

# Fighting Internet Pornography

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## Introduction.

- A. At the most recent preachers' meeting here in Joliet, Mark Sindeldecker, a brother from Burbank, presented a study about the various ways that computers can be used for good or ill in our spiritual lives. One of the topics that he touched on was Internet pornography and some of the ways that we need to protect our children from it. As soon as he brought the subject up, I knew I needed to preach on it.
- B. Internet pornography has been around for as long as the Internet has, and as the Net grows, pornography grows with it. This poses a tremendous spiritual challenge for our young people. When I was researching this online, the most reputable statistics I could find came from enough.org. Here's what they said:
  1. 42% of Internet users between 10 and 17 viewed Internet pornography in the past 12 months.
  2. 66% of those who viewed it did so unintentionally. Often, they stumbled across it while using file-sharing programs, entering chat rooms, or searching for non-sexual images online.
  3. More than 1/3 of boys ages 16-17 sought out X-rated Web sites in the past year.
  4. 8% of girls ages 16-17 sought out X-rated Web sites in the past year.
- C. To me, the most surprising thing about these statistics is that they tell us that porn isn't just a problem for parents of boys anymore. A substantial number of teenage girls are getting involved with porn too, and I suspect we will see an even larger number involved in the years to come. Just like parents today need to take steps to protect their children from alcohol, drugs, and sexual immorality, they also need to protect them from online porn. This can certainly be a challenge, particularly for parents who are less computer-literate than the kids they are supposed to defend. However, this is still something we need to commit to doing. The Internet is an important battleground in the war for our children's souls, so let's look at fighting Internet pornography.

## I. What's the Problem with Porn?

- A. Many people in the world would be bewildered by how seriously we take this topic. In their minds, minors looking at online porn is a victimless crime. After all, no one else is involved but the children in question, there aren't any obvious physical consequences to it, so why not just leave them to it as a harmless method of exploring their sexuality? On surface, that's an appealing method of reasoning, and I'm quite sure that there are thousands of Christian young people across this country who are using it to justify their porn use right now. This tells us for certain, then, that we need to ask "What's the problem with porn?"
- B. The first big problem with porn is that it incites lust, which makes it directly sinful. We see what Jesus has to say about lust in Matthew 5:27-28. Scripturally speaking, lust is sexual desire for another whom we have no right to possess. This is not just noticing a pretty girl walking down the street. This is fixating on, dwelling on, that girl (or that boy, for that matter) as a sexual object. Lust says, "I would if I could." It's obvious, friends, that pornography exists with the purpose of stirring up this illicit sexual desire. Porn is intended to create lust, and for those who use it, lust is what it creates. No one else may ever know, but God knows.
- C. That's the most obvious problem with porn, but it is equally problematic because it creates a selfish attitude toward sex that can trouble the porn user for the rest of his life. Pornography is the ultimate in instant gratification. No matter what our thing is, we can find it and get it on our computer screens in a matter of seconds. We don't have to consider anyone else's needs in seeking it out; we don't have to work with anyone else in getting it. Internet pornography is pure selfishness, plain and simple.
- D. Now, as all of us who are or who have been married know, real life doesn't work like that. In fact, God's vision of married sexuality is completely different. We see Paul describe this in 1 Corinthians 7:2-4. Sex isn't about an unrestrained taking for oneself. That's rape. It's about unrestrained giving to another. God intends for sex to be not just an expression of *eros*, but of *agape*. Let's say that there's a young Christian man who's been a porn hound for the past seven or eight years. One day, he finds the right girl and gets married. Do you think he's just going to be able to flip the switch and go from selfish to selfless after he has spent so much time training himself to be evil? Not hardly. Better far that he never develops the problem in the first place.
- E. Similarly, porn creates problems in marriages because it raises unrealistic expectations. Look at Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 3:7. We are to live with our spouses in an understanding way: who they are, where they're coming from, what they can do, and what we need to do to make our marriages work. Pornography cripples that process in the sexual realm by imposing fantasy on reality. It creates unrealistic expectations of what real men and real women look like, for how they behave, and for what will happen in the years and decades of a marriage. When real-life spouses get compared to porn, they lose, and so does the marriage.
- F. Perhaps most importantly of all, though, porn is problematic because it enslaves us to sin. Like every other sin, porn is addictive. The devil hasn't set it up so that we do it once and walk away. Instead, we come back, and the second encounter with porn is never as good as the first. We seek out stronger and stronger

stimulation to maintain the same level of enjoyment, until we end up addicted, enslaved to a sin we can't even really take pleasure from anymore. Paul describes the problem with that in Romans 6:15-16. As we learn to obey the devil's will through porn, that keeps us from being Christ's slave and makes us Satan's slave instead.

