YOUR COAT!