

# ***ADDRESSING THE TEMPTATION OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY***

Presented to the Pacific Coast Pastoral Conference  
October 7-9, 2008  
St. Paul Lutheran Church  
Vernon, British Columbia, Canada

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Why a paper on the subject of "Addressing the Temptation of *Internet* Pornography"? Why not simply, "Addressing the Temptation of Pornography," or, "Addressing Temptations To Sin Against the Sixth Commandment"? The latter is broad beyond the scope of this paper, and the former misses the point. The problem today is not pornography in general. The greatest, most pervasive and possibly the most underrated threat facing Christian *men* (especially) at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is *Internet* pornography.

## **What is Pornography?**

Pornography has been variously defined. Much of what passes as standard advertisement today has more explicit sexual imagery than the pornography of a generation ago. For our purposes we will adopt the definition of Dr. Jill Manning in her book, [What's the Big Deal About Pornography?](#) She says, "Pornography is material specifically designed to arouse sexual feelings in people by depicting nudity, sexual behavior, or any type of sexual information. This can refer to pictures, stories, sounds, symbols, actions, or words that depict bodies and/or sexual behavior."<sup>1</sup>

There are two distasteful facts that should be stated immediately. First, the great preponderance of pornography use is by men (estimates run as high as 88%), and that's why this paper will focus mainly on the threat it poses to Christian men. This is not to deny that there are women who struggle with similar temptations - some researchers particularly note the lure to women of "romantic" chat rooms (the chat often deteriorates into sexual themes, and these forums have become notorious for leading married women disastrously astray). However our main focus will be on the temptations affecting men. Secondly, we should have no illusions about what men use pornography *for* - the vast majority of men use pornography as an aid to masturbation. A study by the Kinsey Institute showed that viewing of Internet pornography is accompanied by masturbation 72% of the time.<sup>2</sup>

## **An Old Sin on Steroids**

Pornography has been with us from ancient times, ever since man's view of his sexuality was corrupted by the Fall. Following their sin, Adam and Eve for the first time felt the need to make coverings for their nakedness. Ever since then, the sexual sensibilities and desires that began as a perfect facet of

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<sup>1</sup> Jill C. Manning. [What's the Big Deal about Pornography?](#) Ann Arbor: Shadow Mountain, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Paul, Pamela. [Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families.](#) New York: Times Books, 2005.

God's creation have been warped and corrupted. Even in a simpler and less-dangerous time, C.S. Lewis could observe, "You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act - that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, *would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?*"<sup>3</sup>

Up until recently, pornography was delivered in only a few ways: through the mail, or via seedy bookstores and theaters. Now pornography is distributed and consumed in a myriad of ways, including (but not limited to): the Internet, television, radio, books, film, photographs, magazines, cartoons, drawings, videos, DVDs, CDs, telephones, cell phones, iPods, video games, webcams, and live performances. Among the many vehicles by which pornography has been distributed to date, however, the most potent and dangerous by far is the Internet.

The proclivity among sinful people (especially men) to use images of the human body in a prurient way in order to satisfy the lusts of the flesh is not new. Internet pornography, however, *is* relatively new. It has only been around since the late 1980's, and its popularity and acceptance has only really skyrocketed in the last few years. The number of adult websites increased 1800% between 2004 and 2008.

Internet pornography changes the game in some profound ways. Manning says that "...it differs from print and film material in that it is highly interactive (people can search for exactly what they want to see, when they want to see it), and it stimulates more senses due to the sound and movement that accompanies most websites.. Additionally, the Internet provides almost immediate access to some of the worst, most vile, and obscene material that exists."<sup>4</sup> The situation is closely analogous to the proliferation of methamphetamine, or "crystal meth", in our country's drug culture. The amphetamine family of drugs have been around (and been abused) since the 1960's, but amphetamines were hard to manufacture, and access to them was tightly controlled. Only in recent years has a process emerged by which any person of moderate intelligence can download a recipe from the Internet, purchase or steal the readily-available ingredients, and "cook" a batch of crystal meth that will bring a 1000% return on the initial investment. The end product is many times more potent than the original drug, costs a fraction as much, and is wildly addictive. In Pierce County, Washington, where I live, sheriff's deputies estimate that three-quarters of crime activity in their jurisdiction is connected with the sale or use of crystal meth.

### **The "Triple A Effect"**

Well, think of Internet pornography as the crystal meth of sexual sin. It's far more potent and

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> Manning, ibid., p. 147.

pervasive than the pornography of old. Experts who have studied the phenomenon frequently refer to the "Triple A Effect" that makes Internet pornography such a potent threat: **accessibility, affordability, and anonymity**. Prior to the 1990's, men who wished to satisfy their appetite for pornography had to get it from certain brick-and-mortar vendors. That entailed, in most cases, going to a seedy part of town and purchasing it from a sleazy bookstore. Accessibility was limited, the material was expensive, and the risk of others knowing that you used pornography was high.

None of this is true any more. Prurient images of the female body have become so pervasive in our society that, not only are they readily **accessible**, they are difficult to avoid. Highly suggestive images now show up everywhere, from your mailbox to the billboards you drive past to the magazine covers that stare at you as you wait to pay for your groceries. Cable TV offers channels featuring explicit pornography, while network TV is often very little better. Recent studies estimate that overt references to sex average around nine per hour on *network* TV shows aired between 7:00-8:00 p.m. (the so-called "Family Hour").

