

## Counseling for Pornography Addiction

By Casey Hough

### Introduction

In his book, *The Drug of the New Millennium*, Mark Kastleman reports that nearly "50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women are addicted to pornography."<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that nearly 247 million US citizens claim to be Christian,<sup>2</sup> Kastleman's claim should come as no surprise since the United States contributed nearly 14 billion dollars to the pornography industry in 2006.<sup>3</sup> To give the reader a perspective, Pastor Mark Driscoll says, "*Christians* are part of a culture that spends more money each year on pornography than country music, rock music, jazz music, classical music, Broadway plays, and ballet combined."<sup>4</sup> If these statistics are true, then pornography is affecting the American church at epidemic proportion. This reality raises many questions. For instance, what are Christians to do in a "pornified society?" Are they to withdraw? Or are they to fight back? If they are to fight back, then how do they fight? And if they fight, on what grounds do they fight? All of the questions are crucial and must be answered carefully and thoroughly. Yet, of all of the questions that surround the debate, two seem to be the most important. The first question is this: What does the Bible teach about sexuality? The second question is similar: What does the Bible teach about pornography? The answers to these questions are absolutely foundational for the counselor who desires to help those who are addicted to pornography and the Christian who longs for sexual purity. After answering these

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Kastleman, *The Drug of the New Millennium: The Brain Science Behind Internet Pornography Use* (Orem, UT: Power Thinking Publishing, 2007), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (7th ed.; Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 862.

<sup>3</sup> "Internet Pornography Statistics", n.d., <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Porn-Again Christian: A Frank Discussion on Pornography and Masturbation* (Seattle, WA: Mars Hill Church, n.d.), 3.

questions,<sup>5</sup> this paper will briefly consider a biblical approach to pornography addiction and then conclude with recommendations for further study on the pertinent issues.

### **What do the Scriptures teach about Sexuality?**

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." For the Apostle Paul, the test of every word and deed was whether or not it could be done to "the glory of God." The nature of Paul's command requires the reader to have at least an elementary understanding of the glory of God. Essentially, the glory of God is the holiness and righteousness of God made manifest for all to see in Jesus Christ. Two passages are essential for understanding the glory of God in this way. The first is Romans 3:21-22, which says, "<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." In this text, Paul tells his readers that the "righteousness of God" is now being revealed through something other than the law. In this specific case, the revelation of God's righteousness is seen in the totality of Christ's saving work. Yet, in a broader sense, Christ himself, is the "face-to-face" revelation of God's righteousness. In every way, Christ obeyed the will of His Father, leaving His followers with an example. So in the context of Romans 3, Christ is seen to be the "glory of God," because He IS the manifestation of God's holiness and righteousness. Moving ahead to consider the second passage, one will find an explicit reference to the above concept in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6, which says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ." So for Paul, the revelation of the righteousness and holiness of God is found in

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<sup>5</sup> Given the broad nature of these questions, the answers will stick primarily to major themes and issues that are faced in each.

the "face" or the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Paul commands Christians to do "everything for the glory of God," in essence, he is commanding them to be like Christ by manifesting in their "every word and deed" the holiness and righteousness of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Hence, the following consideration of the scriptural teachings on sexuality must continually be judged in light of this overarching principle: the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ.

So then, what does scripture teach about sexuality? There are a number of ways to answer this question. A starting point would be to take the following list<sup>6</sup> (compiled by Justin Taylor) and do extensive exegetical study of each passage,<sup>7</sup> yet for the purposes of this paper, an abbreviated list will suffice to show that scripture is replete with things to say about sexuality:

- Sex is created by God (Colossians 1:16)
- Sex continues to exist by the will of Christ (Colossians 1:17)
- Sex is caused by God (Ephesians 1:11)
- Sex is subject to Christ (Ephesians 1:22)
- Sex is good (1 Timothy 4:4)
- Sex is lawful in the context of marriage (1 Corinthians 10:23)
- Sex is to be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:4-5)
- Sex is both pure and impure (Titus 1:15)
- Christians must be on guard not to be enslaved to sex (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Christians are not to grumble about sex (Philippians 2:14)
- Christians are to rejoice in the Lord during sex (Philippians 4:4)
- Christians are to be content in sex (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- Christians are to practice and pursue sexual relations in holiness and honor (1 Thessalonians 4:4)

This list is helpful, but how can one proceed to answer the question in light of overarching principle of God's glory? In short, the scriptures teach that "sexuality is designed by God as way

