

# Confessions of a Missionary Addicted to Porn

*Paul Rutherford explains the lies he believed and to which he was in bondage about pornography, until Jesus helped him achieve sexual sobriety.*

## Introduction—But Really, a Prologue. A Really Important Prologue.

Internet pornography use is ubiquitous. The metric you use to support that statement doesn't seem to matter: percent of internet users who consume it, number of bits of data flowing through the Internet, or even cash currency. It is a huge business. And the internet distributes pornography at levels historically unprecedented. It quickly became easy to access, cheap to acquire, and anonymous to consume.

I am myself no stranger to the consumption of internet pornography. To be clear, consuming pornographic material is not appropriate for a believer in Jesus Christ. Our [website](#) has more information on this. But I don't think that principle needs repeating; my older brothers in the faith have been very clear about that.

In this article I want to share with you some insights the Lord has taught me through my struggle to be free of an addiction to internet pornography. I will be frank. And rather than condemning you for your sin (the enemy does a plenty good job at that), I will address a number of beliefs you may find you hold, even if unwittingly. Then you'll see how those beliefs do not reflect reality—they are all a lie.

# I Like Porn Because It's Easy

My name is Paul, and I am a missionary. In the late 2000's the Lord made plain to me that I was no longer dabbling with internet pornography, it had become my master. I was addicted, and I needed help.



By God's grace I found help through a group [recovery program](#) at a local church. I later placed membership there, and have found freedom from this life-sucking addiction. Still, I carry the wounds inflicted by my choices years ago. The balm of Christ has healed them. I'm walking today in the freedom only forgiveness from the Father can provide. By God's grace I have a beautiful wife, a blessed marriage, and three wonderful children.

Hindsight, though, is 20/20, and while I must be vigilant every day to guard against temptation, time and space have provided me perspective to gain clarity on the beliefs that got me into my addiction in the first place and kept me down for some time. I've since come to realize there were five lies in particular that I was believing. Let me share them with you, along with the truth that will set you free.

The first reason I love porn is because it is easy. It is easy to access, yes—as easy to access as turning on my smart phone. Years ago it was far more difficult to acquire. Now I carry temptation in my pocket! How dangerous! Only by God's grace am I sober from porn today.

When I say I love porn because it's easy, what I mean is it's easily to get what I want from sex without all the hard work. Pursuing my wife is hard work. Empathy is not easily mustered. Emotional intimacy with her is no easy task. Pornography on the other hand, is just a tap away. If all I'm looking for is that release, surely porn is a better choice because it's an

easier route. Same destination, right? No harm no foul. Right?

Wrong.

Nope. Not true. Pornography is in fact NOT easy because it circumvents God's good plan for sex.

Pornography only seems to be easy. That is just an appearance. Ultimately porn complicates my life. Confessing relapse to my wife? Not easy. Confessing lust to my small group and others? Difficult. The wound I inflicted on my wife by spiritually cheating on her? Not easy for her. The months of work required to earn back her trust? Not easy.

The ease of pornography is a lie. The truth is, it complicates my life and makes it harder. If you are tied up in it, please confess it to the Lord today, and confess it to another human being. The first step to getting better is simple. Admit you have a problem.

## **I Like Porn Because It's Fast**

I love pornography because it's fast. I get pleasure fast. I get satisfaction quickly. I get what I want, and I get it now. Sound familiar? It's not unlike that famous song lyric from the 70's, "Wham bam, thank you, ma'am."

What I love about pornography is that it gives me what I want, and it gives it to me fast. No waiting involved. No patience required. Faster is better. Isn't it? Why rent the "Eight Minute Abs" workout VHS from the local video store, when "Seven Minute Abs" is on the shelf right next to it? (As referenced from the 90s film *Tommy Boy* starring Chris Farley.)

What I love about pornography is how it satisfies quickly. Pornography only asks for a few minutes of my time and then gives me what I want.

Do you know how long it takes to pursue my wife? It took

months to get to know her when we were dating. It took months to plan, prepare, then execute our wedding. Now that we're married, do you know how long it takes to pursue her, so that she feels close to me, intimately and emotionally connected? That takes a LOT longer than the time required to log on to the internet.

The problem with loving pornography because it's fast, is that eventually it isn't. The truth is pornography has sapped years from my life.

There was a season I was a casual user of pornography, and on a fine spring afternoon, I finished up work early for the day and looked forward to what adventures I might pursue with the remainder of that evening. By the time I went to bed that night, I'd wasted hours of my life consuming internet pornography.

The problem with pornography is that it *is* fast, until it requires hours of your life you would rather have spent otherwise. Furthermore, this trend continued for months, even years!

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." The fast pleasure of pornography seemed to me like the right way in the moment. Now I realize it is the way to death—death of my relationship with the Lord because sin separates me from Him; it is death to intimacy with my wife; death to time and energy that could have been better spend elsewhere doing things other than pornography itself.

The death I experienced led to so much loss because of the work required in my relationships to clean up the mess of my sin. It was a process over several years. I loved pornography initially because it was fast. it's not, and it's not worth it!

# **I Like Porn Because I'm in Charge**

The third reason I love pornography is because I am in charge. I get what I want and risk nothing in return. I remain in control. I give up nothing. I risk nothing. It's everything a man-fearing, people-pleaser could ask for. Except that's not the true identity for a believer in Jesus Christ. And if you identify with Christ, then this applies to you.

Pornography is great because I remain in charge. I have control. That whole fear of rejection thing is not a problem. Since I'm not entering into a real relationship with a real person, I'm not taking any of those risks. I don't have to reveal anything about myself. I don't even have to give my name. I don't have to share my anxieties, my fears, or my dreams. I don't have to share anything.

With porn, I don't have to admit that I'm human in any way. And this appeal is strong for those of us who are cowards. And I am one. Since I fear rejection—and porn never risks rejection—it gives the false illusion of security. It's a lie.

Sadly, this means what I love about pornography is how it enables my cowardice.

This has no place for the genuine Christ-follower.

If you have taken a wife, you are called to love that woman as Christ has loved His Church. Jesus Christ is the paragon of courage, bravery, and vulnerability. If you are a husband, then the standard by which to compare yourself as a husband is not to your neighbor but to Christ Himself. That is a high call, friend—much higher than you or I are accustomed to, I'm afraid.

I like pornography because I feel like I'm in charge. But that is a lie. Being strung out, addicted to pornography, shows that you definitely are not in charge. It's a farce. It's a lie.

The truth is I have far less control than I desire. When it come to my wife's opinion of me, I have no control. Zero. I have a lot of influence, but no control. That's the risk inherent to the job of husbanding a wife. That's the risk inherent in marriage.

Marital love is a self-giving love. As Jesus died to love His bride when she was in sin, so you too, husband, are called to love your bride even if you are in fact right, and she is in fact wrong. Love her anyway. Love her always. It will require you to take risks. But it's ok. Those risks are good—both for you, your wife, your family, and the family of God.

## **I Like Porn Because I Get What I Want**

The fourth reason I love porn is because I get what I want. That's what we all want, isn't it? We want what we want, and we want it now. That somehow seems like America's motto these days. Give me what I want but don't make me work for it. Capitalism does have some downsides.

In moments of temptation all I feel is my desire for gratification. I've learned from years now of recovery that I rationalize the pursuit of fulfilling this temptation by telling myself how good I've been, how many good things I've done, or perhaps with how much I've sacrificed to do the right thing.

If you can't tell already, the problem with this reason is that it is purely selfish. It's the definition of immaturity. You want what you want, and you don't care who you hurt to get it—be that your spouse, the Lord, your community, your children, or even yourself.

The Bible calls this “gratification of the flesh.” In Ephesians 2:1-3 the author, Paul, admits that all believers in Jesus once lived this way, giving into the desires and inclinations of our sinful flesh. Insisting on getting what I

want is sin.

The worst part is that I wasn't actually getting what I wanted. That too was a lie. My flesh was merely chasing that fleeting feeling. The truth is, I have a God-given desire for the feeling, but also so much more: a desire for connection to another person, a desire to belong, a desire for intimacy—the thrill of knowing another and being known by another.