But nowhere are pornographic images more accessible than on the Internet. Recent estimates put the number of adult websites currently on the Internet at 4.2 million.<sup>5</sup> Jan LaRue, Senior Director of Legal Studies at the Family Research Council, puts it in chilling terms: "Pornography is no longer confined to the sleazy combat zones of our major cities. *Pornography is now invading your home*. If you have a computer and an Internet connection, your computer is a virtual pornography bookstore and peep show booth."<sup>6</sup>

Adding to the popularity of Internet pornography is that it's **affordable**. This is true, even though lots of people are making lots of money on pornography. So-called "pay sites" do a thriving business - back in 2004, Internet porn was a \$10 billion-a-year industry worldwide, by 2006 it had risen to \$97 billion. Worldwide, people now spend twice as much money on pornography as they do on Microsoft Windows. U.S. consumers now spend more on Internet pornography than they do on professional basketball, baseball and football combined. In spite of these startling statistics, pornography can still be found for free all over the Internet. Many users pride themselves on never paying for their images and videos. Often they collect pornographic images and videos for free via file-sharing software such as Limewire, Gnutella and Bit Torrent. A few years ago, statistics showed that there were roughly *five times* as many monthly visits to free adult sites as there were to pay sites.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps most damaging is the **anonymous** aspect of Internet pornography. No longer does a "respectable" person have to risk exposure and ridicule by visiting a store on the wrong side of town. Now

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<sup>5</sup> "Internet Pornography Statistics," Internet Filter Review, <http://www.Internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/Internet-pornography-statistics.html>. (accessed August of 2008)

<sup>6</sup> LaRue, Jan and York, Frank. Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Carnes, Patrick; Delmonico, David; and Griffin, Elizabeth. In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior. Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2001, p. 6.

he can view as much as he wants in the privacy of his own home, and "nobody need ever know." Frequently the assumption of anonymity proves to be an illusion - 46% of Internet porn users are married men, and studies show that their wives or other family members nearly always find out about their pornography use eventually. And of course when we're discussing Christian men, they presumably understand that, even if no one else knows what they're doing, God knows. Nevertheless, the false lure of anonymity is a powerful one.

Beside the "Triple A Effect" of accessibility, affordability and anonymity, there are two additional factors that are sometimes cited as adding to the attraction of online pornography: isolation and fantasy. Indulging in adult websites and chat rooms fulfills a powerful desire for isolation in some users. It's a selfish way to be completely by yourself and gratify only your own desires. In others, the Internet provides a way for them to indulge in fantasy, exploring forms of sexuality that they would never otherwise have the opportunity (or courage) to investigate. Often these may include the "harder" types of pornography, such as, e.g., sadomasochism and child pornography.

### **A Dark, Downward Path**

This raises another factor that makes Internet pornography much more dangerous than its print-based predecessors, and that is that it "hooks" the user very quickly, and then rapidly moves the user along a dark, downward path to harder and harder material. Again, the crystal meth analogy is apt: pill-based amphetamines could become addictive if used too often. Crystal meth, in almost every case, is physically addictive the *first* time you use it. Likewise with Internet pornography. One of the self-justifications often expressed by users is, "I just like to admire beautiful women in swimsuits or lingerie. Where's the harm in that?" Beside the obvious fact that *any* lust is a violation of the Sixth Commandment regardless of what the woman is wearing, studies show that in the vast majority of cases, men using Internet pornography move rapidly from so-called "soft-core" images to progressively harder material, as the thrill they are seeking becomes more illusive and difficult to fulfil.

In 2001, University of Utah psychologist Dr. Victor Cline authored an extensive study entitled, "Pornography's Effect on Adults and Children." In it, he documented a frighteningly routine continuum of behavior among people who regularly use pornography. This downward progression has several clearly delineated phases: 1) Addiction. The user is "hooked" on viewing Internet pornography. He is excited by the images and finds himself viewing it more and more frequently [although see my remarks later on the use of the term "addiction."] 2) Escalation. The user becomes bored with what he has been viewing and spends more time searching the web for more exciting material. Still pictures are replaced by video, "soft" material such as lingerie and swimsuits are replaced by more graphic and sexually explicit material, and often the user progresses to material that is sexually deviant, or that involves force or violence. 3) Desensitization. Images that once shocked the viewer are now seen as "normal," or even tame. The

sexuality depicted in pornography is legitimized in the user's mind. "Everyone is doing this, so it must be OK." Women are increasingly dehumanized and objectified in the user's mind, whether or not he is aware of it, as reflected in his opinions and attitudes. 4) Acting Out Sexually. This is the stage at which some users cross the line from fantasy to reality, and carry out their sexual fantasies in real life actions. This is when the user of pornography "...may become an adulterer, a sex offender, a child molester, a rapist, or even a murderer."<sup>8</sup>

Obviously this final stage is not one that every user of pornography goes through. The frightening thing about the "acting out stage," however, is that it *is* clearly the logical end toward which pornography use eventually leads. And there is no one who uses pornography, no matter how briefly, who is not in some way affected by it. Many scholars have in fact argued that our whole society is being radically changed by pornography.

### **Symptomatic of Society**

Pornography, its quantitative explosion into our lives, and its progressive acceptance and normalization by society, is an outgrowth of a rapidly changing societal world view. Young author Alan Shapiro, in a comprehensive (and frightening) book about the mainstreaming of pornography entitled Porn Generation, writes,

"Over the latter half of the twentieth century, the forces of moral relativism, radical feminism, and generational nihilism have gradually destroyed the foundation of our own greatness. Instead of adopting stronger moral standards, our society has embraced the lure of personal fulfillment. In a world where all values are equal, where everything is simply a matter of choice, narcissism rules the day. Our culture has bred hollow young men, obsessed with self-gratification. Young women are told to act like sex objects -- and enjoy it."<sup>9</sup>

Later he laments,

"So where is all the condemnation? Many of those on the side of traditional morality ignore the problem of porn, hoping that it will go away. We let those who degrade and destroy the concept of spirituality within sexual relationships win. Unless we're willing to throw away our computers, televisions, and library cards for the sake of raising children in a safe and healthy environment, we can't afford to let the porn-pushers win."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cline, Dr. Victor B., "Pornography's Effect on Adults and Children," Univ. of Utah, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Shapiro, Ben. Porn Generation. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc, 2005, pp. 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Shapiro, Ibid., p. 177.