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> For a robust look at the scriptural teaching of sexuality, See Daniel Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004).

to know God in Christ more fully."<sup>8</sup> John Piper's comments on this matter are very important. He says

God created human beings in his image –"male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27) – with capacities for intense sexual pleasure and with a calling to commitment in marriage and continence in singleness. And his goal in creating human beings with personhood and passion was to make sure that her would be sexual language and sexual images that would point to the promises and the pleasures of God's relationship to his people and our relationship to him. In other words, the *ultimate* reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable.<sup>9</sup>

Above all other reasons for human sexuality, the divine reason is the most important. The reasons for why it is so important are vast, but specifically in the case of this paper, a God-centered view of sexuality is crucial both for the counselor and the counselee. One of the reasons that pornography and sexual perversion are so rampant in the church is because people have lost a sense of how heinous it is before God. Many are convinced that sexuality is something that "they possess and dispense with at their own pleasure," yet, Scripture teaches that sexuality is first and foremost about God because everything ultimately exists for His glory. Piper is found to be helpful again, by saying that "All misuses of our sexuality (adultery, fornication, illicit fantasies, masturbation, pornography, homosexual behavior, rape, sexual child abuse, bestiality, exhibitionism, and so on) distort the true knowledge of God. God means for human sexual life to be a pointer and foretaste of our relationship with him."<sup>10</sup> Having briefly considered what the scriptures teach about sexuality, how does one begin to answer the question about what the scriptures teach about pornography?

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<sup>8</sup> Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 30.

## What do the Scriptures teach about Pornography?

Before one can answer this question, one must define pornography. The legal definition of pornography is "material that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement." Biblically speaking, the Greek words *porneia* (noun form) and *porneuo* (verb form) are used to describe different forms of unsanctioned sexual behavior and are etymologically related to the present day word, "pornography." Without being anachronistic, one could combine the two definitions to define pornography as "any material that depicts, encourages, perverts, exploits or provokes biblically unsanctioned sexual behavior for the purpose of exciting sexual arousal." With a definition in place, one may now begin to consider the scriptural teachings on pornography.

In very clear terms, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:13 that the body is not "meant for sexual immorality (*porneia*), but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." This means that God's purpose for sexuality is not the use of pornography or the engagement in biblically unsanctioned sexual behavior. Furthermore, in Galatians 5:19, Paul identifies "sexual immorality (*porneia*)" as a "work of the flesh." The contrast, of course, is with the fruit of the Spirit. For Paul, the two should not co-exist. The believer is to live as though they are dead to the flesh and alive in the Spirit, yet, the believer cannot have his/her cake and eat it too. Either they will be indulging in the flesh or they will be walking in the Spirit, but they cannot do both. So not only is pornography explicitly shown to be contrary to God's purpose for sex and life in the Spirit, it is finally shown by Paul in Colossians 3 to be the object of God's wrath. Consider Colossians 3:5-6, which says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality (*porneian*), impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming." No sterner warning could be issued to the one who is indulging in the

sexual immorality of pornography than that God is coming in wrath on account of their sin.

Thus, in summary, pornography is contrary to God's purpose for sexuality, it is contrary to a life of freedom in the Spirit, and it provokes the wrath of God to the point of bringing divine judgment.

### **Various Approaches to Pornography Addiction**

In a "perfect world," the scriptural teaching on sexuality would be praised and the scriptural teaching on pornography would be upheld; yet this is no perfect world.<sup>11</sup> Christians are merely sojourners that are passing through this fallen world. Yet, the effects of this fallen world cannot be ignored. Ever since the Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, this world has been in rebellion against God. But this rebellion is not impersonal; rather, it is very personal. It includes ever human that has ever lived, save the sinless and perfect Son of God, Jesus Christ. The reality of the fallen state of man is fundamental to one's understand of pornography. All sin is essentially symptomatic. It flows out from the idolatrous and rebellious hearts<sup>12</sup> of the creatures that refuse to submit themselves to the lordship of the Sovereign God. Therefore, any attempts to help those who are in bondage to pornography must begin by addressing this fundamental issue: the sinful state of man.

If this fundamental issue of man's sinful state is true, then the first place to begin counseling from is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the gospel is good news of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ to deal with the bad news of the man's sinfulness. Through the obedient life,<sup>13</sup> death,<sup>14</sup> burial,<sup>15</sup> and resurrection of Christ,<sup>16</sup> God has provided a once for all

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<sup>11</sup> In actuality, a perfect world would by definition exclude pornography.

