

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Biblical Sexuality, Part I

Pornography: A Cancer Killing Families, Churches and Culture

A Bible Study for *Mature* Christ-followers

-By Dr. John P. Splinter

This Bible study will explore how Christians can protect their children and their marriages by 1) understanding the grave consequences of Internet pornography, and 2) using God's Word and wisdom to overcome the sexual tactics Satan is using in our culture today. In this series, the NIV translation will be used unless otherwise specified.

Imagine walking alone at night on a city street and suddenly being confronted by a gang of 10 armed youths. You look for a way out but there is none. You realize that you are completely surrounded. You will now become the victim of these youths' sinful intentions, whatever they may be ~ robbery ~ assault ~ whatever.

Now change the analogy. You are at home on your computer. Or reading a magazine. Or watching primetime TV. Or walking past a Victoria's Secret shop in the mall. Your daughter is texting with someone she doesn't know. Your son is doing something on the Internet. Your husband is browsing the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. You realize that you and your family are completely surrounded ~ by sexuality ~ there is no way out. That is our culture today.

This Bible study, and the seven that follow, are aimed at taking God's Word into an area that the church has been loathe to go in the last 2,000 years ~ the area of biblical sexuality. The sexualization of our culture has become a many-headed Hydra overwhelming us today. The Hydra was a Greek mythological poisonous snake-like critter with nine heads. If you chopped off one of its heads, two grew back. Heracles was the only character who could stand up to it and kill it. Here's the point: If the church doesn't stand up and face this Hydra then nobody else can, or will.

This study will be challenging for many Christians to read, because we will be looking straight at the Western church, and its weakness and fear in the face of the Hydra of cultural sexualization. Understand that we are not intending to be critical of Christ, or of the Body of Christ, but we are intending to point out how the local church has hidden itself from this battle, and we are calling

Pornography: A Cancer Killing Families, Churches and Culture

Christ-followers to strip off any sin that controls them, armor-up in the power of Christ, and then join in this battle.

Before you begin reading, take a moment, clear your mind, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth, and remind your soul of your unyielding commitment to Jesus Christ. OK ~ ready? Dive in.

We begin with a trip down memory lane. A few motion pictures in the early 1900s could have been termed “slightly naughty,” with suggestive scenes or racy dialogue. By the mid-thirties many moviegoers thought Hollywood had gone too far. Protests led by Catholics prompted the establishment of the Breen Office to delete offensive words and images. In 1939, viewers were shocked when Clark Gable uttered the word “damn” in *“Gone with the Wind.”* Two-thirds of a century later, anything goes ~ full frontal nudity ~ rape ~ homosexuality ~ kiddie porn ~ you name it. In today’s world, pornographic sexuality comes at us like snowflakes in a blizzard. You no longer have to look for it to find it. It hunts you down.

Each lesson in this Bible study series will be based upon scripture. In this first lesson we’re going to begin by pondering teaching from the apostle Paul. He lived in a morally deteriorating culture, and wrote about it. *“...Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man.... (Rom. 1:21-23).* We could add, “and women.” Consider this: Pornography, as is all sexual sin, is actually a form of idolatry.

Movies, magazines, books, television, DVD’s, the Internet – we live today in a sex-drenched society that corrupts our youth, destroys marriages and leads to a host of pathologies this nation cannot survive. Researchers find that our kids today receive something in the area of 14,000 sexualized messages per year. Ruth Graham once said, “If God doesn’t punish the USA, He’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”

St. Paul continues, *“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen.” (Rom. 1:24-25).*

What happens when God gives a culture over to degrading activities? Well, in this lesson we’re focusing on the single Hydra head of pornography. Here are a few dynamics that go hand in hand with pornography. Each of these reflects what happens when God gives a culture over to its sinful sexual desires, as seen within creation and distribution of pornography.

- It demeans, disgraces and degrades women.
- It turns human beings created in the image of God, into mere sexual objects.
- It is narcissistic ~ *always* focuses upon oneself ~ turns sexuality into self-gratification.
- It is addictive ~ as addictive as cocaine or heroin.
- It causes shame, which leads to hiding one’s real self from others.
- It destroys trust.
- It brings other sins with it, including dishonesty and loss of integrity.
- It creates bio-chemical changes and alters blood flow patterns in the brain.

Pornography: A Cancer Killing Families, Churches and Culture

- It creates a false reality based upon sinful fantasy.
- It leads to “pseudo attachments” with pictures rather than real attachments with people.
- It leads to deeper, darker, more deviant sexual desires (including things like voyeurism, prostitution, affairs, sado-masochism, rape, child sex, bestiality, and sexual torture.)
- It humiliates children, especially daughters, when dad is found using it.