Young people in particular are gaining an increasingly warped view of sexuality through today's great influx of pornography. Young people have a natural curiosity about sex, and these days they seem to be gleaning the answers to their questions from the worst possible source: pornography. In the book, Men Confront Pornography, Michael S. Kimmel maintains that pornography is one of the major sources of information that young males have about sexuality and is therefore the central mechanism by which their views concerning sexuality have been constructed.<sup>11</sup>

We turn to scripture, of course, as our only source and norm of doctrine and life. And God's Word has a lot to tell us about human sexuality. It teaches that sexuality is, among other things, a wonderful way to express the love and intimacy a married man and woman feel toward one another in their one-flesh relationship. According to the Bible, the most important components of a healthy relationship are spiritual rather than physical, and always involve deep commitment. Pornography teaches the exact opposite. Pornography teaches people (especially impressionable young people) that a woman is primarily an object, whose main purpose is to be used for a man's sexual gratification. This "objectification" of women may be one of the very worst consequences of pornography use. It is everywhere apparent, especially in advertising and women's (even girls') fashions. The MTV version of the "ideal" relationship is increasingly - and almost exclusively - physical, temporary, and involves little or no commitment and blatantly promotes the objectification of women. Shapiro's book contains a particularly discouraging section about how, on today's college campuses, dating and courtship has almost completely been replaced by casual sex. "Dates are out," said one college student. "Hookups are in." One female Princeton grad writes, "Why bother asking someone to dinner when you can meet at a party, down a few drinks and go home together?"<sup>12</sup>

### **So How Bad Is It?**

Most of us are at least vaguely aware that, as time goes on, our society is becoming more and more desensitized to pornography, especially under the influence of Hollywood. Leaving aside mere graphic imagery and sexual themes, the subject of pornography is often specifically referenced in today's movies, prime time dramas, and even sitcoms and other "family" programming. Pornography is uniformly depicted by Hollywood as mainstream, acceptable and even healthy. They refer to it by the diminutive and less-threatening term, "porn," much as the term homosexual has been abandoned for the less-threatening and pejorative term "gay." Conversely, in the rare case that a movie or TV character is shown as objecting to pornography, that character is invariably cast as a either religious fanatic or a close-minded prude. And as time goes on, even we Christians may find that we are no longer shocked by the explicit and pervasive

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<sup>11</sup> NCPFCF, *Subtle Dangers of Pornography*, [www.pureintimacy.org](http://www.pureintimacy.org) (September 2008)

<sup>12</sup> Shapiro, *Ibid.* p. 38.

references to sexuality in the media. It's the old "frog in the pot" syndrome: as long as the water temperature rises very slowly, the frog won't notice the increase until he's cooked.

Some say, "It can't be that big a problem. I don't even know anyone who uses Internet pornography." But the fact is that you probably do, and it's not just your non-Christian acquaintances, either. I won't belabor the point unduly, but a few statistics are in order.<sup>13</sup> Studies show that...

- ❑ 98% of male Internet users have viewed explicit content, most intentionally
- ❑ 75% of surveyed adults now say it is acceptable to visit an adult website
- ❑ 77% of online visitors to adult websites are male, with an average age of 41
- ❑ 20% of men admit to accessing adult content at work
- ❑ 50% of all churchgoing men are currently struggling with pornography
- ❑ 37% of surveyed *pastors* admit to struggling with pornography
- ❑ 53% of Promise Keeper men said they had visited an adult website in the previous week
- ❑ 47% of Christians surveyed said that pornography is "a major problem" in their home
- ❑ 43% of pastors surveyed said they had intentionally accessed an adult website

My attention was drawn to this issue by a 2007 radio broadcast on the subject by Rev. Skip Heitzig, of Calvary Chapel in Albuquerque. He said that every congregation has a problem with Internet pornography. For the pastors who are dealing with it, it's a big problem. For the pastors who are *not yet* dealing with it, it's a much bigger problem. As I looked into it further, I became convinced that this is an issue our pastors can no longer afford to ignore. I believe that each of us should, at the very least, have a plan in place for counseling our congregation members when necessary. We must also somehow get the word out to our members that this is a common temptation afflicting many Christians in our day, and that we do have resources available to help them if they are struggling with it. Perhaps a better approach would simply be to schedule a Bible class or men's group meeting on the subject.

Of course, it's embarrassing to have to raise the subject of Internet pornography at all (for that matter, it's rather embarrassing to have to discuss it in a conference paper.) This is subject matter that would normally fall under St. Paul's dictum, "...it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret." -- *Eph 5:12*. For preference, most of us would rather avoid the subject altogether. But that would be doing a grave disservice to those in our congregations (especially the men), some of whom may at this very moment be involved in a desperate spiritual struggle, all unknown to their pastor. There may be those who will feel confident enough to share their struggle with you through personal confession. But even those who are too ashamed to come to you personally may be still helped, if you can acquaint them

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<sup>13</sup> "Internet Pornography Statistics," Internet Filter Review, <http://www.Internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/Internet-pornography-statistics.html>. (accessed August of 2008)



with the tools available to combat this dangerous sin. The tools are out there, as we'll see in a moment.

## Addiction or Sin?

Here a brief word is in order about the subject of addiction.