Porn never delivers any of these. Porn delivers emptiness, isolation, and disappointment. Marriage, on the other hand, delivers intimacy, satisfaction, and as a bonus, sanctification. This was God's intent from the beginning. You can also have this today if you are married. And it is God's will for you to find all your healthy sexual desire to be fulfilled by your spouse. It *can* happen. There *is* hope, and it is in Christ.

Don't believe the lie that porn will give you what you want. It's a bill of goods. Learn from my mistakes, please. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 14:12)

## **I Like Porn Because It's Cheap**

The fifth and last reason I will share that I love pornography is because it's cheap. It doesn't cost me anything. There is so much free pornography on the internet I struggled in my addiction for years, consuming hundreds of hours of content, and never paid a dime.

At the time I told myself I wasn't paying for it. That made me feel better about myself. At least it made me feel better about my budget.

The problem with pornography being cheap is that it's a lie. Pornography is NOT cheap. It's exceedingly costly. My problem was that I was looking at it strictly from the material point

of view. I was looking only at dollar signs. How many dollars did I spend on my addiction? None? Ok, well no harm to the budget, no foul. The worldview problem with this is that I was behaving like a materialist, like a naturalist, as if the natural, physical, material world were what mattered most.

Don't get me wrong—the material world matters, but so does the spiritual. And that was what I was ignoring.

The truth is, pornography cost me SO much. It has cost me hours of my life wasted, given away to sin. It has cost me trust and intimacy with my wife, gone for whole seasons at a time due to relapse. It has cost me a job opportunity. It has cost me the intimacy of being known by my community of brothers who would love me, care for me, and shepherd me into a joy-filled, holy, pure, and blameless walk with the Lord. It has cost me time, intimacy, and joy from being with the Lord, knowing Him, and enjoying Him.

What costs more than your relationship with the Father?

I loved porn because it was cheap—well, free in terms of dollars. But in relational capital it has cost me something that can't be purchased with ALL the dollars in the world. It isn't enough.

I'm grateful to God that He paid the awful cost of my sin, when the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and rise again. Jesus' death satisfied my sin's debt—the one I owed the Father.

Pornography is so expensive. It cost Jesus His life. Please, if you're addicted, turn to the Father today. Follow the counsel of James 5:16 today: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed." I know you're scared. But trust me that this fear you feel for confessing and taking that first step out of addiction is from the enemy, not the Lord. Trust the Lord. He will make your path straight. He is good, and He loves you.

### Why I Love Porn (The Lies)

It's easy

It's fast

I'm in charge

I get what I want

It's cheap

### How the Story Ends (The Truth)

But it doesn't satisfy

But it sapped my life for  
years.

Until I couldn't stop.

Except I hate myself  
after.

But it nearly cost me my  
marriage.

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## Salt and Light Online

*During the pandemic, I was honored to be asked to address a student leadership conference for a Christian school in the Philippines via Zoom. Looking over my notes, there isn't much here that doesn't apply to ALL of us with any kind of online connection.*

In order to follow Jesus' call to be salt and light, and applying it to online life, I'd like to take a look at several dangers of the dark side of online life, as well as suggest ways to be wise in the use of this technology.

### **The Comparison Trap**

I don't think anything has fueled the temptation to compare ourselves to others as much as social media. There is a wise saying that "Comparison is the thief of joy."

This is where our feelings go when we're caught in the comparison trap: to envy. To depression and anxiety.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:30)

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (Proverbs 12:25)

The opposite of comparing is choosing contentment.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

And one of the best ways to choose contentment is to train yourself to practice gratitude. Give thanks for what the Lord has allowed for you.

Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

## **Dangers of Social Media Apps**

One of the worst is Tiktok.

A 17 year old girl wrote: "The only thing worse that happened to me besides Tiktok was my family members dying . . . . I would spend countless hours crying in my bedroom repeatedly watching Tiktok, telling myself I wasn't good enough."

Another girl told of starving herself to look like the people Tiktok decides are acceptable.

Tiktok destroys people's self-esteem. Millions of kids try to learn the dances to fit in or feel accepted.

There is a strong pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia presence, causing lots of girls to develop eating disorders because

adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure.

The message on so many of the apps for girls is: If you want to be seen, heard, loved—show off your body. No one is valuing you for your heart or your mind or your passions, just your appearance. Just your body.

This is so dangerous! It's a lie that a girl's worth is in how pretty she is or how thin she is or how sexy she is.

A person's worth is set by Jesus, who was willing to pay for each one of us with His life. He says, "I made you in My image, and that makes you infinitely valuable to begin with. Then I died for you, which proves you are infinitely valuable." THAT is true worth. It's set by Jesus Himself.

Many of the apps are also dangerous because sexual predators use them to trick kids and lure them into meeting, where bad things happen. So many victims of sex trafficking are drawn in on social media.

Another way social media is dangerous is because there's where so much cyber-bullying happens.

If you see someone being bullied, ask the Lord for help and be brave. Speak up and say, "That's not okay." There is power in just one voice! And report it—to whatever authorities have to do with how you know the person, such as school, or church, or the neighborhood. Keep inviting Jesus into the situation and ask for supernatural help.

Another problem with Tiktok in particular is a different kind of danger, concerning privacy and security.

One expert said, "Anytime Amazon, major banks, and the Department of Defense ban employees from using an app for security issues, it's time for everyone to uninstall the app."

You need to know that NOTHING you put on social media is private.

## Other Emotional Dangers

The more time you spend online, the greater your risk of feeling isolated and taken to a dark place emotionally. Because of the pandemic's lockdown, depression and loneliness are at an all-time high.

Scrolling your social media feeds contributes to feeling left out.

Too much social media leads to disconnection and loneliness, and feelings of social isolation. Too much social media makes us feel inadequate because of the comparison thing.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology revealed that those who limited their social media exposure to 30 minutes a day, reported that their depression lifted and their loneliness improved. Social media activist [Collin Karchner](#), founder of the "Save the Kids" movement, kept hearing from U.S. students that they reported feeling better immediately after deleting their social media apps!

Another aspect of spending too much time online is that it can cause difficulty engaging in conversations in real life. Which of course fuels the loneliness further.

## Purity

Probably the MAJOR pitfall of the Internet is pornography.

The fastest growing consumer of porn is girls 15-30. I found one statistic that 70% of guys and 50% of girls struggle with a porn problem. I think it's higher than that.

I understand that when apologist and speaker Josh McDowell offered a one-month discipleship program for Christian student leader, he learned that 100% of both guys and girls confessed to problems with porn.

Brain chemicals are released when viewing pornography and

during sexual experiences. These brain chemicals are intended to bond husband and wife like emotional superglue, but when people use porn, they bond to the porn instead of an actual person.

This is a matter of spiritual warfare. The enemy of our souls is taking captive millions of Christians through pornography, then beating them up with shame and guilt.

I plead with you, install a filter or an accountability program on your phone to help you stand against this attack on your purity.

And please, don't take pictures of your bodies. And most certainly do not send any pictures of body parts to other people!

**You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)**

**The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:4)**

Your body was bought by Jesus and it belongs to Him. It's not okay to give it away, even in pictures, to anyone except the person you have married.

**What would being WISE look like, then?**

First, recognize that this is a huge issue, especially in the Philippines. People in your country spend more time online than any other country in the world-almost 11 hours a day. You also spend more time on social media, over four hours, than any other country-twice the worldwide average.

It would be wise to choose to unplug yourselves so you can replenish your mental, emotional, and spiritual resources.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

There has to be a choice to deny ourselves and say NO to the phone as a way of saying YES to Jesus.

Think about all the ways you stay tethered to your phone so it controls you.

Get a real alarm clock and watch so you're not dependent on your phone to tell you what time it is.

At night, recharge your phone in another room so your sleep won't be disturbed by the sound and light of incoming messages and notifications.

Don't post on social media when you're emotional. Don't treat social media like a diary. Then you won't regret emotional posting that embarrasses you later.

If you're already feeling down, don't scroll social media. It will make you feel even worse.

