

Protecting from Pornography

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

Introduction

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” (1 Cor. 6:18 ESV)

In this series, we will talk about the subject of handling pornography and how to protect both ourselves as leaders, and the flock that God has made us to be overseers.

I. Reason for this Session

Typically questions like these may be asked: “Is it even relevant for my congregation?” “Is it appropriate to discuss in a church or should the discussion be done in a different setting?” Let us look at three quick reasons why I believe this is appropriate:

A. God's heart on this matter

1. The extensive focus in the Bible against sexual sins—adultery, fornication etc.—reminds us again and again that sexual purity is very important to our Lord. Nothing displays greater spite toward God than trying to destroy what he considers significant.
2. In trying to understand God's heart, we must realize that porn is the same evil from before dressed differently. Therefore, God's command against what we might call the “21st-century porn” is the same as his command against “first-century sexual immorality.”

B. People need help

1. There are many in our churches that need help and yet have nowhere to go.
 - a) On one hand, it is unfortunate in some cases that though a church is meant to be the hospital for the sick, people are not able to find help without being judged.
 - b) On the other hand, some have fooled themselves into thinking that this matter is personal and church has no role, especially since it does not hurt others.
2. Porn lies by making false promises, and it is important people are made aware of its lies.
 - a) We read in Romans 1 that “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:23–25).
 - b) Porn is deceptive. It makes people think it is harmless, while in fact, it is not just skin deep, but soul deep. It ravages the soul and breaks down relationships.
3. Here are some key findings on the effects of pornography by Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., commenting on a research conducted by Marriage and Religion Research Institute.
 - a) Effect on the family
 - 1) Pornography viewing leads to a loss of interest in good family relations.

- 2) Pornography use is a pathway to infidelity and divorce, and is frequently a major factor in these family disasters.
- b) Effect on the individual
 - 1) Pornography is addictive, and neuroscientists are beginning to map the biological substrate of this addiction.
 - 2) Users tend to become desensitized to the type of pornography they use, become bored with it, and then seek more perverse forms of pornography.
- c) The main defenses against pornography are close family life, a good marriage, and good relations between parents and children, coupled with deliberate parental monitoring of internet use. (<http://marri.us/pornography>, March 27, 2014)

C. Leadership responsibility to teach

Churches have a responsibility to warn, to teach and to equip their members against pornography, just as they do against sexual immorality (since they are not different). Let me give you three injunctions on teaching:

1. Consider the injunction of “teaching” in the very fiber of the Great Commission.
“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you . . .” (Matt. 28:20)
2. Consider Paul, how who compels us with his example.
“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:26–27)
3. Hear Peter urging us in 1 Peter 2:11.
“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:11)

II. What is Pornography?

Before we proceed, however, it is important we get a clearer understanding of what we are dealing with.

A. General understanding

1. Interestingly, the world finds it difficult to define porn since it lacks a point of absolute reference.
 - a) Here is a famous quote uttered by the late Justice Potter Stewart in 1964 when faced with a case involving obscenity.
“I shall not today attempt further to define [obscenity]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it . . .”
 - b) The judge was in effect saying that it is easy to recognize but difficult to explain or even defend legally. And the porn industry has used this ambiguity to a \$400 billion advantage.

2. So what is the secular definition?

"Printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity".

- a) The question is always asked, "What does one mean by 'explicit'?"
- b) Here is another question: "Is the nude sculpture of David by Michelangelo, art or pornography?"
- c) In fact, the jury was unable to answer that question, when the lawyer defending his client indicted on pornographic charges asked them to explain.

B. Biblical understanding

- 1. In looking at the Bible, we must recognize that the words "*porneia*" and "*porneuō*," from where we get the word "pornography," is used in the Bible to mean illicit sexual activity or fornication. They occurs at least 35 times in the New Testament, including the text we read from, 1 Corinthians 6:18.
- 2. We can therefore define the biblical understanding of "porn" to be "Anything that provides an immoral outlet to satisfy a sinful or sexual desire."
- 3. Porn in this definition covers a wide range that is because we must realize porn is a continuum.

- a) Dr. Victor Cline says there are five stages of addiction and that sex and pornography can be a more difficult addiction to break than cocaine.
 - 1) Early exposure
 - 2) Addiction
 - 3) Escalation
 - 4) Desensitization
 - 5) Acting out sexually
- b) What does this mean in our day-to-day language?