It goes without saying that looking at pornography is always a sin. That it is a sin against chastity and the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment should be clear from Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount: "*Whoever looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" -- Mt 5:28. Cf. also Rom. 6:13, I Cor. 6:13-20, Gal. 5:19, et. al.

Pornography use is always a sin, but might it not sometimes also be an addiction - i.e., a behavior over which the person has no control? By way of analogy, the days when we thought alcoholism could always be overcome by will power and strong sermons are long past, and we now recognize that there is a clinical as well as a moral aspect to genuine alcoholism (as contrasted with mere problem drinking). Might not the same be true about a person's "addiction" to pornography? One has one's doubts. In the no-fault society in which we live, we may be justifiably skeptical about someone who, as soon as he is discovered in his use of pornography, pleads, "I couldn't help myself! I'm a sex addict!"

The number one defining factor in every other area of addiction is compulsion, or *loss of control*. A true addict has no ability to control his use of the addicting substance. Take the person who gets roaring drunk once a month: he is obviously sinning, and may be a problem drinker, but he is certainly not an alcoholic. Why not? Because an alcoholic is incapable of drinking only on weekends. By definition an alcoholic is someone who has lost control over when and how much he drinks.

Are there "sex addicts" who truly cannot control their use of pornography? Clearly there are some, though what percentage of Internet pornography users are truly addicted is a question that is hotly debated. In my reading I saw estimates as high as one in five. What hard evidence there is, however, seems to support the view that true addiction is rare. In an extensive study by Stanford and Duquesne Universities in March of 2000, researchers defined "addictive use" as more than 11 hours per week spent viewing pornography on the web. According to this definition, they found that a little over 1% of Internet pornography users were "cybersex compulsive," or truly addicted in a clinical sense.<sup>14</sup>

Personally, if I were confronted with a case in which I was convinced that a genuine addiction existed, I might do the same thing that I have done in cases of legitimate mental illness; i.e., find a Christian doctor or therapist who specializes in this area, and who is comfortable providing clinical diagnosis and therapy (outside the framework of fellowship) as a supplement my own counseling with God's Word. There are no forces in this world more powerful than the Word of God and prayer. On the other hand, the same gracious Lord who bestows these gifts upon us also gives us doctors and medicine,

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<sup>14</sup> LaRue and York, *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

and sanctified Christian judgment to determine when it is prudent to make use of them..

In general terms, however, be aware that the term "addiction" is used very loosely in our society. Especially when utilizing the many resources available to help combat pornography, you'll find the term "addiction" used constantly, and not always in its clinical sense. Most often it refers simply to people who have fallen into the sinful habit of viewing pornography online, and are having difficulty breaking the habit. From a pastor's standpoint, obviously, it needn't be a case of clinical addiction to pose a deadly serious spiritual threat.

### **The Consequences of Pornography Use**

True clinical addiction is probably quite rare. Far more often, I think, a pastor will be confronted with a case in which a Christian has fallen into the temptation of using Internet pornography, is regretful and penitent about such use, and is searching for your help in ridding himself of this evil and sinful habit. By the time he comes to you, he is probably already encountering some of the consequences of frequent pornography use which experts tell us are common. These may include, but are not limited to:

- ❑ Marital problems, especially when the pornography use has been discovered by a spouse
- ❑ A sense of betrayal and loss of trust on the part of the user's spouse
- ❑ A reduced ability - or complete inability - to engage in normal marital intimacy
- ❑ Gradual withdrawal and isolation from loved ones, and deteriorating relationships
- ❑ A heightened sense of shame, and consequent withdrawal from church
- ❑ Loss of energy, and irritability, as sleeping habits change due to long Internet sessions
- ❑ Problems at work due to fatigue
- ❑ Problems at work - even termination - due to accessing adult material on work computers
- ❑ Loss of significant amounts of money from illicit online activities
- ❑ Arrest and/or imprisonment for "acting out" on fantasies, exposing oneself in public, arranging online for illicit sexual contacts, etc.

Most users vastly underestimate the potential consequences to their marriage of their pornography use. "It's just virtual reality," they say. "It can't do any serious harm. It may even enhance my marriage." This is incorrect. Professors Dolf Zillman of Indiana University and Jennings Bryant of the University of Houston found that repeated exposure to pornography results in a decreased satisfaction with one's sexual partner, with the partner's sexuality, with the partner's sexual curiosity, a decrease in the valuation of faithfulness and a major increase in the importance of sex without attachment.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families, *Subtle Dangers of Pornography*, [http://www.pureintimacy.org/print\\_friendly.cfm?articleurl=/gr/intimacy/understanding/a0000121.cfm](http://www.pureintimacy.org/print_friendly.cfm?articleurl=/gr/intimacy/understanding/a0000121.cfm) (September 2008)

When we speak of "marital problems caused by pornography," this is no mere expression. Statistics make clear that *many* marriages are being destroyed by pornography today, and many more are being damaged and threatened with destruction. At a convention in 2003 of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, a national association of divorce attorneys, two-thirds of the lawyers present said they had witnessed "a dramatic rise in business brought about by pornography use." In their experience, 58% of the increase stemmed from "looking at excessive amounts of pornography online." The president of the association, Richard Barry, stated, "Eight years ago, pornography played almost no role in divorces in this country. Today, there are a significant number of cases where it plays a definite part in marriages breaking up."<sup>16</sup> Of course, every pastor deals with marriage problems in his ministry. But if these experts' observations are anything to go by, we may well have many more cases to deal with in the future stemming specifically from the scourge of online pornography.