<sup>12</sup> See Jesus' words in Matthew 15:19

<sup>13</sup> Romans 4:23-25, 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13

sacrifice that takes sin away,<sup>17</sup> satisfies the wrath of His holy justice,<sup>18</sup> reconciles the Father,<sup>19</sup> and redeems from bondage to sin and the law.<sup>20</sup> Regarding these truths of Christ's saving work in relationship to counseling, Dennis Johnson writes

Does it sound too simplistic to claim that in the cross of Christ and in the surprising combination of ego-smashing humility and despair-smashing confidence that trust in the gospel produces the power to set struggling people free? Can the cross really free men and women from addictive appetites, whether physical or mental, cut through hearts hardened and turned poisonous by long years of bitter grudge-bearing and blame-shifting, and "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6)? Can it make self-absorbed husbands into sacrificial servant leaders (Eph. 5:25-33)? Can it make defiant or untrusting wives into daughters of the King, set free to glorify their Lord through "respectful and pure conduct," adorned in "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet 3:2-4)? Is the gospel really a panacea – a cure all – or is it just one more "medicine show" product, hyped by claims that no elixir could ever fulfill? ... We believe that when God the Creator provides a cure-all, it really cures all, and that when he sent his eternal Son as redeemer, he set in motion a new creation power that will eventually eradicate both the sin-twisted self-centeredness of our hearts and the sin-inflected wounds that we have inflicted on one another.<sup>21</sup>

Other than concluding by saying, "Amen and Amen," suffice it to say that the gospel is absolutely essential in overcoming not only man's sinfulness, but pornography addiction as well.

At this point, the focus of the paper will deal specifically with the nature of pornography addiction and Biblical counseling that is rooted in the reality of the gospel. First, one needs a

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 5:12-21, Philippians 2:8

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

<sup>16</sup> Romans 4:22-25, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Peter 1:3

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 20:28, John 10:11, Romans 5:6-11, 1 Corinthians 11:24, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 21, Ephesians 5:2, 25, 1 Timothy 2:6, Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-27, 10:8-14, 1 Peter 2:22-25, 3:18

<sup>18</sup> Romans 3:22b-26, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:1-2, 4:10

<sup>19</sup> Romans 5:9-11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Ephesians 2:11-16

<sup>20</sup> Romans 6:5-11, Galatians 3:10-14, 4:1-7, Ephesians 1:7-10, Titus 2:11-14, Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Peter 1:17-19

<sup>21</sup> Elyse Fitzpatrick and Johnson, Dennis, *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 13.

working definition of "addiction." According to Gary Collins, "An addiction is any thinking or behavior that is habitual, repetitious, and very difficult or impossible to control regardless of the consequences."<sup>22</sup> From Collins' definition, it is easy to see that addiction is very closely related to compulsive behavior. Categorically, "pornography addictions" falls under the category of a compulsive sexual behavior. Functionally, "pornography addiction" refers to the habitual and compulsive "use" of pornographic material.

Having defined "pornography addiction," one must now explore its addictive nature. In his groundbreaking book, *Wired for Intimacy*, neuroscientist, William Struthers, writes

Just as food is consumed and digested by the body, pornography is consumed by the senses and digested by the brain. In the digestive process, food is broken down so that it can supply the body with the energy. Waste products are excreted to ensure the health of the organism. Similarly, pornography is taken into the brain via our senses, primarily through sight and touch. However, there is no process for the "waste" products associated with pornography to be removed. Pornography and our response to it alter our brain in a way that is difficult to undo. Pornography is the consumption of sexual poison that becomes part of the fabric of the mind.<sup>23</sup>

The major point to be made here is that pornography addiction, though exploitive of man's fallen nature, begins from outside of a person. It is something that people "take in" through their senses. Pornography is something that is "consumed," and therefore, should be approached like any other "consumption-related" addiction.<sup>24</sup> With this established, Collins' method of dealing with addiction<sup>25</sup> can be adapted to apply to pornography addiction.

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<sup>22</sup> Gary Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (3rd ed.; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 682.

<sup>23</sup> William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009), 20.