To be emotionally healthy, let yourself feel your feelings instead of distracting yourself by scrolling.

Put your phone down and be 100% mindful of what's happening in your life at that moment.

The blue light from screens decreases your melatonin levels, which leads to sleep problems. Turn off your screen an hour before bed to help yourself sleep better.

## **Love One Another**

Before you post anything, ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Will it cause drama?

- Am I posting this for the right reason?
- Would my grandmother want to see this?
- Is it mine to share?
- Would I say this or share this in real life?
- Does this glorify God?

Can you see how passing your post through the filter of these insightful questions would be loving?

## The Big Picture

There are two verses that strike me as especially appropriate to this issue:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

So then, whether you eat or drink OR WHATEVER YOU DO, do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

If that is the question we ask: “Will this bring glory to God?” we will find ourselves being loving, kind, respectful Christ-followers who are bringing salt and light into the dark and corrupt world of the internet.

And we will earn the Lord’s accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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# What God Says About Sex – A

# Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

*Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God's perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.*

## The Pickle Principle

It's not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God's gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world's perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.



Counselor [Waylon Ward](#) offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls “the Pickle Principle.” In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world's sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and

music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure.{1} Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.{2}

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.{3} It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It's like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His "pickled people" out of the world's brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

## **Sex is God's Invention! The Purpose of Sex**

Sex is God's idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men's and women's body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and

wife, we can express and enjoy God's two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called [What God Says About Sex](#),<sup>{4}</sup> Eric Elder says that intimacy really means "into-me-see." It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, "warts and all," to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive "till death do us part." The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.<sup>{5}</sup> God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.<sup>{6}</sup>

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God's intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another's love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very *other* beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it

to be holy and sacred—and protected.

## **So . . . What Does God Actually Say?**

A lot of people believe the Bible says, “Sex is fun and it feels good, so don’t do it.” Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God’s great idea in the first place! But God’s view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world’s perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.<sup>{7}</sup> As I said above, sex is so powerful that it’s like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what’s best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God’s own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special,<sup>{8}</sup> a gift that we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents “ghosts” in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[{9}](#) God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires," which means "until the time is right."[{10}](#) As I minister to sexually broken people,[{11}](#) most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It's for adults. *Married* adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it's ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality.[{12}](#) In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.[{13}](#) That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you're not physically touching another person's body doesn't mean it's not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.[{14}](#)

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me?[{15}](#) This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn't build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I'm about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with *His*

supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.{16}

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, “Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!”{17} In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.{18}

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

## Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin.{19} Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,{20} but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It’s pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, “In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two

partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you.”[\[21\]](#)

The pickling brine of our culture’s increased sensuality says, “If it feels good, do it. You’re entitled.” But while this belief about sex may *feel* good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn’t meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He’s doing, and we do well to follow.

## Notes

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O’Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7.
2. Ibid., 8.
3. Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:15-16.
4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact [theranch.org/2006/07/03/bookstore-what-god-says-about-sex/](http://theranch.org/2006/07/03/bookstore-what-god-says-about-sex/) for more information.
5. Hebrews 13:4.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.
7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated “sexual immorality”), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws

the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries ([www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org)), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don't struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse has long been a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. Song of Solomon 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

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# Probe Survey 2020 Report 5: Sexual Attitudes and Religion vs. Science

*Steve Cable continues his analysis of Probe's 2020 survey of American religious views moving over to consider their response to sexual mores of today and how they navigate religion and science.*

The previous reports on Probe Survey 2020 were primarily focused on religious beliefs and practices. In this report, we will look at how these beliefs impact Americans as they deal with sexual issues and with navigating the relationship between religion and science. In general, the survey results confirm a continuing degradation in Americans', and particularly Born Agains', view of sex within a heterosexual marriage. We find that fewer than one in five Born Again Protestants affirm a biblical view in this area. On the other hand, Americans still tend to consider religious views at least as important as scientific positions in establishing their beliefs.

## American Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

We asked four questions regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors in this survey.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly
2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:
  - a. To be avoided
  - b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.

- c. A matter of personal choice
- d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
- e. Don't know

3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:

- a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
- b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
- c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
- d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

4. People attracted to same sex relationships are:

- a. To be loved and affirmed in their sexual choices.
- b. To be avoided as much as possible.
- c. To be accepted while hoping they realize there is a better way.
- d. To be loved and told God's truth regarding our sexual practices.

First, let's see how the different religious affiliations impact the answers to these questions.

## Sex Among Unmarried People

First, let us establish the biblical standard for sexual relations outside of marriage. Is there clear teaching on this topic? Consider Jesus' discussion in the Sermon on the Mount where He said, "You have heard that it was said, '**Do not commit adultery.**' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."[{1}](#)

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul writes, "For this is God's will: that you become holy, that you keep away from sexual immorality." And then in 1 Peter 2:11, Peter writes, "I urge

you to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” It is very clear that the biblical standard calls for all sexual relations to occur within a marriage between one man and one woman.

✖ Results from the first question are plotted in Figure 1. As shown, here and in the next three graphs, we will look at those ages 18 through 29 next to those ages 40 through 55 to see if there are differences based on age. If there is a trend or variation seen in the 30 through 39 age group, then that one is also shown as seen for Born Again Protestants in Figure 1.

The graph shows the older group of Born Again Protestants is much more likely to Strongly Agree that fornication is always a mistake than the youngest group, dropping from almost one half to a little over one quarter, 46% to 29%. **Over two thirds of Younger Born Again Protestants have adopted the common view of the culture** that sex and marriage are not necessarily related. Note that even among the older group, **less than half of them strongly agree that sex outside of marriage is always a mistake.**

Looking across other religious affiliations, we see that the vast majority said they Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with this statement<sup>[2]</sup>. They generally believe that sex outside of marriage by unmarried people is not an issue. This is particularly true of the Unaffiliated with close to 90% (nine out of ten) disagreeing.

How have these views changed among born again young adult individuals over the last decade? Looking at the GSS survey from 2008, we find that over one in three (37%) Born Again Christians ages 18 through 29 agree with the statement, “If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, I think it is always wrong.” Now in 2020, we find that over one quarter (27%) of Born Again Christians agree that it is always wrong. Although the questions asked were not identical, they are

close enough to indicate that the drop of ten percentage points is a significant decline in young adult, Born Again Christians who take a biblical position on sexual activity outside of marriage.

### **Pornography.**



The second question deals with views on the acceptability of viewing pornographic material. What does the Bible tell us about feeding our minds with sexually immoral material? Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." We are warned in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee sexual immorality! Every sin a person commits is outside of the body but the immoral person sins against his own body." And further in Ephesians 5:3, "But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints." Clearly, avoiding sexual immorality in all forms includes avoiding explicit sexual material.

The results are shown in Figure 2. Once again, we see that Born Again Protestants are much more likely to say that we should avoid exposure to such material. Both the younger group and the older have more than 50% who say it is "to be avoided." However, the data also shows over four out of ten Born Again Protestants believe it is usually okay. Given what we know about the negative effects of [pornography](#) on healthy living and relationships, this result is surprising.

All the other religious affiliations have only a small percentage of people who think that explicit sexual material should be avoided. Only about one in five Other Protestants and Catholics affirm that pornography is to be avoided. Once again, the Unaffiliated lag those affiliated with some religion having only about one in twenty (5%) that think pornography should be avoided.

For those who are not Born Again Protestants, around 10% to

20% say that such material is okay if no one is hurt in them. These people fail to realize that the person being hurt by these materials is themselves and their loved ones. More surprisingly, the vast majority of these people selected “a matter of personal choice” or “not a problem if you enjoy it,” implying that if people are shown being harmed in this pornographic material, that is perfectly okay if you enjoy it or want to put up with it.

## Living Together Before Marriage

What does the Bible tell us about living in a sexual relationship before marriage? In Colossians 3:5, Paul states, “So put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry.” The current philosophy of “try before you buy” is popular but totally contrary to biblical instruction for a rich, fulfilling life. This philosophy clearly “belongs to the earth.”