In passing, I'd like to include another lawyerly quote. I found it disturbing for reasons that will be immediately evident to pastors. Divorce attorney Virginia Maddox wrote, "Pornography wrecks marriages. ...Using pornography is like adultery. It's not *legally* adultery, but there are many ways of cheating. It's often effectively desertion -- men abandoning their family to spend time with porn."<sup>17</sup> She said that judges often agree with this view, awarding increased or exclusive custody of children to the mother in cases where the father can be proven to have possessed pornography. Naturally, the legal definition of "desertion" concerns us pastors less than the scriptural definition, but the implications here are as obvious as they are thorny.

## **Join The Battle**

Clearly, the problem posed by Internet pornography has been increasing exponentially in recent years. If we are honest, we will admit that our response as Christian shepherds may not have been commensurate with the challenge. We need to wake up, quit ignoring the problem, and bring the full weight of God's power -- and our God-given ability and training as counselors -- to bear on this serious issue.

## **Physician, Heal Thyself**

First of all, of course, we as pastors will need to be honest with ourselves about our own life, *and our own online activities*. It goes without saying that the same sinful nature that afflicts and tempts our members also afflicts and tempts us in equal measure. Perhaps even more so. Pastors may be more adept

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<sup>16</sup> Paul, *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167

<sup>17</sup> Paul, *Ibid.* pp. 168-169.

at the use of computers than are most of their members, and to that extent more at risk. Also, the need to constantly present to the world a highly sanctified lifestyle may enhance the attraction of risky forays into adult entertainment. Some time ago I had a conversation with a colleague who said that he was aware of several CLC pastors who had, or are now, struggling with this specific temptation. Why should we be surprised? Why wouldn't this be one of Satan's top priorities? Well he knows our weaknesses as men, and the most effective ways of exploiting them. If you are a CLC pastor, you can imagine how much the devil would love to "sift you as wheat" with this shameful sin. Satan knows well that, if he can successfully attack and defeat the shepherd, then the sheep will be easy prey.

All in all, it behooves us pastors, as always, to "...offer up sacrifices first for ourselves, and then for the people." -- Heb. 7:27. We should look to ourselves, our own lives and behavior, and "...serve as a pattern of good works." -- Titus 2:7, cf. I Tim. 4:12.. Naturally, the counsel and advice we apply to the lives of our parishioners we will apply first and foremost in our own lives.

## **The Armor of God**

In a moment we will discuss the so-called "external" barriers that can be put in place to help people rebuff these temptations of the flesh - the physical ways and means and methods of banishing Internet pornography from the believer's life. These are not inconsequential. Many of them are very helpful (I would say essential) tools in the Christian's efforts to remain chaste. But most psychologists and counselors emphasize that external barriers can only go so far. There is no Internet filter that a tech-savvy user can't defeat if he's determined to do so.

I think we Christian counselors would agree that the "internal" barriers are far more important than the external ones. For us this would include the inner, spiritual conviction in a person's heart that this behavior is not acceptable to God and must be stopped. It would include a consideration not only of one's own spiritual wellbeing, but also of the needs and feelings of one's spouse and family members. It would include an awareness - and determination to avoid at all costs - the damage that inevitably results if a person lets his sinful impulses run free. It would also include a resolve to "run the way of God's commandments," even if pursuing this course eventually involves grinding through a heartbreaking cycle of relapse, repentance, and renewed commitment. In this respect, the sinner will say with the psalmist, *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!* --Psalm 119:9-11.

God's Word, of course, is the Christian's highest source of counsel. And Scripture is full of encouragement for believers who are struggling to resist the temptations of the flesh. Wise King Solomon urged, *"My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent."* Proverbs 1:10. He wouldn't call upon us to do this if it were not possible, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to comply. Indeed, our God promises us that it will be

possible, for "...no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13. We may counsel our members with confidence that, no matter how acute the temptation, there will always be that means of escape.

Certainly the temptations may be sharp, especially for those of our members who may have succumbed repeatedly to the lure of online pornography in the past. But God promises forgiveness in Christ to the repentant sinner, and renewed strength to the forgiven sinner. With God, all things are possible. "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" -- James 4:7. If it were not possible to resist, God would not encourage us to do so. It is possible.

The affliction is carnal, so the cure must be spiritual. Paul says, "*And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*" Romans 6:13. In another famous "6:13," the Apostle outlines the arsenal of weaponry and armor available to the believer for this struggle against Satan and concludes, "*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*" Ephesians 6:13. In a beautiful passage, the Apostle Paul tells the Philippian Christians what sort of things are truly worthy to occupy the mind of a believer: *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.* Philippians 4:8. Again, God wouldn't tell us this if it weren't possible, with His help, to do it.

## **Ways and Means**

With repentance for sin and with faith in God's forgiveness motivating the believer's striving for improvement, there is nothing that may not be accomplished. With God all things are possible. The next question is: are there effective means to help those tempted by Internet pornography avoid, resist and overcome this temptation? The good news is that, yes, there are many resources available, and many options to explore.

The most drastic option is also the most obvious: *cancel your internet service.* This may become necessary, especially if other, lesser measures have been tried and have failed. Certainly, it would be a difficult step to take in today's environment, where Internet-based applications such as e-mail are no longer considered luxuries, but items essential to life. But if other measures aren't working, hard choices will have to be made. The words of Christ apply here: "*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*" Certainly one's internet access will be a small price to pay if the subject recognizes that his soul's salvation is at stake.

At the same time it should be noted that cutting off one's Internet access at home doesn't necessarily solve every problem. Most people now also have the Internet at work. Also to be considered is travel, with the notorious temptations of hotel internet and cable access.

Short of cutting off all Internet access, many other forms of help are available. There are all kinds of new technologies and strategies designed to assist someone who is sincerely determined to get rid of this bad habit. Many of these ideas are ingenious and innovative. Others are matters of simple common sense and determination.

