

PORNOGRAPHY

The human form is beautiful. In Scripture, it is referred to as *poiema*, “God’s masterpiece” (Ephesians 2:10). The human form is not evil, but pornography is, for it prompts individuals to view the human form in ways contrary to God’s will. Pornography leads to sin in both mind and body. Pornography is a serious matter, for it can destroy marriages, prompt bad behavior, and negatively impact our focus and witness. This response provides a biblical overview of pornography—a problem of epidemic proportions in the world today.

The word pornography

The term *pornography* is a compound word, coming from two root words in the Greek language, *porneia* and *graphe*. The word *porneia* refers to forbidden sexual activity. This includes (but is not limited to) adultery (Exod. 20:14), fornication (1 Cor. 6:18-20), homosexuality ((1 Cor. 6:9-10), and intercourse with close relatives (Lev. 18:6). The word *graphe* references an image or something drawn or written. The word *pornography* does not appear in Scripture. However, the word *porneia* is used 25 times and found in two dozen verses in the New Testament; the word is always presented in a negative light. Though the Bible does not directly reference the term pornography, multiple guiding principles are provided to warn and help Christians know how to respond to pornography.

What does the Bible say about the mind and heart?

Pornography can impact the mind, body, heart, and spirit. Viewing pornographic material often leads to physical acts that conflict with the laws of God and man. This, of course, constitutes sin, but what few appreciate is that pornography’s impact on one’s mind and heart can also constitute sin. Pornography facilitates lust and Scripture presents lust as a sin. Lust not only leads to sinful sexual acts, Jesus made clear that lust in the mind or heart is also a serious sin. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “*I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matt. 5:28).

God wants us to guard the mind and the heart

Many do not appreciate the correlation between what we see and think about and its impact on our hearts. The wise Solomon warned, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life*” (Prov. 4:23). As noted above, Jesus said it is possible for a man to commit grave sins “*in his heart*” (Matt. 5:38). Therefore, guarding our heart, mind, and actions is essential to thwart Satan’s temptations and ensure our spiritual wellbeing.

Paul warned that Satan wages a spiritual battle in the mind. 2 Corinthians 10:5 states: *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”* But though often tempted, Paul vowed, *“I will not be dominated by anything”* (1 Cor. 6:12b). Satan uses addictions, including pornography, to try and keep us from being all that God wants us to be. Jeremiah 29:11 notes God’s desire: *“For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.”* Requisites to receiving what God desires to give include keeping our minds and hearts pure.

Sin arises when the mind is “set on the flesh” rather than “the Spirit”

Pornography first attacks the mind and then prompts the individual to act out in the flesh.

Temptations and urges can be formidable but can be overcome. Overcoming requires guarding and reorienting the mind to focus on the things of the Spirit, which honors God, rather than the things of the flesh. When our minds are “transformed” (Rom. 12:2) and “governed by the Spirit,” we honor God and find the strength to overcome. Paul wrote: *“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace”* (Rom. 8:5-6).

Pornography is addictive—it “enslaves” the mind

The Bible describes the impact of being mired in spiritual sin as “enslaving.” Proverbs 5:22 states: *“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”* This is not God’s will for you. Scripture notes that Jesus came to *“set you free and if the Son has set you free you shall be free indeed”* (John 8:32). Peter warned about the false promises of the enemy—which seek to lure good hearts to dark thoughts by promising pleasure and new freedom. He noted that those who succumb to temptation and engage in sexual sin become “servants of corruption.” 2 Peter 2:18-19 states: *“They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness...While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”*

A warning about the impact of pornography on marriage

Jesus noted the profound negative impact lust can have on the most cherished of relationships—the marriage union. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that those *“who look on a woman with lust hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matt. 5:38). Later, in Matthew 19, Jesus was asked, *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife **for any reason at all?**”* (Matt. 19:3).