✖ The third question examines views on whether it is a good thing to live together in a sexual relationship before committing to marriage. The results are summarized in Figure 3. This is another question where Born Again Protestants show a significant difference based on age. The older group, 40 through 55, shows almost 60% who say that it should be avoided as instructed by God. The younger group, 18 through 29, shows only 40% with the same viewpoint. Across all age ranges only about one half of Born Again Protestants say that this practice should be avoided. So, even among this group, over half believe that it is okay and might be helpful.

Once again, this question reveals a stark difference between Born Again Protestants and all other religious affiliations. Other Christian groups show **much fewer** than one in five adherents who believe this practice should be avoided. And we see the Unaffiliated lead the other viewpoint, with about nine out of ten of them saying the practice “might be helpful” or

“makes sense in today’s culture.”

### **Same Sex Relationships.**

The fourth question deals with how people react toward those who profess to have a sexual attraction towards those of the same gender. What does the Bible say about same sex relationships? Let’s consider the instruction from 1 Corinthians 6:9b-11, “Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolators, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

The verse above tells us two things. First, that someone  who is given over to homosexual activity (like those given over to idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed) are not true followers of Christ. Even in Paul’s era, many were apparently saying they would inherit the kingdom of God and so Paul begins the statement by saying “Do not be deceived.” But it also clearly states that such a one can be washed, sanctified and justified in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should love them and tell them the truth that God has a better way for their life.

Note that our question does not distinguish between those experiencing same sex attraction and those actively involved in living out their attraction through homosexual activity. Both categories of people need to be loved and told the truth.

The results for this question are summarized in Figure 4. As shown, we see some difference based on age for Born Again Protestants. However, it is not as pronounced as for the question on fornication above. Looked at as a group between age 18 and 55, less than one half of Born Again Protestants selected loving them and telling them what the Bible says

about homosexual practices.

Once again, all other groups are much less likely to take a biblical position. However, when we add in the answer about “accepting them while hoping they find a better way”, the other religious groups (excluding the Unaffiliated) show almost four in ten who desire them to find a better way.

Note that Other Protestants are most likely at 20% (about one out of five) to say they would try to avoid people attracted to the same gender.

### **Combining Questions for Born Again Protestants.**

How many Born Again Protestants take a clear biblical view of all four questions concerning sexual attitudes and behaviors? Results are shown in the adjacent chart. The chart begins with results by age for the first question concerning fornication. As you move to the right, additional questions are added to the questions already addressed to the left. Thus, the bars on the right include those who took a biblical position on all four of the questions.

✖ Clearly, ones in the older group are more likely to take a biblical view on sexual behavior. In fact, on the far right, we see that those 40 to 55 are twice as likely as those 18 to 29 to hold to a biblical view. However, more important, is that over 80% of the younger ages and over 75% of the oldest ages do not hold to a biblical view on these combined topics regarding sexual behavior.

To understand how disturbing these results should be, consider **Born Again Christians with a biblical view on sexuality as a percentage of the entire United States population. The results are 2% for 18 through 29, 3% for 30 through 39, and a whopping 6% for 40 through 55.** In other words, a slim remnant of adults in America hold to a biblical view of sexuality. A secular view promoting no relationship between sexual behavior and marriage and no limits on satisfying one's lusts currently

dominates our national thinking.

### **Don't Do What You Say You Will Do.**

We will address this topic more fully under Topic 10 but it is relevant to thinking about the Combining Question topic above. We asked this question:

*When you are faced with a personal moral choice, which one of the following statements best describes how you will most likely decide what to do?*

One of the answer choices is "Do what biblical principles teach."

Almost half (47%) of Born Again Protestant young adults (18 through 39) selected that answer. They would follow biblical principles in making moral decisions. Yet as just seen, only about 15% of Born Again Protestant young adults selected biblical principles on all four questions regarding sexual behaviors.

*Although we can't be certain, it appears that many Born Again Protestant young adults either don't know what topics are covered under moral choices OR they don't know what biblical principles teach OR both. Clearly, almost half of Born Again Protestant young adults think that they are choosing to think biblically about moral choices, but most of them are not living the way they think they are.*

### **Responding to These Results on Sexual Attitudes**

All of the results presented above show that a large majority of young adult, Born Again Protestants do not adhere to a biblical position on topics related to sexual morality. The data also shows that when Born Again Protestants enter the world of higher education and secular careers, they are surrounded by an even greater majority of people who believe that pretty much anything is acceptable in the area of sexual

relations. Among other conclusions, we can be sure that these two data points tell us that while young adults were involved in church as teenagers, they were not adequately taught the basics of Christian doctrine in the area of sexuality and did not receive a good explanation as to why the Christian attitudes are much, much better than the free license rampant in our society today.

Christian teaching on sexuality must occur more frequently from the pulpit, in bible studies, in small group times. If we think that parents as the only source of information are sufficient to set up young Christians to be an example of godly sexuality, the data says “not so fast.” However, we do not equip parents to discuss these matters with their children. We cannot allow their peers to set the bar on acceptable behavior.

## **American Attitudes Concerning Science and Religion**

We included three questions probing people’s views on the relationship between science and religion. The first question relates to any apparent conflicts between current scientific theories and their beliefs based on their religion. From the answers, one can tell whether the respondent puts more credence in current scientific theories or in their religious beliefs. The question is:


**Question #1: When apparent conflicts appear between science and religious teachings, one should:**

1. Ignore science, accepting that when science learns more it will agree with your religion.
2. Examine your religious teachings to determine if the scriptures are in conflict or it is just someone’s interpretation of the scriptures that

conflict.

3. Change your religious views to align with current scientific views.

4. Abandon your religion as being false.

The first two answers are consistent with a Basic/Enhanced  Biblical Worldview, reflecting 1) a view that their scripture is informed by a higher source of truth than simple science can draw upon, 2) a recognition that generally accepted scientific viewpoints have often changed over time, and 3) on the type of scientific questions being addressed here, there are in most cases a variety of theories supported by different groups of scientists. The second answer includes the possibility that the person's holy scriptures do not directly address the topic at hand, but that some religious leaders have inferred a position on the topic from their interpretation of scriptures.

The second two answers, i.e. 3 and 4, reflect a view that scientific teaching communicates truth that religious teachings are unable to counter. The third answer results in a religious viewpoint that will vary over time as scientific ideas gain or fall out of favor in the scientific community.

As shown in the figure, the majority of American young adults do not accept that science is infallible (by supporting answers 3 or 4). Less than 10% of Born Again Protestants selected one of these answers. And even among the Unaffiliated, less than half of them selected an answer where scientific theories trump other sources of beliefs.

At the same time, those who selected a view that ignores science all together (answer 1) were a small minority as well. Less than one in five (20%) of the Born Again Protestants and slightly over one out of ten for the other religious groups.

So well over 50% of all religious groups selected answer

number 2, showing a willingness to go against science but also a desire to meld the views of science into their religious views. We did not ask a follow up question as to what they would do if they determined there was an unresolvable conflict with the current position supported by most scientists. There are not many unresolvable conflicts if one is willing to adopt a position supported by a reputable minority of scientists, e.g. intelligent design.

**Question #2: My understanding of human origins is the result of:**

1. Using the Bible alone with no regard for the findings of science.
2. Using science to better understand what the Bible teaches us about origins.
3. Not sure
4. Accepting a completely naturalistic view, i.e. no intelligence involved in the process.

✖ Note these answers follow a similar pattern to those of the first question, but now they are applied to a specific question where many people assume there is no meeting ground between science and religion.

The answers are shown in the adjacent graph. On this more specific question, the percentage of each religious group that is going to look at the Bible alone for their understanding hovers around 30% for all religious groups but plummets to under 8% for the Unaffiliated.


Conversely, only the Unaffiliated show more than three out of ten who “accept a completely naturalistic view” (choice #4). Born Again Protestants show only about one out of eight who select such a view. This result is amazing given the concerted push by some educators to force our students to accept a

completely naturalistic view of creation. However it is consistent with the current state of the research on the origins of man, including new reports from 2021.[\[3\]](#)

The majority for each group of people selected “Not sure” or said they would use science to help them better understand what the Bible teaches.