*An important note:* Much of the information presented below may sound as if it applies more to "home Internet safety" -- like keeping your kids safe from web dangers -- than it does to the subject of this paper, "Addressing the temptation of Internet pornography." If so, it's only because the technology that helps with the former is often equally helpful at overcoming the latter. The same web filtering software, e.g., that helps keep kids safe can also make it much easier for an adult in the household to avoid the temptation to view Internet pornography.

## **Internet Filtering Software**

We will talk about filtering software first, because I believe this to be the most important component of internet safety at home. You should always use some form of filtering software on all the computers in your house.

Filtering may be delivered in various ways. All popular web browsers (like MS Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Apple Safari, Firefox and Netscape) feature password-protected "parental controls," but these can seldom be relied upon to do the whole job. They leave certain categories uncontrolled (like Internet messaging and peer-to-peer file sharing), and they are relatively easy to circumvent.

Some large "security suites," like Norton and McAfee, have robust filtering components, though they are expensive, and come bundled with antivirus and other software that you may not want. Also, there are some people like me who don't like big security suites like Norton or McAfee and don't want them on our computers. They're big, they take up a lot of memory, are octopus-like in the way they take over a computer, and can be hard to completely uninstall.

Finally, there are also some Internet service providers ("ISPs") who offer server-based filtering ; these will be discussed below.

However, the most commonly utilized kind of filtering - and some feel the most effective - comes in the form of software that you install on your home computer. This software uses filters to block certain types of websites, such as pornography, gambling, online multiplayer games (like World of Warcraft), peer-to-peer file sharing (LimeWire, Gnutella), and social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook). With the software in place, these materials cannot be viewed or accessed.

Software filtering programs can be downloaded from the Internet or purchased from a store.

Some filtering software can be expensive, though a few of the most effective ones are free for individual use. In addition, many of these products also include reporting and accountability features described below in the section on "Accountability Software." You should use the filtering program that you understand best and feel you can trust. Get the advice of tech-savvy Christian friends on what software has worked for them.

Also be aware of some caveats: nearly all filtering software is password controlled, which means you need to establish a "strong" password and guard it as jealously. A strong password is defined as being more than eight characters in length, containing a mix of numbers and letters, both capital and small letters, and not containing any recognizable word, phrase or number (least of all your name, your birthday, or your social security number). A good way to construct a strong password is to take a memorable phrase and use the first letters of each word, substituting numbers for words like "to" and "for," and capitalizing the last letter in the phrase. E.g. the phrase, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David," using this method, would yield the very strong password "4uyibtditcoD." Remember that if someone in your house can guess what your password is, or can find it hidden on a scrap of paper under the keyboard, then all the sophisticated filtering software in the world won't do you any good. Also, if someone in your house can access your e-mail, he can probably get the filtering service to send a "password reminder" to your e-mail and obtain it that way. And it's good to bear in mind that, for every major filtering product, a quick Google search will turn up strategies for defeating it.

However, for the purposes of this study we are assuming that the people involved *want* to keep away from adult material, and will not make deliberate efforts to circumvent it. For this reason some have said that filtering software products are like door locks - they're mostly made to keep honest people honest. It's also the reason that some have concluded, "Filtering software is for children; accountability software is for adults."

I don't wholly agree with that latter statement. I continue to believe strongly that no Christian home should have unfiltered Internet access available to *anyone*, child or adult. And with good, intuitive filtering programs available - some of them for free - there's no reason this helpful tool can't be on everyone's home computer. So with that said, here are some of the most popular filtering programs:

- ❑ Bsafe Online [www.bsafeline.com](http://www.bsafeline.com) \$49.95.
- ❑ Content Protect. [www.contentwatch.com](http://www.contentwatch.com) \$30.00
- ❑ SafeEyes. [www.safeeyes.com](http://www.safeeyes.com) \$49.95
- ❑ CyberPatrol. [www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com) \$40.00
- ❑ CyberSitter. [www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com) \$39.99
- ❑ Net Nanny. [www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com) \$40.00
- ❑ SafeFamilies Software. [www.safefamilies.techmission.org](http://www.safefamilies.techmission.org) **free**
- ❑ K9 Web Protection. [www.k9bluecoat.com](http://www.k9bluecoat.com) **free**

- ❑ PK Family. [www.pkfamily.com](http://www.pkfamily.com) \$5.95/mo.

Filtering software, of course, won't be the only protection you have for your computer. My personal feeling is that every home computer, to be fully protected, needs to have at least three kinds of software running in the background at all times: a firewall, antivirus protection, and Internet filtering. In our home we use the firewall that comes with Windows (another good free one is Zone Alarm, from [www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com)). We use Avast Antivirus, free from [www.avast.com](http://www.avast.com). And we also use K9 Bluecoat, mentioned above, which is a very robust and effective Internet filtering product that also has reporting and accountability features, and is also free for individual use.

I want to strongly emphasize a very simple measure that can be extremely helpful in this area. When our family first installed K9 filtering software several years ago, we followed the wise advice of a colleague who said, **"Let the wife set the password."** This we did, and to this day she is the only one who knows the password that overrides the filtering software. This can be a bit burdensome when, say, a teenager needs to research a paper on "breast cancer," and has to find Mom to get an override. But it takes a lot of potential problems right off the table, too. There is a much higher level of protection for the children. The husband doesn't even have to think about accessing improper material - intentionally or otherwise - and the wife doesn't have to wonder what the husband might be up to when she's not around. In short, this simple action is great preventative medicine. Obviously, a pastor wouldn't recommend this for those households - and there are some - where the wife is the one with an Internet problem. And clearly, having effective web filtering in place doesn't mean that there won't be other temptations to break the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment. There will be. But it's a big relief when the Internet - the crystal meth of sexual temptation - is no longer a factor to reckon with in the home.

