

IMPURITY AND PORNOGRAPHY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and then I will have enough, then I will be satisfied.” But “enough” is never found.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pornography

Now, this word *porneia* is at the core of the next topic we need to discuss and that is “pornography.” Pornography is at an all-time high in availability and usage. Plus, it is no longer a “male issue.” Those of us who consistently counsel

those battling sexual brokenness have seen about an 800% increase in the number of women in bondage to the besetting idolatry of pornography.

What Is Pornography?

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

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

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

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

How Prevalent Is It?2

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

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

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

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

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

Among the top U.S. cities searching for pornographic sites, Stockton, CA ranked number 2 and Irvine, CA ranked number 6 in searching for the keyword "porn". Irvine ranked number 4 in searching for the keyword "xxx". Irvine is again a winner as number 9 in searching for the keyword "sex".

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

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

How Are We to Think About Pornography?

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

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

And it isn't an idolatrous relationship with sex or intimacy that is the main idolatry, either.

In the fantasy world of pornography, the pornographer is always a winner, always a conqueror, always desired, never rejected, never overlooked, never not chosen, always preferred, always the hero and never a "zero."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Laura³

It couldn't have happened at a worse time.

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

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

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

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

When I finally scanned the history on Ryan's computer, I found some images that he had recently viewed. Even though I wasn't surprised, I did feel freshly hurt and betrayed. I felt the familiar rush of jealousy, of wanting to look intently at every two-dimensional woman to discover what she had that I didn't have,

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

what she did that I didn't do, or what she was that I couldn't be. I clenched my jaw and set my heart in disgust towards my husband: my heart was filled with bitterness toward this man who wasted our time, energy, and resources on lust while I worked so hard to take care of our family.

April⁴

I met Darren at the young age of nineteen. My mom had just moved us to a new town after her 32-year marriage ended in divorce from my father—a man who was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive. Darren was older than me, and came from a tight-knit family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At first he lied, then he apologized, then he said he'd never do it again. No one wanted to believe that more than me. I didn't want anyone to know that my

⁴ Ibid.

marriage wasn't perfect. I didn't want anyone to know that Darren was looking at women in this way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Hard Truth

Those who use pornography deny the *imago dei* in the "performers," dehumanizing and objectifying them solely as resources for them to use to get

their “needs” met. The hard truth of the matter is that they are just as much a sexual predator as any rapist.

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

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

INFIDELITY/ADULTERY

According to the most recent update on infidelityfacts.com⁵, 57% of American men and 54% of American women admit to committing infidelity in any relationship they have been in. The same site reports that 53% of American marriages end in divorce and that 74% of men and 68% of women says they would have an affair if they knew they would never be caught.

When we understand the dynamics of the betrayal of infidelity, it seems a little surprising that only 31% of marriages last after an affair has been admitted to or discovered.

Merriam Webster’s Online Dictionary defines ‘adultery’ as: “voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband”.

Adultery is actually only one form of infidelity and the most commonly reported as the reason a marriage ended in divorce. Yet, of the approximately one million divorces in America every year, 56% of those cases involved at least one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.

Adultery is not only a sin against one’s mate, but an attack on the sanctity of marriage, a betrayal of the covenant relationship between Christ and His Bride

⁵ <http://www.infidelityfacts.com/infidelity-statistics.html>

that the marriage relationship represents, and is a path of destruction that leaves a trail of wreckage in the lives of many people, not just the adulterer's.

Adultery is also most importantly a sin against God. Adultery is one of the most frequently and severely condemned sins in the Bible, to the point that God called it a capital offense in the Old Testament.

Adultery is specifically mentioned 52 times in the Bible, including in the Ten Commandments, all four Gospels, and ten other books of the Bible.

And, as we have discussed already, adultery is not just a sexual matter, it is a matter of the heart. It is one of the most selfish acts a human being can commit, and the residual damage it causes in the lives of others can last a generation—or longer.

FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE, AND RESTORATION⁶

Forgiveness is poorly understood and even more poorly taught in many Christian circles today. A combination of defective hermeneutics (the rules of proper Bible interpretation), bad logic, and weaving together ideas that don't really go together, added to a certain level of emotionalism, all blended together with one person after another repeating the same misinformation, has created an unbiblical and unhealthy view of forgiveness.