**Question #3: All real scientists believe that science is the only source of real truth.**

The potential answers ranged from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree and included Neither agree or disagree.

First note that if we strictly define real scientists as  individuals meeting these qualifications—1) a Ph.D. in a scientific field, 2) actively involved in the field, and 3) published in reputable scientific journals—we will find many scientists who agree that there are other sources of truth outside of science. So, we can say with confidence that **the statement in question #3 is objectively, verifiably not true**. However, there are certainly some believers in scientism [the belief that science is the only way to know ultimate truth] who claim the statement is true. They accomplish this trick by claiming that anyone who does not believe that science is the only source of real truth cannot by definition be a real scientist.[\[4\]](#) In other words, they use circular reasoning.

But there is certainly a movement to instill scientism as the favored viewpoint in society.[\[5\]](#) How successful are these proponents of scientism? Looking at the answer shown in the adjacent chart will throw some light on this question.

We would like to see the answer: Strongly Disagree. This answer aligns with the objective truth discussed above. But what we find is that only one out of five (20%) of Born Again Protestants profess this view. Among Other Protestants and Catholics only about one out of twenty (5%) profess this view. Adding some uncertainty by adding those who say they Disagree,

increases those amounts to two out of five (40%) for Born Again Protestants and one out of five (20%) for Other Protestants and Catholics.

Those who agree with the statement range from one out of four (25%) Born Again Protestants up to nearly one half (almost 50%) of Other Protestants and Catholics. Clearly, the proponents of scientism have done a good job of skewing our understanding of who scientists are and what they believe.

### Combining the Questions


☒ What do the results look like when we combine these questions? In our opinion, there are a number of different answers that could be consistent with a biblical worldview. Starting with the strictest view of relying on the Bible rather than science and then adding in those who would look at the results from science to obtain a clearer understanding of what the Bible teaches or those areas where the Bible is silent. Then, we add in their view on scientism which as already discussed is demonstrated by a long list of scientists who disagree to be false, thus being a source of strong disagreement.

The results from this comparison are shown in the adjacent figure. The first thing to notice is that the percentage of Born Again Protestants who take a more fundamental position, i.e. science should be ignored as a source of information, is low for one question and goes down to only a few percentage points when all three questions are combined.

The right hand side of the chart considers all combinations of answers that reflect a commitment to biblical truth above current scientific theories combined with a willingness to consider what science has to offer. As shown, the combination of the first two questions has a large percent of Born Again Protestants, ranging from 55% for the youngest age group and growing to over 65% for the older age group. Since only a

minority of Born Again Protestants stated Strongly Disagree that all scientists are adherents of scientism, when we add that question to the mix on the far right, we see less than one in five take a Biblical position on all three.

### **Effect of a Basic Biblical Worldview.**

A natural question to ask is, “Does having a Basic Biblical Worldview correlate with having a biblical view on these science issues?” We can look at this question by comparing Born Again Protestants with a Basic Biblical Worldview with Born Again Protestants without a Basic BWV. The results are shown in the adjacent figure. 

At a top level, we can see a correlation between a Basic Biblical Worldview and a biblical understanding of the relationship with science. This correlation appears to be strongest with those ages 18 through 29. We see that those with a Basic Biblical Worldview are about twice as likely to have a biblical view on all three of the questions related to science.

### **Responding to These Results on Science and Religion**

As we can see from the first two science questions above, the majority of Americans do not buy into the idea that the only real source of truth is science. They don't believe that scientific positions automatically take precedence over their religious beliefs. Perhaps one factor supporting this stance is an understanding that scientific hypotheses and positions have changed fairly often over the years, particularly in the areas of the origin of life and the role of evolutionary processes on our current bounty of life forms. Certainly, it is not the public school system which has attempted to promote concepts which current day scientists studying the field do not support.

However, Americans do have a skewed view of scientism, with a vast majority believing that all real scientists support this

religious concept. This position is a little surprising given that the view is demonstrably false.

In one area, sexual behavior, even American Christians have thrown out the teaching of the Bible. At the same time, they are resisting the call to make science the ultimate source of truth.

## Notes

1. Matthew 5:27-28
2. There is also a small number of those answering Don't Know included in the number of those who do not state that they Strongly Agree or Agree Somewhat with the statement.
3. In March, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Brian Josephson declared that "intelligent design is valid science." In April, researchers writing in the journal *Current Biology* asked whether Darwin's "tree of life" should "be abandoned."
4. See for example: Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 2006.
5. See for example the book by J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 2018.

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# Pornography – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

*Kerby Anderson looks at pornography from a biblical worldview perspective. He clearly chronicles the physical, emotional and spiritual harm created by pornography and lays out the scriptural warnings to protect us from its degrading effects.*

Pornography has been tearing apart the very fabric of modern society, but the problem has been made much worse with

pornography's proliferation through the Internet. Studies show that 40 million adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites.[{1}](#) To put that in perspective, that is ten times the amount of people who regularly watch baseball.

When I first started writing about pornography in the 1980s, it was already a multi-billion dollar-a-year business mostly promoted through so-called "adult bookstores" and pornographic magazines. With the development of videos, DVDs, and the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous.



The wages of sin are enormous when pornography is involved. Revenue from Internet porn exceeds by nearly a 2 to 1 ratio, the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.[{2}](#) And sales of pornographic material on the Internet surpass the cumulative sales of all other products sold online.[{3}](#)

The current estimate is there are over 4 million pornographic websites representing almost 400 million pages of pornographic material.[{4}](#)

Pornography is not just something a few men view in the late hours in the privacy of their homes. At least 70 percent of porn is downloaded during work hours (9 am to 5 pm). A percentage of those who do so admit to accessing pornography at work.

And pornography also affects those in church. According to *Leadership Journal*, 40 percent of pastors admit to visiting a pornographic website.[{5}](#) And at one Promise Keepers Convention, 53 percent of men admitted to visiting a porn site the week before.[{6}](#)

The impact pornography is having on young people is alarming. It used to be that when you would ask someone when they first saw pornography they would tell you a story about seeing a porn magazine at a friend's house when they were in middle school or high school. Now a child in grade school has already

seen images that were only available in an adult bookstore a few years ago. At one time these images were inaccessible to youth; now they are merely a mouse click away. The average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old. And the largest consumer of Internet pornography is the 12-17 age group.[{7}](#)

How should we define pornography? What is the effect on individuals and society? And what is a biblical perspective on this? I deal with each of these questions in detail in my book, *Christians Ethics in Plain Language*.[{8}](#) In the next section, we address some of these questions.

## Definition and Types of Pornography

How should we define pornography? Pornography has been defined as material that “is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.” Hardcore pornography “is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose.”[{9}](#)

Another important term is obscenity. In the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. California*, the justices set forth a three-part test to define obscenity:[{10}](#)

- (a) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.
- (b) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and
- (c) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

What are the types of pornography? The first type of pornography is adult magazines, which are primarily directed

toward adult male readers. The magazines with the widest distribution (*Playboy* and *Penthouse*) do not violate the *Miller* standards of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed.

The second type of pornography is video. Videocassettes or DVDs are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and the Internet. They have become a growth industry for pornography.

The third type of pornography is motion pictures. Ratings standards are being relaxed, and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called “hard R” rated films would have been considered obscene just a few decades ago.

A fourth type of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. But cable television poses an even greater threat. The Federal Communications Commission does not regulate cable in the same way it does public access stations. Thus, many pornographic movies are shown on cable television.

A fifth type of pornography is audio porn, which includes “Dial-a-porn” telephone calls, the second fastest growth market of pornography. Although most of the messages are within the *Miller* definition of obscenity, these businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A sixth type of pornography is “cyberporn,” or Internet pornography. Virtually anyone can download and view hard-core pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts through the Internet.

