

A Look at Pornography

By Jeffrey W. Hamilton

Pornography: Material that deals with sex in a rude or offensive manner. Material designed to shock the viewer in how sex is depicted. Material that is sexually explicit and intended to arouse sexual passion.

The depiction of sex has become increasingly common in our society. It is rare to find a television show that does not include at least one scene of a sexual nature. Advertisements use glimpses of intimate areas of the body to catch viewers' attention. Books, which are not even in the "Romance" genre, will include titillating hints of sex or out-right descriptions of the sex act. Songs glorify romantic encounters. With such an environment, it is not surprising to find few objections to pornography by people in the world. Objections are overruled. "People ought to be free to express themselves as they see fit," we are told.

We forget that our society is not the only one that has dealt with rampant sexual expression. Think about the artwork from the ancient Greek and Roman societies which has survived to our era. Nudes were frequently depicted, making one wonder if it was a common sight in their society or not. The stories contained in Greek lore frequently contained sexual themes. Yet this is the era in which Christianity was born. As the gospel spread through the Gentile regions, the apostles and other preachers of God's Word had to contend with a society that glorified sex.

Lust

Before examining pornography in the light of the Scriptures, we need to address the problem of lust. James 1:13-16 warns us how people die a spiritual death. It starts with our desires. Each of us is born with desires to help us survive in this world. We experience hunger to remind us to fuel our bodies with food. We experience thirst when our bodies need more fluids. We have desires to sleep, to be respected, to be loved. Even the desire for sex is necessary for the continuation of mankind.

When the natural desires of man are satisfied, it gives us pleasure. We enjoy our meals, especially when we have worked up an appetite. A cool glass of water is particularly pleasurable when we are hot. And yes, sex is meant to bring pleasure as well (Proverbs 5:18-19).

However, Satan uses our desires against us. He places us in situations where satisfying one of our desires will cause us to break a law of God. Enjoying a meal is not wrong, but overindulging in food is gluttony (Philippians 3:18-19; Proverbs 25:16). Satisfying your thirst with water is quite different from drinking alcoholic beverages (Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-21, 29-35). Sex is honorable within marriage, but God will bring judgment against those who engage in sex before marriage (fornicators) or the married who have sex with

someone who is not his spouse (adulterers) (Hebrews 13:4). The situation where fulfilling our desire would break a law of God is called temptation.

When a person gives the temptation serious consideration and begins to rationalize that the satisfaction of the desire is worth the consequences of breaking God's law, we call that lust. Lust is any strong desire, but we generally reserve the word for a strong desire to do what is unlawful.

When the person acts on his desire and breaks the law of God, he sins (I John 3:4). Unfortunately, it rarely ends there. Once a person convinces himself to sin once, he will easily convince himself to sin additional times. Soon it becomes a habit to sin. Where his conscience might bother him at first, the repeat sinner no longer cares what anyone else thinks about his life. He has decided he has a license to sin. Some older English translations use the word licentiousness or lasciviousness to refer to this attitude. Since this self-approval to sin is so often connected with sexual sins, many of the modern translations use the word sensuality - indulging in the gratification of the senses without regard to morality.

A person who no longer cares what man or God thinks about his actions has no reason to stop his sinful lifestyle. He has separated himself from godliness and God (Isaiah 59:1-2). To God it is the same as if the man has died.

Looking back at these steps, we see that there is nothing we can do about our desires. If we do not eat, we will get hungry. If we do not drink, we will get thirsty. The desires to be respected and the desires for sex remain, so long as we live in these earthly bodies. We cannot dismiss these desires, no matter how much we may wish them to go away. Neither can we stop temptation. Temptation is a work of Satan and we cannot make him stop. Every person in this world must and will face temptations throughout his life.

The first point we have control is in our response to temptation. It is the thoughts of our hearts that determine our character. Proverbs 23:6-8 speaks of being invited to a meal at a miser's home. A miser is a man who hoards his funds. He spends very little and what little he spends is only for himself. While you are at his meal he urges you to eat heartily, but inside he wishes you would not eat so much. Which defines the man's character, what he says out loud or what he thinks inside? Obviously, no matter what he says, he remains a miser in his heart.

Jesus makes a similar point in Mark 7:18-23. It is not the actions of a man which determine his character but the thoughts that precede his actions. Most people contemplate sin for a while before they work up the nerve to attempt to try it. It is our thoughts which determine our course of future action (Matthew 6:22-23).

Understanding this helps us to understand Jesus's statement in Matthew 5:27-28. Jesus is not saying it is wrong to see a woman and note that she is pretty. However, to look at a woman and wonder what she would be like in bed is a completely different matter. To have sex with a person you are not married to is a sin (Hebrews 13:4). You might claim

that you do not plan to actually have sex, you are just thinking about it. Yet, it is our thoughts which determine our future course of action. Is the reason you are not having sex because you believe it is wrong or because you simply have not had the opportunity to have sex outside of marriage? Even though a person may not have actually carried out his thoughts, the lack of opportunity to act doesn't make him any less of a sinner than the man who carried out his thoughts.

When the Gentiles turned their backs on God and began to form gods of their own, "*God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them*" (Romans 1:24). They pursued the lusts of their hearts and their bodies followed thereafter to commit indecent acts.

"I won't get hurt"

As humans, we tend to judge the future on past experience. Nothing bad has happened to us so far, so we feel that nothing bad can happen to us in the future. Young people are especially prone to this naive attitude toward life. They have not lived many years. They have not experienced many of the problems in life. And so they come away with the conclusion that they are immune to such problems.

