

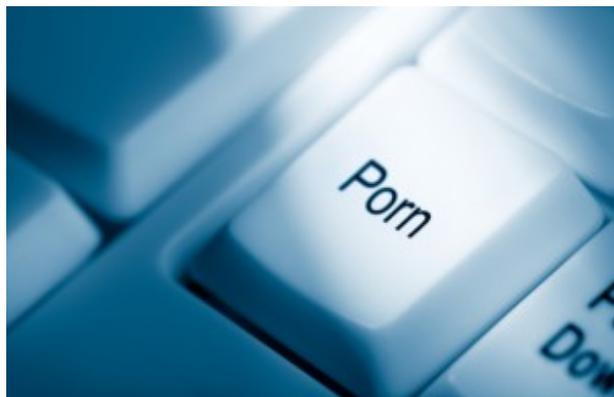
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The Seduction of Pornography and the Integrity of Christian Marriage, Part One



Tuesday, May 29, 2012

The intersection of pornography and marriage is one of the most problematic issues among many couples today—including Christian couples. The pervasive plague of pornography represents one of the greatest moral challenges faced by the Christian church in the postmodern age. With eroticism woven into the very heart of the culture, celebrated in its entertainment, and advertised as a commodity, it is virtually impossible to escape the pervasive influence of pornography in our culture and in our lives.



At the same time, the problem of human sinfulness is fundamentally unchanged from the time of the Fall until the present. There is no theological basis for assuming that human beings are more lustful, more defenseless before sexual temptation, or more susceptible to the corruption of sexual desire than was the case in any previous generation.

Two distinctions mark the present age from previous eras. First, pornography has been so mainstreamed through advertising, commercial images, entertainment, and everyday life, that what would have been illegal just a few decades ago is now taken as common dress, common entertainment, and unremarkable sensuality. Second, explicit eroticism—complete

with pornographic images, narrative, and symbolism—is now celebrated as a cultural good in some sectors of the society. Pornography, now reported to be the seventh-largest business in America, claims its own icons and public figures. Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy*, is considered by many Americans to be a model of entrepreneurial success, sexual pleasure, and a liberated lifestyle. The use of Hugh Hefner as a spokesman by a family-based hamburger chain in California indicates something of how pornography itself has been mainstreamed in the culture.

Growing out of those two developments is a third reality—namely, that increased exposure to erotic stimulation creates the need for ever-increased stimulation in order to demand notice, arouse sexual interest, and retain attention. In an odd twist, hyper-exposure to pornography leads to a lower net return on investment—which is to say that the more pornography one sees the more explicit the images must be in order to excite interest. As the postmodernist would explain, in order to “transgress,” pornographers must continue to press the envelope.

One further qualification must be added to this picture. Pornography is mainly, though not exclusively, a *male* phenomenon. That is to say, the users and consumers of pornography are overwhelmingly male—boys and men. In the name of women’s liberation, some pornography directed towards a female market has emerged in recent years. Nevertheless, this is decidedly a “niche” market in the larger pornographic economy. The fact remains that many men pay a great deal of money and spend a great deal of time looking *at* and looking *for* pornographic images in order to arouse themselves sexually.

Why is pornography such a big business? The answer to that question lies in two fundamental realities. First, the most fundamental answer to the question must be rooted in a biblical understanding of human beings as sinners. We must take into full account the fact that sin has corrupted every good thing in creation, and the effects of sin extend to every dimension of life. The sex drive, which should point toward covenant fidelity in marriage and all the goods associated with that most basic institution, has instead been corrupted to devastating effects. Rather than directed toward fidelity, covenantal commitment, procreation, and the wonder of a one-flesh relationship, the sex drive has been degraded into a passion that robs God of His glory, celebrating the sensual at the expense of the spiritual, and setting what God had intended for good on a path that leads to destruction in the name of personal fulfillment. The most important answer we can give to pornography’s rise in popularity is rooted in the Christian doctrine of sin. As sinners, we corrupt what God has perfectly designed for the good of His creatures and we have turned sex into a carnival of orgiastic pleasures. Not only have we severed sex from marriage, but as a society, we now look at marriage as an imposition, chastity as an embarrassment, and sexual restraint as a psychological hang-up. The doctrine of sin explains why we have exchanged the glory of God for Sigmund Freud’s concept of polymorphous perversity.

In addition to this, we must recognize that a capitalist free-market economy rewards those who produce a product that is both attractive and appetitive. The purveyors of pornography know that they succeed by directing their product to the lowest common denominator of humanity—a depraved sexual mind. Without the legal restraints common in previous generations, pornographers are now free to sell their goods virtually without restriction. Beyond this, they base their marketing plan on the assumption that an individual can be seduced into the use of pornography and then will be “hooked” into a pattern of dependence upon pornographic images and the need for ever-more explicit sexual material as a means towards sexual arousal.

The bottom line is that, in our sinfulness, men are drawn toward pornography and a frighteningly large percentage of men develop a dependence upon pornographic images for their own sexual arousal and for their concept of the good life, sexual fulfillment, and even meaning in life. Medical research can document the increased flow of endorphins, hormones that create pleasure in the brain, when sexual images are viewed. Given the law of reduced effect, greater stimulation is needed to keep a constant flow of endorphins to the brain’s pleasure centers. Without conscious awareness of what is happening, men are drawn into a pattern of deeper and deeper sin, more and more explicit pornography, and never-ending rationalizing, and all this started when the eye first began its perusal of the pornographic image and sexual arousal was its product.

The postmodern age has brought many wonders as well as incredible moral challenges. Often, technological achievement and moral complexity come hand in hand. This is most explicitly the case with the development of the Internet. For the first time in human history, a teenager in his bedroom has access to an innumerable array of pornographic websites, catering to every imaginable sexual passion, perversion, and pleasure. Today’s teenager, if not stranded on some desert island, is likely to know more about sex and its complexities than his father knew when he got married. Furthermore, what most generations have known only in the imagination—if at all—is now there for the viewing on websites, both commercial and free. The Internet has brought an interstate highway of pornography into every community, with exit ramps at every terminal or personal computer.

Pornography represents one of the most insidious attacks upon the sanctity of marriage and the goodness of sex within the one-flesh relationship. The celebration of debauchery rather than purity, the elevation of genital pleasure over all other considerations, and the corruption of sexual energy through an inversion of the self, corrupts the idea of marriage, leads to incalculable harm, and subverts marriage and the marital bond.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

This column was originally published on Wednesday, June 8, 2005. It is reposted today at the request of several readers and church leaders.

Next, Part Two: The Meaning of Sex in Marriage

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