Here is a simplistic attempt to piece together the slide from a mere 'glance' to 'addiction', 'escalation' and 'acting out sexually'.

- 1) Let's start with glance.
- 2) A second lingering look at someone of the opposite gender.
- 3) Magazines on the rack we subconsciously thumb through as we wait our turn at the cash register.
- 4) Enjoying a popular movie though known for violence, foul language, and sexual content.
- 5) A "one-click stand" with online provocative banner ads, especially available on social media.

- 6) Intentionally watching a pay-per-view movie in a hotel room while travelling alone.
 - 7) Frequent fantasizing over images in print, or online sites.
 - 8) Acting out private sexual acts over digital or print images and/or visiting a prostitute.
- c) Individual experiences may vary, but the broad road to destruction is the same.
 - d) More importantly, since porn is a continuum, many may unknowingly be porn victims and they need help desperately.

III. What is the Leader's Role?

The role of every Bible teacher is to direct the attention of every person to Jesus Christ. He is the perfect answer and the total solution against pornography. He shows us how to handle this tricky subject.

A. We read about the woman of Samaria in the gospel according to John 4.

1. The incident of the woman of Samaria is story of grace.
2. She has been looking for meaning, satisfaction, and identity in sexual intimacy.
3. Jesus could have demanded that she stop her behavior before he would talk to her. Knowing that she is trapped, he offers her "living water" that would quench her thirst.
4. Instead of leaving her guilty, he leads her to fuller satisfaction in himself.

B. Our role is to lead people to this Living Water.

1. Only Jesus can quench that inner thirst.
2. Lead them lovingly, gently, and without judging, for only he can truly judge, but more importantly only he can fully satisfy.

Protecting from Pornography

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 4

IV. Role of Church Leaders

When we talk about roles it is important to remember that “proactivity is the mark of a leader.”

Good leadership is rarely blindsided, nor is it constantly firefighting—and it is no different for church leaders. In their dependence on God for wisdom they recognize the actions they need to take before matters become major issues.

A. Three ways for church leaders to be proactive

1. Acknowledge the problem.

Denial is probably the most common trait of an absconding leader. Leadership must quickly acknowledge the “elephant in the room.” They know that the problem exists, but almost subconsciously they try to avoid confronting the issue.

In fact, it is time for us to acknowledge that:

- a) The silent killer may be lurking in the pews of our churches.
- b) No one is immune to this issue—men, women, children, and even us as church leaders.
- c) People rarely come forward on their own to confess or to ask for help.

2. Arm yourselves with grace and facts.

- a) First, we must be gentle just like Christ would and not condemning. Guilt and condemnation will only make it worse.
- b) Second, know the facts and resources that will help in handling this matter with care, confidence, and competence.
- c) There are many resources available for use:
 - Websites: Covenant Eyes; Net Safe Kids
 - Books: *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* by William M. Struthers.
 - Videos: “Somebody’s Daughter: A Journey to Freedom from Pornography,” www.somebodysdaughter.org/
 - YouTube videos: “Asking David”
 - Technology that parents can use to set up controls

3. Act by teaching.

Leadership must ensure that they are teaching not what is palatable but what is right—teaching “the whole counsel of God,” as we saw from the example of Paul.

- a) Teach against pornography from the pulpit. What must be evident is the care for the flock, not the embarrassment of having to be explicit.
- b) Teach to have a low tolerance of sin and to keep a short account with God.
 - 1) Show them that even a little amount of sin is too much.
 - 2) Show them that the God of grace and strength is also a holy God.
 - 3) Show them that when they sin, instead of running away they should come running back to God.

"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." (Eph. 5:3 ESV)
- c) Sexual purity is the fruit of teaching and equipping the flock against sexual immorality.

B. Lead them to forgiveness in Jesus.

In discussing the role of the leadership, we must remember that it is important to lead them to find forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Pornography can scar people with guilt, and therefore it is important to encourage them to turn to Jesus and find healing.

1. Encourage them that no one is beyond forgiveness.

Remind them that the gospel shows that our God is bigger than our sin.

