

Freedom from the Influence of Pornography

Written by Reverend Canon Bruce Morrison

Article 1

It doesn't take a great deal of discernment to realize that our society is hugely influenced by pornography. I don't have any figures to quote but, given the space taken up by magazines in garage shops and its prevalence on the internet the industry would have to be worth billions of dollars in Australia alone. Pornography influences dress, advertising and free to air television. It is difficult to go into a garage, a newsagent or a video shop without being confronted by pornography. In the last 10 years alone technology has made it hugely accessible and especially to a generation that is far more computer savvy than their parents and guardians.

Proverbs chapter 7 warns against the adulteress: 'I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house... then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute with crafty intent'. Today a man doesn't even have to walk down the street. He can be seduced in his own bedroom by a pixilated adulteress who is every bit as dangerous as the woman of Proverbs 7.

It isn't difficult for Christians to work out that pornography must be avoided. We could begin with Jesus words in the Sermon on the Mount. The NIV translates: 'I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart'. The original text says literally: 'anyone who looks at a woman *to lust after her...*'

Pornography is calculated to cause a person, and especially men, to lust after a woman (and sometimes, it has to be said, to lust after another man). Jesus doesn't mince words. To fall into this trap is adultery. The issue is the heart. At stake is nothing less than our relationship with God and eternal life because, in the end, it is not possible to love God who demands our whole heart and to love the world.

If we wanted more reason to take a clear stand against pornography we could add that it is often exploitative, incites a preoccupation with lust and hinders an appreciation of love, encourages promiscuity and promotes unrealistic expectations in regard to a normal and healthy sexual relationship.

Put it all together and we have a huge source of guilt and even agony for sincere Christian men who are tempted (yes they are) and who can fall captive to sin in this regard. Their worst nightmare is Christians, who cannot imagine the power of this temptation and who, if they knew, would judge and condemn the guilty culprit without mercy. There are Christians who have entirely forgotten that Jesus ate with sinners and prostitutes without condemning them. And so the guilt remains a secret and the cure remains hidden. Would that we could call sin sin and yet not condemn the sinner in our pharisaic self adulation. Over the next few weeks I'll be writing further on this issue.

Article 2

In the previous article, I wrote about the influence and pervasiveness of pornography in our society and the ease of access which, prior to the internet and digital media, is unknown in human history. I mentioned the solemn warnings of Jesus and from the book of Proverbs against the adulteress which apply just as well to the issue of pornography. I mentioned the huge guilt that this temptation can cause Christian men as well as the great danger of an unsympathetic condemnation by other Christians who don't understand its power.

How should we deal with this issue? To begin with we need to disarm it. What I mean is that we need to be able to acknowledge the existence of the problem and be free to talk about it – Christian men have all the same temptations as other men. A man is not neutered when he is

converted! He struggles with all the same desires. So let's say so and not pretend. And let's not pretend that when a publisher goes out of their way to attract men by the women on their magazine cover or when a woman goes out of her way to dress seductively - that somehow Christian men are immune and don't notice. Jesus forgives the sinner who acknowledges his sin. But he also said, 'if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck' (Mark 9:42).

One of the less well known things about pornography is that it can be physiologically addictive due to a powerful combination of hormones and adrenalin. It can also be emotionally addictive in a situation where it is used for comfort, much as other people may find that food is a comfort when they are distressed, angry or anxious. It isn't possible either to understand or to helpfully discuss the problem without taking sympathetic account of these issues. But neither can these be a justification for the use of pornography. And neither do they discount the disastrous effects of continued use of pornography. The fact is that there are men who are not able to make love to their wives, and never have been able to do so, because of this other 'love'. This may not be common. But what is common is men who are stymied in their prayer life through guilt and incapable of leading their wives in prayer because they are too depressed by their own helplessness in sin.

So next time I'd like to go a step further with the question of how to deal with this issue: I would like to talk about repentance – what is it and how can you apply it in this difficult issue?

Article 3

Pornography is a problem which Christians and particularly Christian men are not immune to. It causes huge guilt and it prevents men from praying confidently, following Jesus and leading others. A man may sincerely desire to set his life apart for Jesus but pornography strips a man of his strength. So Proverbs 5:9 says: "Keep a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others".

What counsel should we give? It is one thing to say 'Repent'. It is another to achieve it when the temptation is so pervasive. Here are a couple of thoughts but they are a mere introduction. There are some things which can't be written in a church bulletin. If you need help please talk to me or to one of the other staff.

Firstly, what is the nature of repentance? It is not so much to *feel* sorry for sin. Rather it is to turn away from sin. There is no point trying to *feel* sorry for something when the reality is you love it and you are addicted to it. The issue is: what measures are you prepared to put in place in order to turn away from it? Proverbs 5 speaks about the issue in terms of discipline. "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body and spent. You will say, 'How I hated discipline!'"

There are really only two main sources of pornography. Firstly, with computers there is a simple solution. Our government has provided free software called *Safe Eyes* which enables an administrator to check every search and every site you have visited. Find someone who will keep you accountable by using this software. And if you have children growing up in the house it is an absolute essential anyway. (It can also be used as a filter. Another option is *Covenant Eyes*) Destroy old computers. If your mobile phone is a problem get rid of it and buy one that doesn't have the capacity.

The second source is magazines and DVDs. Here it is more difficult to impose an external constraint. Perhaps the words, 'Keep a path far from her' are particularly applicable. Find an appropriate person to confide in and ask them to keep you accountable.

The next thing to recognise is that God is unutterably merciful. You can always go back to him and seek forgiveness. But don't make the mistake of asking for forgiveness without doing your best to put into place the disciplines that will help you overcome the problem. If you are feeling sorry then use that moment to take the initiative. But don't mistake the momentary

sorrow and fear as genuine repentance if they aren't accompanied by the actions that will make a difference later, when the temptation is strong. Remember that if you have gone down this path then there is a permanent weakness there which you have to protect yourself against. Know that you might fall again and protect yourself as best you are able.

Finally, pray and confess. If you need to, tell God that you don't even really *want* to give up the pleasure but ask God to help you to *want* to be set apart for him even more. And confess your sin to another person who will be confidential, a godly person who will know not to condemn you but who will pronounce forgiveness in the name of Jesus and pray for you and ask you from time to time how you are going.