It’s difficult to imagine a more ugly picture. Yet as this sexual explosion continues to reverberate in our country, the church for the most part remains silent. Pastors are hesitant to preach and teach about it. It’s easier and safer to pretend this battle doesn’t involve the Body of Christ. In large part it is the church’s silence that provides a comfortable backdrop for ever-increasing sexual harm being pumped into our culture.

It’s as if living in our pluralistic culture, and being academically weaned on Post Modern ideology, has left the church in a backwater of social irrelevance and moral barrenness. Perhaps it’s time for us to ask ourselves whether we do indeed believe God’s Word is Truth, and whether that belief is an academic exercise, or a spiritual presence that completely transforms us.

Let’s look for a moment at how pervasive this plague has become. In 1973 Americans spent \$10 million on pornography. Today that annual figure exceeds \$12 billion. This is more than the total revenues of professional football, baseball, and basketball, *combined*.

And it has invaded the church in a major way. Here are some graphic research findings regarding sinful sex and the Body of Christ:

- The pornography-purchasing habits of Christians have been found to be the same as non-Christians.¹
- In a Pastors.com survey, 54 percent of pastors said they viewed porn within the past year.²
- In a 2003 *Focus on the Family* poll 47 percent of respondents said porn is a problem in their home.³
- One researcher found in his own church, that 25% of men had looked at porn in the previous 30 days; 44% within six months; and 61% within the year.⁴
- In a poll of 1,000 respondents, 50 percent of Christian men and 20 percent of Christian women were found to be *addicted* to pornography. Conducted by ChristaNet.com.⁵
- One survey found 60 percent of Christian *women* admitting to having significant struggles with lust; 40 percent saying they were involved in sexual sin in the past year; and 20 percent struggling with looking at pornography on an ongoing basis.⁶
- Another study found 37% of pastors said pornography was a struggle for them.⁷

Pornography: A Cancer Killing Families, Churches and Culture

- One shocking study from Canada found that 87% of university students are having sex over webcams, instant messenger or the telephone.⁸
- At one Christian retreat, 70% of men admitted to porn addiction.⁹
- A 1996 Promise Keepers survey at one of their stadium events revealed that over 50% of the men in attendance were involved with porn within one week of attending the event.¹⁰
- In one survey of evangelical pastors and church lay leaders, 64% confirmed that they struggle with sexual addiction or sexual compulsion including, but not limited to use of pornography, compulsive masturbation, or other secret sexual activity.¹¹
- 34 percent of female readers of *Today's Christian Woman's* online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn in a recent poll.¹²

As ugly as it is, that's just a fraction of the research available. Obviously, this is not a problem that is "out there," somewhere away from the safety of the church. It is domicile in the Body of Christ. Now let's return to the words of the Apostle Paul.

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (Rom. 1:26-27). In our country today, militant homosexuality is actively working to rid our culture of *any* Christian influence. And yet the church remains a passive observer, occasionally wringing her hands but for the most part being nothing like the "salt and light" it was called by Christ to be.

OK. You get the picture. This sexual assault upon the Body of Christ is *very serious*. Imagine a seven-foot timber rattler coiled on your arm with its fangs imbedded in your jugular vein, pumping its venom into your blood stream. That's a picture of this onslaught against the Body of Christ. You may ask, why hasn't the church done more to stop this lethal flood of filth? Why are we more *influenced by* the culture than *influencers of* the culture? After all, didn't the Early Church influence the entire Roman Empire? Yes, it did, but not without a battle. In today's culture the Enemy of God has dramatically penetrated the Body of Christ with sexual sin.

This issue of our culture being overwhelmed by sexual issues is extremely uncomfortable for many in the church. It is a clear reflection of Christ's observation that, *"if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Mt. 5:13).* In the eyes of today's culture, the church has lost its distinctiveness, and is only good for being trampled upon. It no longer is seen as standing for much that is different from the rest of culture. Francis Schaeffer nailed it several years ago when he said we've become more concerned with comfort, security, and personal peace, than with following hard after Jesus Christ. And a major symptom of this slide into the abyss of irrelevance has been the church's acceptance of sexual disobedience.