"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." (Ps. 103:10–14)

2. Exhort to take steps to prevent recurrence.

- a) To be watchful

Temptations are constant. We read in Luke 4:13, referring to the temptations of Jesus that, *"the Devil departed from him until an opportune time."*

Thankfully, the devil has got nothing on Jesus. But unless we are watchful it can be different story for us.

- b) To be disciplined and self-controlled

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Rom. 13:14)

- c) To be in intentional battle

- 1) The battle against lust, sexual immorality and porn is active and intentional.

- 2) We are soldiers, and soldiers fight. There is no passive Christianity.

"... that by them you may wage the good warfare." (1 Tim. 1:18)

3. Lead them to victory in Jesus.

As we lead members to Jesus for forgiveness we must also remind them of the victory in Jesus.

Jesus is both the eraser of the past guilt and the enabler of the future hope. He alone can lead us into victory and into holiness.

a) Victory is through transformation not self-reform.

1) There is no hope in self-reform or self-efforts, for the Bible says:

"For from within, out of the heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality . . . adultery." (Mark 7:21)

2) We are weak and have no strength of our own to act against our sinful desires. Bible says we were:

". . . passions of their flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind." (Eph. 2:3)

3) Victory in Jesus is because of what he does in you and because of His Spirit that dwells in you.

(a) As Warren Wiersbe puts it, "through incarnation not imitation."

(b) Jesus is not saying, "Watch me and live," but his Spirit enables you from within as you seek to live for Him.

b) Victory is 100% guaranteed.

1) God has given the power of God in Christ Jesus to be a daily overcomer.

2) We know Jesus is the victor over death, and he offers us the same victory over pornography as we live dependent on him.

*"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
(1 Cor. 15:57)*

Protecting from Pornography

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 4

V. Practical Steps to Help Guard Ourselves and the Flock

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 ESV)

There is a need to take intentional and practical steps so that both the leaders and the flock are kept safe.

A. Don't be deceived

1. False sense of privacy
 - a) We live in a world where privacy is a highly valued commodity, and for good reason.
 - 1) It is only in the abusive use of privacy, particularly when it hides sin, that a good thing can soon turn bad.
 - 2) The culture of "It is my life," clubbed with the false understanding of privacy, has trapped even the intentional Christian.
 - b) We have been raised in a culture that evaluates risk based on potential of being caught. As the saying goes, "In Jersey anything's legal as long as you don't get caught."
2. False rationalization
 - a) We try to excuse sin in our life and "hide" the ones in the life of our family members on the basis of "family honor" and pride.
 - b) We must bear in mind that excusing sin for the "greater good"—i.e. protecting a marriage, family, or even a ministry—never leads to any good. It is, in fact, a sinful rationalization.
 - c) As one pastor put it, "I was in a six-month affair, at the same time preaching and counseling against adultery, and telling myself that God didn't care because the church was growing."
 - d) Don't be deceived. Porn lies with a straight face.

B. Don't linger

1. Tear down the image.
 - a) Our mind is constantly creating mental pictures.
 - 1) A casual glance at picture on the magazine cover can sear itself into our minds and when we dwell on it can lead to fantasies.
 - 2) At its root, porn is about worship—self-worship.

- b) Addiction to pornography demands a disproportionate level of dwelling on and a desire for selfish satisfaction.
 - c) And anything that occupies our thoughts and motivates our actions can soon become our god.
 - d) The image becomes the god we worship.
2. Have a low tolerance for sin.
- a) Be convinced that a little is too much. Again it is the culture of compromise that we live in that allows for compatibility of sin in a Christian's life. It is in no way biblical.
 - b) We often seek "boundaries of tolerance." That is to ask questions like:
 - 1) "How much is okay?"
 - 2) "Is a casual glance an addiction?"
 - 3) "When is it really porn?"
 - c) These questions are in effect asking us to answer the question, "What proportion of sin is bad?" The answer is obvious. Asking these questions only desensitizes us to sin.

C. Make a covenant like Job

I love the way the book of Job begins. As soon as we are introduced to Job, his character is evidenced. What do we learn from Job?