## **Addiction to Pornography**

Victor Cline, a psychologist, documented how men become addicted to pornographic materials, then begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and finally act out what they have seen.[{11}](#) He maintained “that memories of experiences

that occurred at times of emotional arousal (which could include sexual arousal) are imprinted on the brain by epinephrine, an adrenal gland hormone, and are difficult to erase. This may partly explain pornography's addicting effect."[{12}](#)

Other research showed that biochemical and neurological responses in individuals who are aroused release the adrenal hormone epinephrine in the brain, which is why one can remember pornographic images seen years before. In response to pleasure, nerve endings release chemicals that reinforce the body's own desire to repeat the process.[{13}](#) Kimberly Young, an authority on Internet addiction, found that 90 percent of those who became addicted to cyberporn became addicted to the two-way communication functions: chat rooms, newsgroups, and e-mail.[{14}](#)

Psychologists identified a five-step pattern in pornographic addiction. The first step is *exposure*. Addicts have been exposed to pornography in many ways, ranging from sexual abuse as children to looking at widely available pornographic magazines.

The second step is *addiction*. People who continually expose themselves to pornography "keep coming back for more and more" in order to get new sexual highs. James L. McCough of the University of California at Irvine said that "experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase."[{15}](#)

A third step is *escalation*. Previous sexual highs become more difficult to attain; therefore users of pornography begin to look for more exotic forms of sexual behavior to bring them stimulation.

A fourth step is *desensitization*. What was initially shocking becomes routine. Shocking and disgusting sexual behavior is no

longer avoided but is sought out for more intense stimulation. Concern about pain and degradation get lost in the pursuit of the next sexual experience.

A fifth step is *acting out fantasies*. People do what they have seen and find pleasurable. Not every pornography addict will become a serial murderer or a rapist. But many do look for ways to act out their sexual fantasies

In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I discuss in further detail the issue of pornographic addiction as well as describe the social and psychological effects of pornography.

## Social Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because of some of the prevailing theories of its impact. One theory was that pornography actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a “safety valve” for potential sexual offenders.

The most famous proponent of this theory was Berl Kutchinsky, a criminologist at the University of Copenhagen. His famous study on pornography found that when the Danish government lifted restrictions on pornography, the number of sex crimes decreased.[\[16\]](#) Therefore, he concluded that the availability of pornography siphons off dangerous sexual impulses. But when the data for his “safety-valve” theory was further evaluated, many of his research flaws began to show.

For example, Kutchinsky failed to distinguish between different kinds of sex crimes (such as rape and indecent exposure) and instead merely lumped them together, effectively masking an increase in rape statistics. He also failed to consider that increased tolerance for certain crimes (public nudity and sex with a minor) may have contributed to a drop in the reported crimes.

Proving cause and effect in pornography is virtually impossible because, ethically, researchers cannot do certain kinds of research. As Dolf Zillman said, "Men cannot be placed at risk of developing sexually violent inclinations by extensive exposure to violent or nonviolent pornography, and women cannot be placed at risk of becoming victims of such inclinations."[\[17\]](#)

Nevertheless, a number of compelling statistics suggest that pornography does have profound social consequences. For example, of the 1,400 child sexual molestation cases in Louisville, Kentucky, between July 1980 and February 1984, adult pornography was connected with each incident and child pornography with the majority of them.[\[18\]](#)

Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves before and during their assaults.[\[19\]](#) 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.[\[20\]](#)

Professor Cass Sunstein, writing in the *Duke Law Journal*, said that some sexual violence against women "would not have occurred but for the massive circulation of pornography." Citing cross-cultural data, he concluded, "The liberalization of pornography laws in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries has been accompanied by a rise in reported rape rates. In countries where pornography laws have not been liberalized, there has been a less steep rise in reported rapes. And in countries where restrictions have been adopted, reported rapes have decreased."[\[21\]](#)

# Biblical Perspective

God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:27) as sexual beings. But because of sin in the world (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24-25).

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Pornography also distorts God's gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-3). When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman's breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man's or woman's sexual organs.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23), adultery (Lev. 18:20), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

A biblical perspective of human sexuality must recognize that sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word "know" indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19). Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Gen. 1:28).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt. 5:27-28).

Moreover, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a

comparison mentality, a performance-based sexuality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, decreased self concept, and obsessive thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

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## **"What's Your Take on 'Fifty**

# Shades of Grey'?"

## What's Your Take on *Fifty Shades of Grey*?

The bottom line for me is that this verbal porn (and now visual as well, with the release of the movie) doesn't pass the "Philippians 4:8 test": "[W]hatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things."

But writer and speaker Dannah Gresh blogged about it so well, I'll just send you to it: "[I'm Not Reading Fifty Shades of Grey.](#)"

There are some disheartening comments on her blog post, which are reasonably rebutted:

**"You shouldn't judge a book you haven't read."** There's enough information out there about this book series to make an informed judgment. Consider God's command in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They didn't know evil personally and experientially, but God still commanded them to stay away from it. God wasn't going to buy the argument, "How can we decide whether or not to partake if we've never tasted evil?"

**"I don't question my faith after reading these books."** Okay, but did they bring you closer to the Lord and to His call to purity? How did they impact your view of God's standards for sexuality? If you enjoyed books that glorify what God calls sin, how do you not see the discrepancy for a Christ-follower?

**"It's just a fictional book, for crying out loud!"** This is the most disturbing of all, because it shows the writer doesn't understand the power of story. People's minds and hearts are not swayed by a list of facts and statistics nearly as much as they are by story, whether in a book or a film or video. The

power of story is that it can slip past the “watchful dragons” of one’s belief system and turn the heart, both for evil and for good. All we have to do is watch how the values of a TV audience change over time by watching certain TV shows. We need to be *more* careful about novels and movies, not less.

Sue Bohlin

Added February 13, 2015:

My pastor answered the question “Is It Okay for a Christian to Go See Fifty Shades of Grey” in this 7-minute episode of *Real Truth Real Quick*:

Posted July 8, 2012; Updated Feb. 13, 2015

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# **Globalization and the Internet – A Christian Considers the Impact**

*Kerby Anderson looks at the growth and role of the Internet through a Christian worldview perspective. It is important that we continue to understand its capabilities and its dangers.*

## **Introduction**

More than one billion people use the Internet and benefit from the vast amount of information that is available to anyone who connects. But any assessment of the Internet will show that it has provided both surprising virtues and unavoidable vices.

Contrary to the oft-repeated joke, Al Gore did not invent the Internet. It was the creation of the Department of Defense that built it in case of a nuclear attack, but its primary use has been during peace. The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency created a primitive version of the Internet known as ARPAnet. It allowed researchers at various universities to collaborate on projects and conduct research without having to be in the same place.

The first area network was operational in the 1980s, and the Internet gained great popularity in the 1990s because of the availability of web browsers. Today, due to web browsers and search engines, Internet users in every country in the world have access to vast amounts of online information.

The Internet has certainly changed our lives. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat*, talks about some of these changes.[\[1\]](#) For example, we used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us also send digitized mail over the Internet known as e-mail. We used to go to bookstores to browse and buy books; now we also browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music; now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it to an MP3 player.

Friedman also talks about how the Internet has been the great equalizer. A good example of that is Google. Whether you are a university professor with a high speed Internet connection or a poor kid in Asia with access to an Internet café, you have the same basic access to research information. The Internet puts an enormous amount of information at our fingertips. Essentially, all of the information on the Internet is available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

The Internet (and the accompanying digital tools developed to use it) has even changed our language. In the past, if you left a message asking when your friend was going to arrive at the airport, usually you would receive a complete sentence.

Today the message would be something like: AA 635 @ 7:42 PM DFW. Tell a joke in a chat room, and you will receive responses like LOL (“laughing out loud”) or ROFL (“rolling on the floor laughing”). As people leave the chat room, they may type BBL (“be back later”). Such abbreviations and computer language are a relatively new phenomenon and were spawned by the growth of the Internet.

I want to take a look at some of the challenges of the Internet as well as the attempt by government to control aspects of it. While the Internet has certainly provided information to anyone, anywhere, at any time, there are still limits to what the Internet can do in the global world.

## **The Challenge of the Internet**

The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global information infrastructure that would link together the world’s telecommunications and computer networks. But futurists and governmental leaders also believed that this interconnectedness would also bring friendship and cooperation, and that goal seems elusive.