<sup>24</sup> For more resources on this matter, See Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010); Ibid.; Robert Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); R Mohler, *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance* (1st ed.; Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2008); Edward Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave, Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel* (Phillipsburg N.J.: P & R Pub., 2001); Patrick Carnes, *In the Shadows of the Net:*

First, the pornography addict must make a "determination" to change. In this case, if it is an unbeliever, they must turn to Christ, for they will never be able to experience true lasting change. If it is a believer, then they too must turn to Christ for the motivation and strength to change.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the pornography addict must "replace" their way of thinking and behaving with activities and thoughts that conform to their goals and desires. A great example of this is seen in John Piper's acronym ANTHEM.<sup>27</sup> The acronym stands for: Avoid the sights and situations that arouse unfitting desire, say No to every lustful thought within five seconds, Turn the mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction, Hold the promise and pleasure of Christ firmly in your mind until it pushes the other images out, Enjoy a superior satisfaction, Move into a useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors.<sup>28</sup> Though there is a small amount of overlap with other points in Collins' method, Piper's ANTHEM clearly demonstrates an example of "replacement" both in thought and deed.<sup>29</sup>

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*Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior* (2nd ed.; Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Collins, *Christian counseling*, 695.

<sup>26</sup> The material on the biblical teaching of sexuality should at least serve as a starting point for motivating the Christian to a life of holiness and sexual purity.

<sup>27</sup> "ANTHEM: Strategies for Fighting Lust - Desiring God", n.d., <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/anthem-strategies-for-fighting-lust>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For more helpful resources on this matter, See Heimbach, *True sexual morality*; John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991); Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*; Joshua Harris, *Not Even A Hint* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003); Tim Challies, *Sexual Detox: A Guide for Guys who are Sick of Porn* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2010); Michael Leahy, *Porn Nation : Conquering America's #1 Addiction* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2008); Wendy Maltz and Maltz, Larry, *The Porn Trap: A Guide to Healing from Porn Addiction* (Enfield, NY: Collins Publishers Group UK, 2009); David Powlison, *Sexual Addiction: Freedom from Compulsive Behavior* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010); Harry Schaumburg, *False Intimacy : Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997); Harry Schaumburg, *Unfiled : Redemption from Sexual Sin, Restoration for Broken Relationships* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009); Kevin Skinner, *Treating Pornography Addiction: The*

Third, the pornography addict must learn how to "fulfill the needs" that use to be "satisfied" through pornography use. For instance, if an addict were using for pornography for a feeling of intimacy, then they must learn what real intimacy is and facilitate ways to pursue it. On this point, as Collins notes, there will be a great need for continual guidance and counseling since many of the needs will be complex and possibly discouraging (i.e. – marriage).

Lastly, the addict must discipline their "lifestyle." This will be hard, but it is absolutely necessary for success in combating pornography addiction. Disciplining (or managing) one's lifestyle may include, but is not limited to: getting a physical, beginning to exercise, developing a hobby, and adapting a daily routine. Yet, nothing will be more important for an addict's recovery than being involved in the community of Christian believers. The church will be an indispensable resource for the recovering pornography addict.

In conclusion, the counselor who is equipped with the gospel of Christ is sufficiently prepared to deal with pornography addiction. As for the Biblical counseling method that was proposed above, its effectiveness is predicated on the reality of the gospel and the sovereign work of God. Therefore, may the counselor be full of God's word and constantly in prayer as he seeks to help addicts live for Christ.

### **Recommended Resources**

Due to space and time constraints, many things regarding pornography addiction could not be covered. In an effort to supplement the preliminary material from this paper, the following resources will provide information and further suggestions for combating pornography and helping those who are in bondage to it.

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*Essential Tools for Recovery* (Provo, UT: GrowthClimate Inc., 2005); Meg Wilson, *Hope after Betrayal: Healing When Sexual Addiction Invades Your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007).

## ***Books***<sup>30</sup>

***Accountability Software*** – All of these programs can be installed on the PC/Mac of the user and programmed to report internet history to select accountability partners. Also, the SafeEyes software ([www.internetsafety.com](http://www.internetsafety.com)) provides not only monitoring options, but also filtering options.

[www.CovenantEyes.com](http://www.CovenantEyes.com)

[www.InternetSafety.com](http://www.InternetSafety.com)

[www.XXXChurch.com](http://www.XXXChurch.com)

## ***Professional Counseling Services***

[www.StonegateResources.org](http://www.StonegateResources.org)

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<sup>30</sup> Please see the Bibliography for a list of books on these issues

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