Solomon warns his readers, Proverbs 6:23-35, to stay away from prostitutes and adulterous women. It is foolish to think that a man can keep company with such women and not be affected by them. "*Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?*" In the next chapter, Solomon describes how a young man was lured into having sex by a prostitute (Proverbs 7:6-27). It starts with the foolish behavior of the young man. "*I discerned among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing though the street near her corner; and he takes the way to her house in the twilight.*" The young man lacked sense because he walks into the area of town where the prostitutes hang out at the very time of day they do most of their business. It was foolish to think he could walk by and not get solicited. It was foolish of the young man to act as if he was immune to temptation. Hence, Solomon warns, "*Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stay into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain.*"

What purpose is served by pornographic material? What is their intent? Obviously the scantily attired models are placed there to arouse the desire for sex in the viewers. Yet the focus of this desire is on people to whom you are not married. Sex outside of marriage is the sin of fornication. Why would a person want to fill his mind with the desire for something he cannot righteously do? When a man spends hours thinking about the possibility of sex outside of marriage, what happens to that man when an opportunity arises to have sex? Would it be easier or harder to resist the temptation after spending time thinking about this particular sin?

The old joke about Playboy magazine is the man who says, "I just read it for the articles." Yet, you cannot get to those articles without seeing suggestive photographs. How long will it take before these views begin to affect your thoughts and your desires?

Paul urged the Philippians to fill their thought with things from above (Philippians 4:8). If we spend time thinking about righteous living, it becomes easier to make good choices. But if we spend our time thinking about evil, we will tend to make bad decisions with the opportunity arises.

"It's not harming anyone"

A person claiming that looking at pornography doesn't harm other people is ignoring the fact that it harms himself. It is similar to the claim a man makes who has sex with a prostitute. The prostitute is willing to accept his money in exchange for sex, so, the claim goes, no one is harmed. Yet Paul addresses this matter in I Corinthians 6:15-20. The man who engages in sex with a prostitute is binding himself to her physically, emotionally, and spiritually. There is much more to the act of sex than the physical coupling of two bodies. Joining with someone in sin prevents us from spiritually joining with Christ. We cannot be partners in sin and remain partners with Jesus (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1). What greater harm can a person do than to lock himself away from the only one who can save his soul from Hell?

Yet the viewer of pornography will argue that he has not engaged in fornication. This brings us back to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:27-28 which we examined earlier. To arouse a desire for sex with someone you are not married is no different than actually committing the act. In your mind you have committed fornication over and over again. It does not require the actual act to be guilty of the sin.

"I can do as I please"

There is a word in the Greek language, *aselgeia*, which is translated into English as sensuality, wantonness, lasciviousness, or licentiousness. The word refers to a person who is so given over to debauchery that he no longer cares what anyone else thinks of his actions. While such an attitude can be connected with any sin, it is usually associated with sins of the flesh, such as drunkenness or immoral sexual relations. The person is solely seeking the gratification of his bodily desires and does not care if others think it is wrong. He believes his desires give him a license to sin.

A person who pursues pornography does so for the sexual arousal the material stimulates within himself. As with most physical pleasures, a constant diet of pornography causes the person to be jaded to these images. In order to regain a similar level of thrill, the man must seek new and more shocking images. Part of the thrill created by pornography is the shock of seeing something you know is wrong. (See Proverbs 9:17.) Yet as you repeatedly fill your mind with sinful ideas, you no longer view them as wrong; you begin

to accept the ideas as "normal." You become callused to the pain of your wounded conscience. (See I Timothy 4:1-2.)

In other words, it is difficult to convince a man who has exposed himself to pornography for a period of time that the pornography is wrong. He no longer feels the guilt of sin in his conscience. He no longer believes that it matters. The only hope is to convince the man that right and wrong is defined by God and not by his own feelings and desires. A man's feelings and desires can be trained, but God's law remains the same. Unless a man truly desires to please God more than himself or other men, he will not leave his sin (Galatians 1:10).

A Christian does not live to please himself, but to please God (Romans 14:7-8). The very idea that "what I desire is most important," places me in the position of God in my life. In a sense, it is a sin of pride that demands that God accept whatever I want to do with my life. How different is that attitude from the one shown by Paul in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* Hence, we have crucified our fleshly lusts when we yield our wills to God (Galatians 5:24).

God once stated that he finds certain sins to be disgusting, among them, *"A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil"* (Proverbs 6:18). We cannot fill our minds with the ideas of sin and remain pleasing to God. God's Word teaches us to deny worldly lusts (Titus 2:12), yet the viewer of pornography pursues it. Those worldly desires choke righteousness out of our lives, causing us to lose our salvation (Mark 4:18-19). *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts"* (Romans 6:12). We are not even to lay plans for the lusts of our flesh (Romans 13:14).

When a man becomes a Christian, he leaves the pursuits of fleshly desires behind (Ephesians 2:3-5). Yes, the world seeks out pornography. Sinful men seek to arouse unlawful passions within themselves for sex outside of the marriage covenant. However, we have left those things behind. Do not long for the sin from which you were rescued (Colossians 3:5).

Pornography is a sin

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (I Thessalonians 4:3-5). The phrase "lustful passion" comes from two Greek words describing things which arouse unlawful sexual desire. Pornography is wrong for the simple reason that God condemns such material. It is not a form of recreation. It is not a personal right. It is a sin.