1. Turn away from evil.
- "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." (Job: 1:1)*
- a) Job is in effect telling us that he does not "linger."
 - b) He refuses to give anything that can lead to evil a second look.
 - c) Often it is not possible to avoid seeing, but Job reminds us that it is possible for it not to "catch our eye" and seek a second look.
 - d) The second look often sears the image in our minds for us to play at our convenience.
2. Make a covenant with your eyes.
- a) We read in chapter 31 that Job had learned there were some places he should not be looking at the first place.

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1)
 - b) Illustration: I know a person who committed not to look below the chin of the opposite sex when conversing with them.

D. Commit to putting the flesh to death daily

As we saw previously, desire or intention is no good on its own. It must be followed through with discipline and commitment.

We read about Paul and how he learned to discipline his body.

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9: 24–27)

E. Use Alvin Cooper's 3-step process to break the cycle

*(*Accessed: Your Brain On Porn. Luke Gilkerson. Pg 14. Covenant Eyes. Sept 2013).*

The late psychologist Alvin Cooper believed that there are three main factors that drew people into Internet porn.

The three factors according to him are: Accessibility, Affordability, and Anonymity. He dubbed this the "Triple A Engine." The good news is, like a three-legged stool, kick out one of the legs and it will fall. That is, remove one of the factors and we can break the cycle of addiction.

1. Accessibility

- a) This deals with the ease of accessing content online. The way to remove this leg of the stool is to make access difficult.
- b) Make access difficult by using reliable filters with passwords.
 - 1) Unprotected Wi-Fi allows unrestricted access, especially in the secluded corners of your home.
 - 2) Have an accountability partner set this up and keep the password.
- c) Don't trust movie ratings.

PG ratings, for example, are often not wholesome even for adults. These movies are often filled with obscenities, violence, and sex scenes that assault the mind and soil the heart.
- d) Keep the windows of your soul closed.

Just as we board up the windows when there is a threat of a storm, we must board up our sensory organs to prevent the entry of anything less than wholesome.

2. Affordability

- a) The internet has made affordability of online porn a non-issue.
 - 1) 70% of porn available online is free and yet the porn industry is a multi-billion industry. That must tell us something.
 - 2) The slide between "free" porn on the internet to paid porn is slippery. Unfortunately, many men and women are finding it out to their ruin.
- b) Ease of access has made this leg the hardest to remove.
- c) Some have found that having your spouse ready access to your credit card statements is a good way to prevent any irregular or immoral charge.

3. Anonymity

This deals with the privacy issue we covered previously. The allowance that society makes to hide and to cover what is personal.

- a) This factor, however, is entirely within the control of the person.
- b) The fortunate part of this is that this leg of anonymity is the easiest to remove.
- c) Awareness, Accountability, and Accessories are three ways to handle this factor.
 - 1) Awareness: Be aware of the presence of God.
 - (a) *To use the old Latin phrase, we must live "Coram Deo," or "before the face of God."*
 - (b) *Be aware of God's presence at all times. As the psalmist put it: "The nearness of God is my good." (Ps. 73: 28)*
 - 2) Accountability: This refers to having someone who you are accountable to. We will talk about this in detail in the next session.
 - 3) Accessories: Technology is a good tool in handling Internet anonymity.

You will find a list of such tools, including websites, books, videos and other tech tools as Additional Resources.

Protecting from Pornography

Detailed Outline

Part 4 of 4

VI. Being Accountable

Bob Woodward, the investigative journalist, along with Carl Bernstein responsible for the original news reporting on Watergate Scandal, once said, "It was accountability that Nixon feared." How true that is even today of the many who often end up in deep addiction.

A. Church and you

First, is the accountability that exists between the church community and you.

1. Be grateful for churches that teach the whole counsel of God, churches that are willing to warn in love, churches that haven't fallen in the trap of mistaking politeness for compassion.
2. Be teachable. It is one thing for the church to be willing to teach, but it is also important that we are not mere hearers of the Word but also doers of the Word.

*"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."
(Prov. 12:1 ESV)*

3. Be available. Having benefitted from the church community and from the experience that God allowed in your lives, it is time to be there for the other person.

a) We are reminded of our Lord telling Simon:

*"But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, **strengthen** your brothers." (Luke 22:32)*

b) Our every experience, God can turn into a blessing because of the opportunity he provides to strengthen our brothers and sisters.