With these three programs installed - firewall, antivirus and filtering software - our family feels that we have the external components of computer safety in place. Of course, far more important for any family are the *internal* and spiritual components - faith in Christ, a diligent use of God's Word, and a desire to conform one's life to His will.

### **Filtered ISPs**

Filtered ISP's are another option. They take filtering a step further, by being are the actual providers from whom you purchase your local Internet service. A filtered ISP like "True Vine" is similar to other ISPs like Comcast, Earthlink, Qwest or ATT, only it offers *filtered* content rather than unrestricted content. The filtered ISPs I ran across were all DSL ("Digital Subscriber Line") providers, rather than cable or dialup. DSL utilizes unused spectrum on your copper phone line to provide high-speed Internet access. It is somewhat slower than cable, but much faster than dialup. Filtered ISPs may not be available in every location, and they only work with certain telephone service providers. Check your local yellow



pages for availability and pricing.

Filtered ISP's basically do the same thing that Internet filtering software does, only instead of doing the filtering on your computer itself, they do it back on their company servers which provide your internet access. So the content is filtered before it ever gets to your house. Users can have a password to override the filter, but again many simply choose not to have a password provided them.

One widely-available filtered ISPs is True Vine (<http://www.truevine.net>). Their cost for full DSL service starts at \$31.95/month, which is about \$5-10 more a month than a regular DSL provider. In areas where they cannot provide direct DSL service, or if you already have Internet access, they offer software that you can install on your computer that will reroute all Internet traffic through their filtered servers, again with your choice as to whether or not you want a password to override the filter. The cost for this service is \$8.34/mo. Other filtered ISPs you may investigate are <http://www.surfonthesafeside.com>, <http://www.settingcaptivefree.com> and <http://www.pkfamily.com>.

### **Accountability Software**

This is still another type of computer software. It provides detailed reports that account for one's actions on the Internet. Users agree to accept responsibility for their web surfing by making it visible to others. The software monitors Internet use on a particular computer, or a particular user on that computer. It then generates reports on Internet usage, which are e-mailed to or viewable by a third party or parties. These are often referred to as the subject's "accountability partners." The reports are mailed at regular intervals, usually weekly or monthly. All Internet activity is reported on, including web sites the user visited or attempted to visit, search terms used, links, downloads, and whether the user attempted to delete his browser's history. The effect of accountability software is to remove the "anonymous" component of the "Triple A" effect. I.e., the user may still be able to access pornography, but he knows ahead of time that someone else will find out about it and call him to account.

The most popular product in this category is **Covenant Eyes** (<http://covenanteyes.com>). Covenant Eyes pioneered the technology in 2000, and is still the most popular. They charge a monthly fee of \$7.95 for the service, with group discounts available for churches, men's groups, etc. Other companies have now come on the scene offering similar services, including **X3 Watch** (<http://x3watch.com>). X3 Watch has a basic version that they supply for free as a community service.

Another type of accountability software works in a similar way to a maligned class of programs known as "spyware." The bad kind of spyware is designed to be unknowingly downloaded onto your computer along with other programs, after which it monitors your internet usage and sends secret reports to a third party. The good kind of spyware - the accountability kind - works in a similar way, only with the knowledge of the users. Once the software is installed, it will automatically log websites visited, peer-to-peer applications, online chat, downloads and instant messaging. Sometimes it even logs all individual

keystrokes on the subject computer. This can all be checked later by your accountability partner (the subject's friend, pastor, or even his wife.) Popular providers of this kind of software are

- ❑ **ComputerCop** (<http://www.computercop.com/homeprods.html>) for \$19.95;
- ❑ **Parents CyberAlert** (<http://www.itcompany.com/cyberalert.htm>) for \$39.95; and
- ❑ **Guardian Monitor** (<http://www.guardiansoftware.com>) for \$39.95.

Accountability products can also be used by spouses or parents (especially those with little technical expertise) to check the computers in their home for pornographic material or illicit activity.

### **Other Common Sense Measures**

As Martin Luther famously said concerning temptation: "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair." Beside the solutions suggested above, there are other, common-sense ways to lessen the temptation to access adult websites.

Keep the computer in a public area. Put the computer in the dining room or family room or other public area of the home, rather than a bedroom, den or home office. Position it so that the monitor can be seen from the doorway. Then the user will be aware that what he's viewing on the computer will be seen by anyone entering the room.

Set reasonable rules for usage. Such as, no computer use after midnight, no computer use when the user is alone in the house, and/or limiting computer use to a certain number of minutes per day. These rules need to be discussed and agreed upon by both spouses, with the expectation that they will be kept and plans for what the next steps will be if they are not kept. This goes to the accountability issue again. Many of the filter programs mentioned above can be helpful with this, in that they will allow you to set usage limits on individual users (or all users), and restrict what times of day the computer may be used.

Use your filtering software to limit search engines. Some of the worst material on the Internet can be found directly by using the most popular (and powerful) search engines, like Google, Yahoo, Bing and Ask. One simple solution is to block these sites with your filtering software, and then substitute safe search engine alternatives. A few of these are: [www.ajkids.com](http://www.ajkids.com), [www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com), [www.onekey.com](http://www.onekey.com), [www.kidsclick.org](http://www.kidsclick.org), and [www.education-world.com](http://www.education-world.com).