The Defective-Hermeneutics Spiral

In Psalm 103:12 we read: *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*

In Isaiah 43:25 the Lord is quoted as saying, *“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”*

⁶ Excerpted from *Unbound*, a discipleship and biblical counseling curriculum of Truth in Love Biblical Counseling Center. <http://www.tilbcc.com/unbound.html>

Then in Hebrews 8:12 (quoting Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; Jeremiah 50:20; and Micah 7:18-19) we read, "*FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.*"

These passages are often conflated, over-extrapolated, and the doctrine of "Forgive, Forget, and Move On" is the result.

Because of a misunderstanding of the Biblical languages and a weak approach to hermeneutics, we are often taught the phrases "remember no more," and "will not remember," mean that God develops the equivalent of "Divine Amnesia."

This is not at all the case. Both the Hebrew and the Greek words used in these and comparable passages where remembering is employed in this manner are referring to a "being mindful of, or mentioning" and similar concepts.

When this misunderstanding is combined with Philippians 3:13 (where Paul speaks of "forgetting what is behind"—which is referring to his pedigree and accomplishments as well as what others have done to him), taken out of context and misapplied, we arrive at the defective idea that, as Christians, we are to, "Forgive, forget, and move on."

As regards forgiveness, nothing could be more unbiblical than this idea.

In fact, this false teaching regularly re-traumatizes people and, very often, becomes a stranglehold on a person's ability to escape false guilt and the associated toxic shame.

It is important that we take hold of God's view of forgiveness and adhere to it if we are to live healthy and free of not only the guilt from the sins we have committed, but also from the evils suffered as a result of the sins of others so that we become able to walk in authentic, godly forgiveness.

Three Kinds of Forgiveness

There are three kinds of forgiveness described in the Bible. One is completely up to God, one is up to us, and one cannot and ought not to happen without a certain amount of work on the part of the offending party.

1. **Judicial Forgiveness:** This is the complete pardon of all sin granted by God that only He can provide to someone when they personally go to God in confession and repentance of their sin—and no one else's.

Through that and our faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, God (as the Supreme and Righteous Judge) grants "Judicial Forgiveness." Everyone has to go to God on their own to receive that type of forgiveness. We will never be able to be forgiven for the sins of other people. Thinking that we need to is part of what causes false guilt, toxic shame, and the destructive idolatries in our lives.

There are many instances in the Bible where, even though God forgave the sins of a person or of the people, He did not remove the consequences of their sin (David, 2 Samuel 12:7-13; Children of Israel, Numbers 14:20-23). That means that, while forgiveness is available, forgiveness does not mean "absence of consequences."

Judicial Forgiveness precedes our Relational Forgiveness with God and requires two things on our part: Confession and true repentance (1 John 1:9).

A. Confess: The word translated "confess" in 1 John 1:9 is a judicial term which means "to be in verbal agreement on the exact nature and character of our wrong." In our judicial system today there is a similar term used: "allocute"; which means "to speak out formally."

B. Repent: Repentance is more than a "change of mind"; it is a change of heart and of direction. Ephesians 4:28 gives us one of the best examples in Scripture of the "put off/put on" characteristics of authentic repentance:

"The one who steals must steal no longer; rather he must labor, doing good with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need."

Not only does the offender cease from doing bad, he replaces the unrighteous behavior with the opposite righteous behavior – *over time* – and does so for the good of another (heart change).

C. Contrite Heart: Apart from a contrite heart, true confession and authentic repentance cannot exist. A contrite heart means the guilty party has a wide-open acceptance of their responsibility—without minimizing, without blameshifting, and without excuse—for the evil someone else has suffered as a result of their sin choice.

2. **Internal Forgiveness:** This is where we extend mercy to the person who has wronged us to the degree that we completely forsake retaliation and revenge, leaving that person in the hands of God.

Our best plans for revenge will fall far short of what God has planned because He seeks justice, not revenge. He *does* have a plan (See Genesis 50:20).

This does *not* mean, however, that the person is not held accountable for their actions, nor does it mean that we stuff our emotions about what happened and ignore them. That will set us on a downward spiral into the same destructive lies we have been working on becoming free from.

This level of forgiveness is almost impossible unless we have already gone to God and received His Judicial Forgiveness. It provides the seed-bed for us to forgive others.