Certainly, churches may say they are opposed to pornography ~ but how many churches do you know that have taken active steps to do something about it in the past year? Has your pastor preached a six-week series dealing with God's plan for human sexuality? Has your youth pastor taught the kids about biblical purity? Are there any adult Sunday School classes dealing with the effects of pornography in the lives of church people? Does your church teach about homosexuality and scripture? Or about cohabitation and God's plan? Does your church library have resources to help families struggling with sexual addiction? Unfortunately, for the most part the light on the hill is covered by a basket in most churches on this subject. Therefore, the culture is in darkness.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: *They are darkened in their understanding of separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 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. – Ephesians 4:18-19 NIV.* The church in Ephesus could not have helped but be influenced by Artemis worship, with its massive temple and cult prostitution right there in the center of the city. So in some ways, the church in America is not in a worse spot than biblical churches. But we are in an increasingly similar spot as the Ephesian church or the Corinthian church.

Fortunately, there is both hope and direction within scripture. The primary question is whether pastors and their churches will stand up and speak on this issue. At this moment, less than 2% of pastors have ever spoken openly and biblically regarding sexuality. A few have made glancing remarks in sermons that focused on other subjects, but even these are few and far between.

So ~ what is the church to do? The correct response to this assault is NOT to cluck our tongues and wag our fingers at all those "filthy-minded porn addicts out there in the culture." In this study we will adopt the posture taken by the cartoon character, Pogo, who once reported, "We have seen the enemy, and he is us." Finger pointing was the Pharisees' approach as they externalized their own guilt by pointing to others worse than they. Satan loves Pharisees because they play so well into his use of **shame** to bind men and women in darkness and hopelessness.

Rather, the theological foci of each lesson will be truth, and grace. In spite of the depth of our sin, God loves us and calls us to repentance, forgiveness, hope, and healing. There is hope in Christ. This Hydra of sexualization can be faced ~ healing is available ~ God's in the restoration business.

The Christ-centered response begins with two steps. **First**, like Peter sinking into the stormy sea, we must drop to our knees, cry out to God and say, "God help us! We're drowning!" One church we know opened a worship service for confession and repentance and found to their amazement that people began confessing very serious sins ~ sexual sins ~ out loud ~ with tears ~ crying out to God for help! For those confessing, it was like cutting the bonds of shame and experiencing the freedom of God's Spirit. That's grace in action.

Second, we must return to the basics of applying God's Word to our lives, especially in the area of sexuality. In God's grace, He has given us excellent advice PLUS the presence of His Spirit in our lives, so that among other things we may enjoy His gift of sexuality to its fullest! This

will undoubtedly lead to such basic spiritual activities as prayer, confession, tearful repentance, forgiveness, healing, and flinty-eyed recommitment to Christ. In the church mentioned above, open congregational confession was followed by deep healing and great joy. That's what the Holy Spirit does as He transforms us from within.

Pornography wreaks havoc. Period. It does so within marriages and within individuals. It is central to human disrespect, and the younger a person is the more devastating it can be. A report by the Commission of Children at Risk looked at the rising of rate of mental problems and emotional distress among children and adolescents in this country, and then wrote this: "We are witnessing high and rising rates of depression, anxiety, attention deficit, conduct disorder, thoughts of suicide and other serious mental, emotional and behavioral problems among children."¹³ It is clear to researchers that our culture, *with its disintegrating view of the value of human beings and relationships*, is at the very least exacerbating this very condition that is most likely central to creating it: A disregard and disrespect for God's highest creation – humans.

Our children are paying a terrible price as they visually absorb this poison. For example, did you know that the highest per-capita use of pornography today is found among children ages 12 – 17? Did you know the porn industry is now *targeting* children ages 5 – 9, in the knowledge that if they can get children addicted to porn, they'll have customers for life? Porn wreaks havoc.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, it is time to stop running from those whose agendas are to increase the sexual sinfulness in our culture. It is time to stop being cowed down by people saying that faith in Christ is outdated, irrelevant, or Politically Incorrect. It's time to stop being enslaved to pornography and all that it brings. It's time to pull the fangs out of our own throat and beg for God's healing. We need repentance and revival. We need to be on our knees, and in God's Word.

At the end of each of the eight sections of this Bible study is a section that may challenge you ~ it may make you defensive ~ it may perhaps call you to make some changes. It's always easy to have Bible studies that look, from a distance, at the "sin in the world," or the "lives of unbelievers." However, *no Bible study is worth its salt* that doesn't apply God's Word to the individual's own heart, and then call for change and action in *him* or *her*.

With this in mind, the following Bible Study is intended to lead you to Jesus Christ. Anyplace or anything in your life that is uncomfortable in the presence of Jesus, probably needs to go away. It's probably sin. This Bible Study will empower you to live a clean and pure life before God, which means you'll have a happier and more fulfilled life. And it may challenge you to make a meaningful difference for Christ, wherever he has planted you.