### **Non-computer Issues**

Once again it must be stated that the Internet, though certainly the most dangerous source of pornography, is by no means the only one. And clearly, children are even more at risk of spiritual harm from pornography than are adults. Accordingly, you will here find some other measures that can help keep objectionable imagery out of the home and out of reach (especially of children):

Restrict or unsubscribe from cable or satellite TV. Cable is the next most common source of explicit material in the home after the Internet. Make sure you don't have the "tier" that includes channels

specializing in adult material. Some cable providers give you a full suite of parental controls - if yours does, use them. However, be aware that one of the most common ways in which people access adult material on cable is through "signal bleed", that is, by viewing channels that are supposed to be scrambled, but on which you can still partially make out the program. As a reaction to this problem, all cable providers are now required, under section 504 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, to provide *total* blocking of any channels that a customer requests be blocked. Finally, of course, you can save some money and avoid a lot of trouble by simply abandoning cable TV altogether. This may at first seem difficult (especially for sports fans), but when you compare the pros and cons it's not that hard a decision to make.

Use the V chip. All new televisions now come with "V-chip technology," that is, built in parental controls that allow you to restrict access to TV programming on the basis of its content. The V-chip uses movie ratings, so you can, e.g., set your TV to block any programming that contains material rated "PG-13" and above (this, by the way, will block nearly all non-news and non-sports programming after about six at night). When you attempt to turn to a program whose content exceeds this rating, you get a blue screen and are prompted for a password. No password, no program. The V-chip also allows you to set allowable times for TV watching, e.g. no TV between midnight and seven a.m. And here again, a husband can remove any potential for his own temptation by simply having his wife set the password.

Monitor other devices. Some gaming devices, like Wii, X-Box and Playstation, not only have multiplayer Internet gaming capability, but also include built-in Internet web browsers. That means these devices *will allow* unrestricted access to Internet pornography unless you set the parental controls to block it. Many other electronic devices such as PDAs, iPods and smart phones are now web-enabled, and capable of providing unrestricted access to the Internet. If you or your family members have these devices, you need to take steps to insure that they cannot be used to access pornography. There are a myriad of reasonably-priced "apps" to provide content filtering for these mobile devices.

Get rid of explicit print material. Obviously, there should be no pornographic magazines anywhere in your house. If there are, the children *will* find them. In addition, though, it is well to quickly dispose of other, less-obvious print material that may still present temptations and possibly even lead to a relapse in someone who's trying to break a sinful habit. These might include women's fashion magazines, lingerie catalogs like Victoria's Secret, swimsuit issues of sports magazines, even advertisements for regular department stores, like Macy's and J. C. Penney, that feature swimwear and lingerie. Many of these advertisements are more explicit and revealing than pornographic magazines of a generation ago. Pitch them, cancel subscriptions where possible, and if necessary arrange for the woman of the house to pick up the mail and screen it before it reaches the other members of the household.

If you have children, know their friends. Make sure your kids are not accessing adult materials at a friend's home. It does no good to secure the TVs and computers at your house if your kids are getting unfiltered adult content at their friend's house down the street. Speak to the parents of your children's friends and discuss your concerns - it may be awkward, but it beats the alternative.

Talk to your children about the danger of pornography. Kids, especially, are susceptible to the lie that "pornography is no big deal." Start talking to them early in an age-appropriate way. Especially as they near the adolescent and teen years, impress on them that this is not "no big deal," but is in fact an incredibly big and dangerous deal, one that has already infected and damaged the lives of thousands of kids just like them. Be specific and avoid euphemisms. Make sure they understand what you're saying. This too will be a difficult and awkward conversation, but the stakes are too high to shrink from the task.

Lead by example. Your children are watching you. Many kids' first pornography exposure is from their parents' material. "Just as second hand cigarette smoke is harmful to those exposed, your media choices can effect your children. It is your responsibility to keep them from being exposed to pornographic or sexually provocative material."<sup>18</sup>

## Helpful Links

As mentioned earlier, helpful material abounds for assisting you in dealing with this profound and troubling issue. Among the following links you will discover a nearly limitless bibliography of resources, from Bible studies to software reviews.

- ❑ [www.Safefamilies.techmission.org](http://www.Safefamilies.techmission.org). You can just about stop with this website. You will never get through all the various resources available here. Some of it is ministry-specific and carries hints of decision theology, but otherwise it is extremely helpful. They also have a long, online video presentation on the subject, basically a PowerPoint with the presenter's recorded voice, here: [http://www.safefamilies.org/webcasts/pastors/Presentation\\_Files/index.html](http://www.safefamilies.org/webcasts/pastors/Presentation_Files/index.html). There is just a bit of preaching (on Nehemiah - "We need to build up the walls again"), but other than that a pastor might consider this a good video for a Bible class or men's group meeting. It's a riveting video by presenters who really know what they're talking about.
- ❑ [www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org). A coalition of Internet industry companies and public interest organizations, providing "one-click" access to family resources concerning Internet safety.
- ❑ [www.pureintimacy.org](http://www.pureintimacy.org). Focus on the Family's section on sexuality and sexual temptation, including extended resources for parents, couples and pastors. Again, some unwanted "commitment" overtones, but otherwise very good.
- ❑ [www.blazinggrace.org](http://www.blazinggrace.org). A Christian website and ministry emphasizing the battle against pornography use, providing support for those who struggle as well as spouses and family of users.
- ❑ [www.internet-filter-review.com](http://www.internet-filter-review.com). Just what it says - a site that compares features of many different internet filter products. Very helpful, side-by-side comparisons.
- ❑ [www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org). The website of "Enough is Enough," an organization dedicated to pointing out

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<sup>18</sup> Safe Families Online Safety and Media Sobriety Manual, <http://www.safefamilies.techmission.org> (September 2008)

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