In a speech given over a decade ago, Vice-President Al Gore said, “Let us build a global community in which the people of neighboring countries view each other not as potential enemies, but as potential partners, as members of the same family in the vast, increasingly interconnected human family.”[{2}](#)

Maybe peace and harmony are just over the horizon because of the Internet, but I have my doubts. The information superhighway certainly has connected the world together into one large global network, but highways don’t bring peace. Highways connected the various countries in Europe for centuries, yet war was common and peace was not. An information superhighway connects us with countries all over

the world, but global cooperation hasn't been the result, at least not yet.

The information superhighway also has some dark back alleys. At the top of the list is pornography. The Internet has made the distribution of pornography much easier. It used to be that someone wanting to view this material had to leave their home and go to the other side of town. The Internet has become the ultimate brown wrapper. Hard core images that used to be difficult to obtain are now only a mouse click away.

Children see pornography at a much younger age than just a decade ago. The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.[\[3\]](#) Sometimes this exposure is intentional, usually it is accidental. Schools, libraries, and homes using filters often are one step behind those trying to expose more and more people to pornography.

But the influence of the Internet on pornography is only one part of a larger story. In my writing on personal and social ethics, I have found that the Internet has made existing social problems worse. When I wrote my book *Moral Dilemmas* back in 1998, I dealt with such problems as drugs, gambling, and pornography. Seven years later when I was writing my new book, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I noticed that every moral issue I discussed was made worse by the Internet. Now my chapter on pornography had a section on cyberporn. My chapter on gambling had a section dealing with online gambling. My chapter on adultery also dealt with online affairs.

## Internet Regulation

All of these concerns lead to the obvious question: Who will regulate the Internet? In the early day of the Internet, proponents saw it as the cyber-frontier that would be self-regulating. The Internet was to liberate us forever from government, borders, and even our physical selves. One writer

said we should “look without illusion upon the present possibilities for building, in the on-line spaces of this world, societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital.”{4}

And for a time, the self-government of the Internet worked fairly well. Internet pioneers were even successful in fighting off the Communications Decency Act which punished the transmission of “indecent” sexual communications or images on the Internet.{5} But soon national governments began to exercise their authority.

Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, in their book, *Who Controls the Internet?*, describe the various ways foreign governments have exercised their authority.{6}

- France requires Yahoo to block Internet surfers from France so they cannot purchase Nazi memorabilia.{7}
- The People’s Republic of China requires Yahoo to filter materials that might be harmful or threatening to Party rule. Yahoo is essentially an Internet censor for the Communist party.{8}
- The Chinese version of Google is much slower than the American version because the company cooperates with the Chinese government by blocking search words the Party finds offensive (words like Tibet or democracy).

Even more disturbing is the revelation that Yahoo provided information to the Chinese government that led to the imprisonment of Chinese journalists and pro-democracy leaders. Reporters Without Borders found that Yahoo has been implicated in the cases of most of the people they were defending.{9}

Columnist Clarence Page points out that “Microsoft cooperates in censoring or deleting blogs that offend the Chinese government’s sensibilities. Cisco provides the hardware that gives China the best Internet-blocking and user-tracking

technology on the planet.”[{10}](#)

All of this censorship and cooperation with foreign governments is disturbing, but it also underscores an important point. For years, proponents of the Internet have argued that we can’t (or shouldn’t) block Internet pornography or that we can’t regulate what pedophiles do on the Internet. These recent revelations about Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft show that they can and do block information.

The book *Who Controls the Internet?* argues that the last decade has led to the quiet rediscovery of the functions and justification for territorial government. The Internet has not replaced the legitimate structure of government with a self-regulated cyber-frontier. The Internet may change the way some of these territorial states govern, but it will not diminish their important role in regulating free societies.

## Government and Intermediaries

Governments have been able to exercise control over the Internet in various ways. This should not be too surprising. The book *Who Controls the Internet?* points out that while some stores in New York’s Chinatown sell counterfeit Gucci bags and Rolex watches, you don’t find these same products in local stores. That is because the “most important targets of the laws against counterfeits—trademark laws—are local retailers.”[{11}](#)

The U.S. government might not be able to go after manufacturers in China or Thailand that produce these counterfeits, but they certainly can go after retail stores. That’s why you won’t find these counterfeit goods in a Wal-Mart store. And while it is true that by controlling Wal-Mart or Sears doesn’t eliminate counterfeit goods, government still can adequately control the flow of these goods by focusing on these intermediaries.

Governments often control behavior through intermediaries. "Pharmacists and doctors are made into gatekeepers charged with preventing certain forms of drug abuse. Bartenders are responsible for preventing their customers from driving drunk."[\[12\]](#)

As the Internet has grown, there has also been an increase in new intermediaries. These would include Internet Service Providers (ISPs), search engines, browsers, etc. In a sense, the Internet has made the network itself the intermediary. And this has made it possible for governments to exert their control over the Internet. "Sometimes the government-controlled intermediary is Wal-Mart preventing consumer access to counterfeit products, sometimes it is the bartender enforcing drinking age laws, and sometimes it is an ISP blocking access to illegal information."[\[13\]](#)

More than a decade ago, the German government raided the Bavarian offices of Compuserve because they failed to prevent the distribution of child pornography even though it originated outside of Germany.[\[14\]](#) In 2001, the British government threatened certain sites with criminal prosecution for distributing illegal adoption sites. The British ISPs agreed to block the sites so that British citizens could not access them.[\[15\]](#)

Internet Service Providers, therefore, are the obvious target for governmental control. In a sense, they are the most important gatekeepers to the Internet.[\[16\]](#)

Governmental control over the Internet is not perfect nor is it complete. But the control over intermediaries has allowed territorial governments to exercise much great control and regulation of the Internet than many of the pioneers of cyberspace would have imagined.

# Globalization and Government

In [previous articles](#) we have addressed the issue of globalization and have recognized that technology (including the Internet) has made it much easier to move information around the world. There is no doubt that the Internet has accelerated the speed of transmission and thus made the world smaller. It is much easier for people around the world to access information and share it with others in this global information infrastructure.

Those who address the issue of globalization also believe that it diminishes the relevance of borders, territorial governments, and geography. Thomas Friedman believes that the Internet and other technologies are [flattening the world](#) “without regard to geography, distance, or, in the near future, even language.”[\[17\]](#)

In one sense, this is true. The lower costs of moving information and the sheer amount of information exchanged on the Internet have made it more difficult for governments to suppress information they do not like. The explosive growth of blogs and web pages have provided a necessary outlet for opinion and information.

It is also true that there has been some self-governing behavior on the Internet. Friedman, for example, describes eBay as a “self-governing nation-state—the V.R.e., the Virtual Republic of eBay.” The CEO of eBay even says, “People will say that eBay restored my faith in humanity—contrary to a world where people are cheating and don’t give people the benefit of the doubt.”[\[18\]](#)

But it also true that territorial governments work with eBay to arrest and prosecute those who are cheaters or who use the website in illegal ways. And it also relies on a banking system and the potential of governmental prosecution of fraud.

We have also seen in this article that governments have also been able to exert their influence and authority over the Internet. They have been able to use the political process to alter or block information coming into their country and have been able to shape the Internet in ways that the early pioneers of the Internet did not foresee.

Goldsmith and Wu believe that those talking about the force of globalization often naively believe that countries will be powerless in the face of globalization and the Internet. "When globalization enthusiasts miss these points, it is usually because they are in the grips of a strange technological determinism that views the Internet as an unstoppable juggernaut that will overrun the old and outdated determinants of human organization."[{19}](#)

There is still a legitimate function for government (Romans 13:1-7) even in this new world of cyberspace. Contrary to the perceived assumption that the Internet will shape governments and move us quickly toward globalization, there is good evidence to suggest that governments will in many ways shape the Internet.

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# Permission Givers

Recently I was shopping in a store clogged with shoppers seeking Grand Opening bargains. I wanted three of an item; as one of the stockers opened a box for me, another lady said, "The limit is six, right? Give me six!" Suddenly I wanted to have six as well. She had given me permission to buy more than I intended. It was like she whipped out a permission slip and handed it to me. And I took it. This lady had no idea what she did!

