

# The Secret War: The Struggle with Pornography

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18th century English poet, Alexander Pope wrote that:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

These words represent a succinct and apt description of the seductive nature of immoral practices in general and pornography in particular. The word pornography refers to any media designed to create sexually explicit imagery in the mind for the purpose of sexual arousal. Porn represents a multi-billion-pound industry in which users cross ethnic, age, gender and religious barriers. Previously considered to be an exclusively male domain, research indicates that use by females is rapidly increasing. It would also be a naïve assumption that the use of porn among Christians is infrequent.

Once again, research tells a very different story. Pornography constitutes one of the most successful tools that the Enemy has employed to ensnare millions in addictive strongholds. 1 John 2:16 states, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

Engagement in this vice nullifies God’s will for individuals on so many different levels. It violates the divine purpose for sexual the experience, which was designed by God to be the covenant sign of marital union. The Bible states, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). The primary purpose of sexual expression is to nurture a spiritual and emotional bond between a husband and wife. It was never intended for the purpose of selfish gratification. Paul states clearly, ‘Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13).

Pornography feeds on lust and fantasy as an individual allows their mind to feast on sexual imagery and Jesus says that lust itself is tantamount to the commission of adultery (see Matthew 5:28). Commenting on those who would develop a Christ-like character Ellen White states that, “The first work of those who would reform is to purify the imagination” (Mind Character & Personality, vol.2, 595). What we choose to focus our mind’s upon forms the basis for our behaviour and shapes our character for good or ill.

The use of pornography is habit-forming and while not everyone who engages in its use is addicted, it does represent a most abject form of mental slavery for countless millions. Paul poses the question, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16). Addiction to pornography became all the more prevalent with the growth of

the Internet and the prevalence of modern technology. They have given free and easy access to explicit sexual images to suit every sexual preference. Addiction constitutes a persistent and escalating pattern of compulsive behaviour practiced in spite of increasing negative consequences to self and others. While the use of porn does not necessitate the injection or ingestion of chemical stimulants in order to create dependence, a porn addict is still the victim of a chemical addiction. He or she develops both a physical and psychological dependence on the body's own pleasure producing hormones, particularly dopamine, oxytocin, and vasopressin.

Modern neuroscience has demonstrated that sexual experiences can literally change the physical structure of the brain and influence our decision-making faculties. The Bible states, "That each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians. 4:4, 5, NIV).

While this is good counsel, it is easier said than done for those who are caught in the pornography trap. The plight of porn addicts is accurately articulated by Paul when he laments, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (see Romans 7:15, 18-19). Unfortunately, more often than not, like the Prodigal Son, addicts often have to hit rock bottom before they look for help (Luke 15:17).

Ellen White's comments also speak to the addict's condition. She states, "Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses . . . you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will (Steps to Christ, 47). Neuroscience demonstrates that an addict's brain can be re-trained through the exercise of the prefrontal cortex, which facilitates our decision-making.

Addicts often cannot experience freedom until they understand why the problem exists. It is important to appreciate that pornography is the symptom of a problem, not the problem itself. Stanley Arnold once said, "Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution." Often the key to breaking addictions lies in why the addiction developed in the first place. Addictions often arise out of attempts to anaesthetise emotional pain. Addicts cannot overcome their addiction without first embracing their vulnerability and admitting their condition. It has been said that, 'The longest journey we will ever take is the journey within.' David had taken that journey when he cried out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

The majority opinion of those within the mental health and caring professions appears to be that sexual addicts don't tend to change without a rigorous system of accountability. This begins with God, but also involves the willingness to risk opening their hearts to safe individuals, in order to become answerable for their attitudes and actions. James states, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:16). It is also to be recognised that while God is the ultimate source of our freedom from bondage, He

can choose whatever methods He wills to accomplish our freedom. This may, and often does require professional help to break the power of addiction. Often, our churches have neither the skills nor the structure to provide for the needs of clinically addicted individuals. It is therefore important to develop a list of trusted referral agencies that can provide the specialist help that is required. No one need suffer alone.

Having acknowledged his struggle in Romans 7:14-5, Paul concludes, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-5) There is no bondage that He cannot break, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).