## II. The Bible's Response.

- A. It is inevitable, friends, that at some point in all of our children's lives, Satan is going to try to lure them into this terrible trap of online pornography. They need to be ready for it, as do we ourselves. Let's look then, at the Bible's responses to this temptation. James gives us two solutions to the porn problem in James 5:14-16. When we're wrestling with any temptation, we need to confess our sins to one another, and we need to pray. First, we need to make ourselves accountable to someone else. Spouses make good accountability partners; so do parents. Even friends will do. We need to confess our sin to someone who will check up on us and demand the truth about how we're doing. This will often be the edge we need to resist instead of giving in.
- B. Prayer is just as important. This verse talks about the prayers of others, but it's equally important that we pray for ourselves. All of us are weak, flawed people, and God does not expect us to overcome our flaws by ourselves. We have to be determined to serve Him, but once we make that commitment, He will gladly help us to build up our character so that we leave even our most dangerous temptations behind.
- C. Second, we need to learn to look for ways of escape. This, of course, is what Paul instructs us to do in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Sometimes, this escape route appears in the midst of temptation, but it often shows up beforehand. When we fall into a pattern of sin, typically, there are triggers for that, things that appear regularly in our lives that expose us to temptation. In our struggles with Internet porn, we have to figure out what those triggers are and solve them. For instance, if Satan is really going to tempt us if we are using the computer after midnight, guess what we need to do? That's right—go to bed at a reasonable hour instead of staying up and being reckless. If going to a particular Web site will entrap us, we shouldn't go there anymore. We might have to give up some things we enjoy, but that's a lot better than giving up our soul to Satan.
- D. Finally, we have to train our minds to think about righteous things instead of evil things. Paul tells us this in Philippians 4:8. This is really where we need to fight the battle against pornography. If we have allowed Satan to corrupt our hearts and train us to be fascinated by the sexually illicit, guess what? He's got half the battle won already. As the Bible tells us, we soon become what we think about in our hearts. The way to protect ourselves from X-rated Web sites is by protecting ourselves from the desire to see X-rated Web sites. If we do not allow Satan to control our thoughts and emotions, he cannot control our actions either.

## III. Common-Sense Responses.

- A. All of these Bible solutions to sin are every bit as applicable today as they were two thousand years ago, but it is still true that the technological nature of the problem requires us to use not just the word, but our common sense too. Let's look now at some modern-day tips for protecting our kids from pornography:
- B. First, we need to **TALK ABOUT IT WITH OUR KIDS**. We don't have a choice, friends, between talking with our kids about online porn and having it not appear in their lives. The choice is between talking with them about it ourselves or letting someone else do it for us, and that's not really much of a choice at all. They need to know what the dangers of pornography use are. They need to know how to protect themselves from it. Perhaps most of all, though, they need to know that we care and that we will hold them accountable.
- C. Second, we need to **KEEP INTERNET-CAPABLE COMPUTERS IN PUBLIC AREAS**. It's quite common these days for teens to have computers in their bedrooms. That's a terrible idea! We certainly wouldn't let them have a TV hooked up to the Playboy Channel there, but any kid in our high school class could find something on the Internet in five minutes that would make the Playboy Channel look tame. Computers don't belong in bedrooms behind locked doors. They belong in rooms where Mom and Dad are too.
- D. Next, we need to **USE INTERNET-FILTERING PROGRAMS**. On a basic level, most online search engines have a "Safe Search" mode that filters out adult content from Web and image searches, and we need to have those up so that our kids don't stumble across something horrifying while researching a school project. In a more intense way, there are programs such as Net Nanny that undertake to block access to all porn sites from a particular computer. We can download and install these for a reasonable fee. None of these filters are perfect, but having any obstacle between our kids and porn is better than having no obstacle at all.
- E. Finally, we should **MONITOR INTERNET USE**. We need to know where our kids are going when they're online. The low-tech way to do this is just to ask them, on a regular basis and at unexpected times. Of course, kids can lie, and so we need to supplement this by looking at the Internet history for our web browser. In Internet Explorer, you can do this through the "Favorites" bar, and when you bring it up, it tells you every Web site the computer has visited in the last two weeks. If it's empty or only has a day or two of data in it, typically, somebody has erased the history list to hide something. For those who are a little bit more tech-savvy, there are programs we can download that automatically e-mail us a list of every adult website that has been visited, whether the Internet history is erased or not. Put all this together, and it's tough to get around.

**Conclusion.** All of our efforts to fight porn, though, are pointless unless we're right with God.