If you're using this study series in a Sunday School class, obviously this particular chapter and its lengthy Bible Study section is far too long for one week's Sunday School class. This is done intentionally. Our suggestion is that you use the first section of Bible Study, to lead the class or group in discussion of this chapter. Then, you are encouraged to use the remaining sections for personal Bible Study – to take you deeper than you may wish to discuss in a class. Use the subsequent sections of this chapter's Bible Study as a home study guide for your personal

spiritual development – use one section a week, or one question a day – sort of like a nice daily Orange Julius.

Bible Study

WHAT DOES JESUS HAVE TO SAY TO YOU?

1. Read Matthew 5:28-30. Why did Christ focus the crowd's attention upon that which was in their minds? Correlate this text with Matthew 18:7-9. Was Christ into self-mutilation, or was he comparing the stunning act of self-mutilation as being far less significant than the stunning fact of eternal damnation?
2. Why, in the same text, did Christ link what was in people's minds, to eternal damnation? Can a Christian intentionally and routinely carry filth in their minds, and still claim salvation in Christ?
3. How does Mt. 5:28-30 correlate with what Christ said in Matthew 7:21-23, and why should this text be terrifying for those bowing before the idol of pornography?
4. Read John 8:34. Is the nature of sin static, or dynamic? That is, according to the words of Christ, *is* a person able to hold onto sin in one part of their life, without it controlling all other parts? Correlate this with Romans 6:15-23, and talk about it as a group.

In response to these statements by Christ, what do you need to accomplish on your knees in your prayer closet? In your experience, are you able to overcome sexual sin by your own strength alone? When was the last time you spent an hour in prayer?

WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH ABOUT WHAT GOES ON IN THE MIND?

1. Paul spoke about the “renewing of the mind” in Romans 12:2. What does that mean in terms of holding sexual sin “privately” in one's mind?
2. On judgment day, scripture says that the scrolls of our lives will be opened, and what we have done in our lives will be presented. This is not a “works theology review,” but rather an honest reflection of the reality of faith in our lives. Read Revelation 20:12-13, and 22:12. Will the sin that we covertly but repetitively held in our minds be exempt from this examination?
3. Are there any bridges to unholy things that you need to burn in your own life? If so, what are they? Name them – put them in writing – confess them as sin – repent of them – add them to your prayer life – beg God to cleanse and free you. Meditate for a few minutes on 1 Jn. 1:9.

4. We may think our secret sins are secret, but our sin almost always “leaks” into our families. This being so, what changes in your mind does your family need for you to take, to bring glory to Christ in your family?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “PURE?”

1. Read 2 Cor. 10:5. What does this text teach as being the responsibility of the Christ-follower, and what does this have to do with purity of mind?
2. Read Heb. 12:14, and 1 Pet. 1:15-16. How do these two texts apply to the mind of the Christ-follower, especially in regard to what one does with the issue of sexuality, sexual thoughts, and sexual actions?
3. Read Ephesians 4:17-19. What is the pathway to losing sexual control in one’s life?
4. Read James 5:16. Most churches don’t practice this instruction, basically due to a combination of spiritual pride plus a fear of gossip. But as a church purifies itself, open confession, repentance and healing are symptoms that lead to purity and serviceability to Christ. How might your church begin purifying itself unto Christ? How might you do this as well?

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Are you willing to confess your sin, seek prayer, and live in accountability with other believers? Yes or no?
2. What changes in your mind do you know you *must* make in order to be pure?
3. What changes do you need to make in your home, in order that it may be pure?
4. Do you have a prayer-partner with whom you regularly pray, and with whom you are open and accountable? If not, why not? Do you truly believe what God says in Jas. 5:16?

CHRIST AND CULTURE

1. Read Matt 5:13-16. Did Christ intend for his followers to impact their culture? What does this mean for the Christ-follower? (Hint: His expectation is more than having a “conversion experience” and a private personal faith.)
2. According to the teaching of Christ, what can believers expect the world’s response to be if we lose our ability to be salt? How does a Christ-follower lose that ability?
3. Name five reasons that church-folk give, which keep them off the battlefield. (We’ll give you two to get you going: 1) I need to prioritize raising my kids, first, so I give all my free time to them. 2) My job takes me on the road a lot. I just don’t have time for ministry.)

4. The church has obviously lost its saltiness in this culture, particularly in the area of sexual impurity. How might your church begin to regain its “saltiness” in today’s world?
5. What is the individual believer’s responsibility in obeying Christ’s command in Mt. 5:13-16? What is God’s Holy Spirit saying right now to you, about something you need to do in order to impact your community by being salt and light for Jesus?

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