We often function as "permission givers" in each other's lives. It's part of living in community. We give each other permission not just for things we do, but how we think. And that's why we need to be careful what we're giving permission for. That was Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 10 when he warned the believers that they could end up giving permission to eat meat that had been offered to idols, which was sold at cut-rate prices in the meat market, to other believers for whom it would be sin because of their weak consciences.

We can give permission for evil as well as for good.

*Right now, the top three best-selling books are the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy, which is female erotica. Verbal porn. Many people are enthusiastically hitting the LIKE button on Facebook whenever anyone mentions it, each one giving permission to others to read it. In Dannah Gresh's blog ["I'm Not Reading Fifty Shades of Grey,"](#) she mentions a friend who "regretfully can't get the images out of her head." (And that's why I'm not reading it either.)*

We can give permission for others to endorse what the Bible calls sin by reassuring each other that we've outgrown the ancient, outmoded values that were given for our protection. We can give permission to continue building an addiction to sexual sin like using pornography by reassuring each other

that “everybody does it.” And it starts early; my friend has been intentional about teaching her 11-year-old son to choose purity, warning him that others will want to show him dirty pictures. Sure enough, last month in the bathroom of a boy scout camp, another 11-year-old offered to show him his porn collection on his cell phone.

But let’s talk about giving permission for *good*! That’s where this social dynamic can really shine!

For over a decade, I have participated in an online support forum, and I did a search for my posts using the word “permission.”

- “I wish someone had asked me when I was growing up what it was like to be handicapped, to be stared at, to be different. It would have given me permission to find and use my voice, instead of living in bondage to shame that wasn’t mine.”
- After people responded to a post that I also shared here, [“What Would You Say to Your 8-Year-Old Self?”](#), I affirmed posters for the really powerful truths they would want to say to their younger selves. “Now—will you give that same little self permission to receive that truth? And ask the Holy Spirit to seal it to your heart?”
- One of the young women I mentor gave herself permission to agree that there *would* be a last time for destructive behaviors that she repeatedly fell into: sinful relationships, indulging in drugs, and self-injury. That permission-giving opened the door to believing that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to her for living in sobriety.
- A number of us encouraged a young lady terrified of doctor visits, who confessed her irrational fear of the crinkly paper on the exam table. I uploaded a “permission button” and wrote, “I give you permission to sit in a chair in the exam room till



Permission

the very last second.” It was amazing how comforting that was!

- “Denying pain doesn’t make it go away, just harder to access because you try to bury it. Give yourself permission to feel pain. You don’t have to do it by yourself—invite Jesus into it, grab a hold of His hand, and hang on for dear life.”

- “You have permission to break a promise you never should have made in the first place, what has been called ‘foolish vows.’ For example, when you promise you will never leave or abandon a friend where the relationship has turned unhealthy and sinful.”

- “Please give yourself permission to think of [a certain person] as an illegal, immoral, harmful substance like crack cocaine that you just cannot have even a tiny bit of, because there’s no such thing as a tiny bit of a life-controlling, life-dominating, life-destroying substance.” “The Holy Spirit knows every single thing we need to let go of [in forgiveness]. Each memory is like a splinter He wants permission to remove. But you have to cooperate with the process, thus the need to give Him permission.”

- “Give yourself permission to mentally fire your sister as the supposedly ‘older and wiser’ sister. She may be older, but she’s not wiser, and you don’t have to follow her advice when it is not wise because it’s informed by the world, not by God.”

- And finally, “Give yourself permission to become comfortable with new habits you’d like to form, such as stopping in the middle of the conversation to pray. And praying out loud. And using new expressions like ‘The Lord bless you!’ And even something as prosaic as wearing a wrap instead of a sweater, or wearing a hat. Give yourself permission to step outside your comfort zone and practice this new thing you want to become comfortable with, and tell yourself, ‘It’s OK to not be comfortable with this yet. I’ll get there eventually.’”

What have you given—or received—permission for?

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/permission\\_givers](http://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/permission_givers) on July 2, 2012

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# Private Sin Impacts Society

*June 11, 2012*

The June issue of the *AFA Journal* focuses due attention on how five areas of private sin impacts all of society. This is such an important issue since a very large portion of our society has bought into the idea that “what I do in private has no impact on the public.” This current issue reminds us that it is not true!

The first area the article addresses is pornography. Dr. Jill Manning documents that about 170 million Americans use the Internet and that nearly one-third go online “for sexual purposes.” Her research has also revealed that online sexual activity is “a hidden public health hazard” that is exploding.

Substance abuse is another example of how private sin impacts society. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that more than one-third of convicted felons had been drinking alcohol when they committed their offense. Another study found that more than one-quarter of state and federal drug offenders committed crimes in order to get money to support their drug habits.

A third area is crime in general. The statistics are staggering. The National Center for Victims of Crime estimates

that just three areas (robberies, arson, and Internet fraud) cost us more than \$1.6 trillion.

Abortion is a fourth area. Pro-choice advocates say that it shouldn't matter to society what a woman does with her body. Apart from the obvious moral objections to abortion are the social and economic costs. As one expert from the National Right to Life observed, "You can't lose fifty-three million lives and not expect it to have a serious economic impact."

A final area documented in the article is fatherlessness. U. S. Ambassador Gregory Slayton has been on my radio program a number of times and documents the social and economic impact of fatherless homes. The estimated price tag for fatherhood failure is more than a trillion dollars over the last decade alone.

These few examples show the error in believing that private sin has no impact on society. We are paying a huge cost for people's sin. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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## Vain Imaginations

Not long ago, I attended a retreat at which a college student, freshly discovering his call to an intercessory prayer ministry, spent hours every night praying by name for everyone on the retreat. The last morning when I ran into him, he said, "Sue! As I was praying for you, I received a word from the Lord for you."

Uh-oh. I'd heard this before. And every time I had taken it to the Lord, asking if there were anything to it, the answer was no.

My defenses up, I smiled and said, "I'm listening." He got a

very thoughtful look on his face and said, “I have to get it exactly right. . . OK, the words were, ‘Guard against vain imaginations.’”

I thanked him for this and promised to immediately take it to the Lord. I had barely breathed, “Lord, is there anything to this?” when the lightbulb came on in my spirit and I knew EXACTLY what this was about.

Oh yeah. This was from God, all right.

For about a year, my husband and I had been carrying around an open wound on our souls. We had been deeply hurt by several people we had trusted and loved, and it is not exaggeration to call it traumatic. Every single day of that time I had engaged in fantasy conversations in my head with the people who inflicted so much pain—except they weren’t really so much conversations as monologues, with me lecturing on how badly they hurt us and how dishonoring their actions were to us and to God. . . yada yada yada.

Vain imaginations. Yep, this word was right on the money.

And God was so incredibly tender and grace-ful to merely exhort me to “guard against” them. Not, “You bad girl, you’ve been sinning against my sons in your mind. Repent!” Not, “And who are YOU to set yourself up as judge and jury? Look at your own fleshly heart, kiddo!”

Just, guard against them.

So I confessed my sin of indulging in self-vindicating fantasy, and resolved not to go there again. It didn’t take long, of course, before my mind returned to what had become a familiar and comforting indulgence—an emotional “binkie.” I stopped and said, “Well Lord, what am I supposed to do instead?” He didn’t even have to say anything, just wait for me to connect the dots since I already knew. “Oh. I should be praying for them instead, huh?”

Okay. Fleshly sigh.

The biblical pattern for changing behaviors is to replace and displace the old with something new, and eventually the temptation to indulge in vain imaginations about this issue faded with disuse. It still pops up occasionally, but I know what to do with it.

“Vain imaginations” is a good term for a lot of popular mental sin we so easily rationalize: engaging in internal arguments with people who aren’t even there, the lusting that accompanies sexual pornography for men or emotional pornography for women (steamy romance novels). We all spend time thinking about things that are empty, fruitless, and harmful to our spirits.

And we all need to guard against them.

This blog post originally appeared at  
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