At the time, several prominent Jewish rabbis stated that divorce was permitted for the slightest transgression. Jesus surprised the hearers by responding: *“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’* They

[pressed]: 'Why then did Moses [grant] a certificate of divorce...?' Jesus said, 'Because of your hardness of heart...but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'"

Here Jesus affirms God's expectation that marriage unions should last and only be broken under the gravest of circumstances, which He noted was sexual sin (a broad term under which falls pornography). Pornography, even if not escalated to physical acts, can have a profound negative impact on the marriage relationship as it is a betrayal of trust and a breach of the marriage bond. Watching porn then, is a violation of the marriage covenant.

A warning about the impact of pornography in the church

Pornography darkens the heart and impairs the mind. Satan seeks to corrupt perspectives and create alternate (false) realities. In these false realities, women can be objectified, sin justified, and pleasure glorified. When these distractions and sin incubators are prevalent in the church: 1) work for the cause of Christ is hindered as focus is lost and motivation wanes and 2) the reputation of the church is impacted as sin seldom remains hidden and conversations regarding the church's ministry highlight scandal more than service and advancing the cause of Christ. Standing strong and being a light in a darkened world is not easy, but is our calling.

What is required is that do everything possible to best focus on serving Christ and persevere during times of temptation and challenge. The author of Hebrews wrote: *"Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart"* (Heb. 13:1-3).

How to overcome

Pornography does not establish a stronghold in one's life in a day, and almost always, overcoming the urge to view pornography will take many days to overcome. But it is possible. God wants you to overcome and offers help to overcome. The following verses and biblical precepts will help you as you strive to grow in this area of your life:

- **Acknowledge, Confess, Repent:** Acknowledge your sin, confess it to God, seek His forgiveness, and repent (turn from the behavior). Scripture promises that forgiveness is available through Christ. John wrote: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).
- **Remove temptations and triggers:** Remove all pornographic material from your home. Moving forward, avoid people, locations, and situations you associate with pornography. Of the serious matter of positioning to live a life of purity, Jesus said, *"If your right eye*

causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29).

- **Know that submitting to God is key to overcoming:** Satan does not want you to overcome and will continue to attack your mind. Full submission to God will allow you to be covered by His strength and righteousness. James wrote: *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).
- **If you look, you will see a “way of escape” when temptations come:** Scripture promises: *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it”* (1 Cor. 10:13).
- **Know that God gives believers the Spirit, which enhances “self-control.”** The presence and power of the Spirit are given to every believer when they commit to becoming a follower of Christ. However, like muscle, the attributes of the Spirit (including self-control) must be developed. Self-control is one of the attributes of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:23. Paul elaborated on this attribute in his second letter to Timothy. We read: *“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”* (2 Tim. 1:7).
- **Remember, Jesus does not want any to be slaves to (addicted to) anything:** Jesus said: *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:36). Paul adds: *“Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery”* (Gal. 5:1b).
- **We are to guard our focus and the clarity of our mind.** In 1 Thessalonians, we read: *“So then...let us be sober, having put on the...helmet of the hope of salvation”* (1 Thess. 5:6-8).
- **We are to surround ourselves with good influences:** *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’”* (1 Cor. 15:33).
- **We are to ask God to help us change our way of thinking:** *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”* (Rom 12:2a).

What to keep in mind as you work to overcome addictions

Support groups, Christian counselors, wise ministers, good friends, the power of the Holy Spirit, informative books, and His inspired Word can support you on your journey of renewal and recovery. In addition, the following may prove helpful:

- **Be mindful of the negative outcomes of bad behavior:** *“Do you like honey? Don’t eat too much, or it will make you sick!”* (Proverbs 25:16).
- **Remember, the things of this world do not truly satisfy:** *“All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied”* (Ecc. 6:7).
- **Keep your guard up:** *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41).
- **Seek help from within the body of Christ (for prayer, counsel, and accountability):** James 5:14-15 states: *“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the*

prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

- **Recognize that pornography seeks to dominate your thoughts and focus. Commit to disciplining the mind and to “not be dominated by anything”** (1 Cor. 6:12b).
- **Remember, Jesus understands temptation and wants to help you overcome.** The writer of Hebrews noted: *“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. 4:15-16).
- **Use technology to your advantage** by installing filters and blockers on your devices that prohibit access to pornography.
- **Find healthy ways to manage stress and anxiety**, such as exercise, meditating on His Word, Christian service, or spending time in nature.