4. The interaction in the church is at a group level and Bible commands us not to neglect this responsibility. This is especially so that we can stir up each other in love and encourage each other.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Heb. 10:24-25)

B. Community and you

The concept of accountability covers not just you as part of the church group but also you as an individual in the community.

It is important for accountability to become personal. Accountability at its core is about one-on-one relationship.

1. Be grateful for the "one another's" in the Bible.

The Bible discourages us from keeping our faith private. That is what the world would have us believe. There are in fact at least 38 "one to another" verses in the Bible. Here is one that speaks to us about accountability in Gospel according to Luke.

*"Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."
(Luke 17:3)*

2. Find a dependable friend of the same gender.

- a) Make it a matter of prayer and intentionally desiring someone who can be your accountability partner.

- b) The Bible says:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" (Ecc. 4:9)

3. Be transparent.

- a) Transparency and vulnerability with each other is extremely important for effective accountability.

- b) Accountability requires both openness and tough love. We read in Proverbs:

*"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend."
(Prov. 27:5-6)*

- c) Honest, transparent accountability is an absolute must for every Christian. The injunction in 1 Corinthians is very clear.

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12)

VII. Leaders Beware!

We cannot end without reminding ourselves to watch out. We as church leaders are in no way immune to pornography.

Remember the Leadership Survey by Christianity Today, which found 37% of pastors saying cyberporn is a current struggle for them.

So with Paul we must daily say,

"... I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:27)

So what are some of the steps we must take?

A. Be disciplined

Nate Larkin, founder of Samson Society and a former pastor, tells how his addiction to pornography started when he had to research the topic for a series at church. The images never left him till he succumbed badly. So leaders beware. Why?

1. Leaders are often the most vulnerable and the least suspected.
 - a) These two factors make for a deadly combination that hides terrible problems—problems of risk, compromise, and denial.
 - b) Church leaders work closely with people and generally have more opportunities of one-on-one time with the opposite gender. These open unwarranted opportunities for fantasies to be played out.
 - 1) Billy Graham had covenanted early on in his ministry never to be alone with someone of the opposite gender. That’s a good tip for every church leader.
 - 2) We have covered this area in some detail under the topic of “Husband of One Wife” within the elder’s personal life.
2. Paul the apostle writes in 1 Corinthians:

“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Cor. 9:27)

Paul had learned that self-discipline must start with oneself before we can teach it to others.

B. Be responsible

1. Be responsible because God is watching.
 - a) Leaders must be responsible because God is watching. We read in Ezekiel about elders of Israel who were practicing “in the dark, each in his room of pictures, saying that the Lord does not see . . .”

“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’” (Ezek. 8:12)
 - b) Leaders must practice Coram Deo—the awareness of God as the psalmist reminds us in Psalm 73:28.
2. Be responsible and stop rationalizing.
 - a) When leaders sin repeatedly, they often serve themselves a bigger dollop of grace than they would for someone else.
 - 1) This they do by rationalizing it is “okay” because of all the good they are doing.
 - 2) They seek to make it a minor issue so that the ministry is not affected.
 - b) We must remember that no ministry is greater than an unconfessed sin.

- c) It is important like David that the leader realizes that any sin is sin “against the Lord,” and by deliberately sinning that leader has “utterly scorned the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13–14).

C. Be gentle

It is easy for us as leaders to become accusatory and judgmental when we find a member of our congregation in sin. It is at this time we must learn to extend the same grace, the grace that we have received from the Great Shepherd.

So how can a leader show himself as gentle?

1. Be empathetic.
 - a) First, remember that we ourselves are daily recipients of God’s grace and so we must likewise be grace givers.
 - b) Secondly, be aware that we are similarly susceptible. That could have been us.
2. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest and our Good Shepherd. He should be our motivation and encouragement for gentleness. We read in Hebrews:

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:14–16)

D. Be an example

1. Be a leader in every sense.

“... Being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1–2)

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (Heb. 13:7)

2. Be available.

Pornography hurts. Let people know you will not condemn but counsel. Direct them to Jesus, who alone can forgive, heal, and strengthen.

VIII. Conclusion

As a quick review, as leaders we have the responsibility to:

- Teach against porn
- Lead them to forgiveness and restoration in Christ, and
- Keep ourselves above reproach through discipline and reliance on God.