If we don't have that foundation of God's forgiveness of us as the foundation for our own forgiveness of others, we are in actuality setting our own standards for forgiveness. We are expecting those people to live up to a standard for forgiveness that we have set in our own heart. Then it becomes between them and us and not them and God. We have to be able to say, it is between them and God to live up to His standard; not between them and me for them to live up to my standard.

When we are living in unforgiveness, it is like carrying a backpack full of sharp, jagged rocks. We tote them around and, while we may learn to live with the pain and discomfort, our lives lack joy and God's peace.

When we are able to forgive, we remove those jagged rocks and hand them over to God. We walk away from them and leave them where they belong. When we walk in unforgiveness, we are trying to bear something that is not ours to bear. Let that person be God's business, not yours. Romans 12:19: Leave room for the wrath of God ("Leave it to Me," says God).

There is a lot of misunderstanding and inaccurate teaching in the church about forgiveness. We want to leave this session with a clearer understanding of forgiveness, based not only on what the Word truly says but also on what God has Himself demonstrated. See Scripture reference 1 John 1:9. (IF we THEN He....)

3. Relational Forgiveness: God does not forgive without confession and repentance on our part, and He does not require or allow us to do so either (1 John 1:9; Luke 3:8). They not only are in full agreement on the exact nature and character of their wrong (the meaning of the Biblical word "confess"), but they also invest much energy and effort to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8; Ephesians 4:22, 24, 28).

It is not just a change of behavior; it is the heart-attitude behind it. This is required in order to truly change and replace old toxic behaviors with fruitful behaviors.

We have to wait from 3 – 5 years for an apple tree to produce fruit. Someone saying, "I'm sorry," is not confession, neither is it repentance – nor has there been any time for fruit to develop. Someone saying, "I'm really, *really* sorry," is neither confession nor repentance either.

A helpful parallelism for understanding the contrast between the prerequisites for forgiveness and the prerequisites for reunion (Relational Forgiveness) can be found in Lewis Smedes', *The Art of Forgiving*:

It takes one person to forgive.

It takes two to be reunited.

Forgiving happens inside the wounded person.

Reunion happens in a relationship between people.

We can forgive a person who never says he is sorry.

We cannot be truly reunited unless he is honestly sorry.

We can forgive even if we do not trust the person who wronged us once not to wrong us again.

Reunion can happen only if we can trust the person who wronged us once not to wrong us again.

Forgiving has no strings attached.

Reunion has several strings attached.

True repentance is a grieving over sins one has committed; an open acceptance of responsibility for the evil suffered by those we have wronged; a complete forsaking of those sins and anything that makes that sin easy to recommit; and a replacing of the sinful attitude and behavior with the opposite righteous attitude and behavior *for the sake of God and others* (See Ephesians 4:28).

The Bible teaches us that knowing the truth will set us free. It is hard for us to practice good until we know what *is* good. Once we have recognized and accepted the truth, we are free to practice the truth. A person who does not know the truth is like someone blind in a strange place.

That person stumbles around, never sure of himself, and is always lost. Confession and repentance require a conviction that what we have done has violated God's moral code; authentic confession and repentance do not come because we simply wish to avoid consequences.

For most of us, the first step to God has to be a willingness to internally forgive those who have wronged us. We must not continue in unforgiveness, knowing that this is a path to self-destruction.

ANCHOR POINTS

- God is the Author and Source of all forgiveness. Forgiveness is a matter of the heart and the will.
- In God's economy, consequences are often a part of the transaction despite confession, repentance, and forgiveness having taken place: Forgiveness does not equal no consequences.
- Believers are to have hearts that tend toward forgiveness, but this needs to be Biblical in its formulation and execution.
- There are three types of forgiveness, and the responsibility of only one of those is mostly mine.
- Internal and Relational Forgiveness are not synonymous: One doesn't necessarily lead to the other.
- God does not require or allow for Relational Forgiveness without specific prerequisites first being met.
- God does not expect us to forgive relationally until the offending party has done their part. The restoration of relationship is not a simple affair and must be done in accordance with God's directives.
- Inappropriate forgiveness puts us at odds with God; appropriate forgiveness puts us in partnership with God.
- Apology-making is NOT forgiveness-seeking.