

Freedom From Porn

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[0:00] Well, this morning I want to talk to you about one addiction that is honestly the most prevalent in the church and in the world.

This morning, it would be nice if I could say that those results did not translate into the church or into Christianity, but according to one Covenant Eyes poll, which I don't know how scientific this is, it's probably not exactly right, but half of Christian men and one-fifth of Christian women are looking at porn.

Now, I have a hard time believing that those numbers are exactly accurate for here. Maybe it's because I really don't want that to be true, but I don't really think that those numbers are completely accurate.

But it does point to a considerable, a significant problem both in our world and in the church. And it would be really totally naive for me to say that it's not a problem here in any sense.

So it's an issue that we can't ignore, and that's why I want to take one class to talk about it. But I am a pastor, and I've been charged by God to oversee your souls.

[2:05] And that's why I'm taking this one class. Trust me, it would be much easier for me not to do this. I'm already nervous. I'm feeling it.

I wasn't nervous on the way here, but now I'm just standing here I am. But Jesus doesn't call us to do things that are easy.

He calls us to do things that are necessary and hard. And so the problem is real. The problem is significance. And the Lord Jesus died to purify his people.

And porn defiles his people. It's a real addiction, and so that's why we're going to talk about it. So we're going to have just a number of questions.

The first is, what is pornography? It comes from two Greek words as a compound word. It comes from the word porne, meaning immorality, and graphe, meaning writing or drawing or portraying.

[3:04] And so pornography is about portraying, picturing, imagining, fantasizing about immorality. And so looking at porn, reading porn, is nothing more than looking at and enjoying and consuming sin.

In Matthew 5, 28, Jesus tells us that whoever looks at a woman lustfully in his heart has already committed adultery. Whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.

And so imagining, fantasizing, looking at, thinking about immorality is sin. And so God's command to not commit adultery is a command that doesn't just reach our physical bodies, but it reaches our imaginations and our minds and our hearts and our thoughts.

And so God's command to be pure reaches all of those places as well. He doesn't just want pure bodies.

He wants pure hearts and pure minds and pure imaginations. So David in Psalm 51 reflects on that. David's sin with Bathsheba was not merely physical. And so that's why in Psalm 51, his confession, Psalm, he says this, Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

[4:33] So he's saying this sin is not just something outside of me. It is something that is a part of me. And then he adds this, Surely you desire truth in the inner parts.

You teach me wisdom in the inmost places. He's talking about his heart. And he's saying, God, you taught me truth in my inmost places.

And so where does God want truth? He wants it in our inner parts. So pornography, though, as we're going to see, Pornography is all about lies in our inner parts.

And so porn in whatever shape, visual or written, is about building a world of lies and then living in that world and acting out in that world.

And so that's what pornography is. The second question is, Is it really addictive? Is it really addictive? Is it really addictive? Maybe it's hard for you to imagine that it is addictive.

[5:39] But in reality, that's exactly what it is. It's addictive for all the reasons that you've been talking about, we've been talking about in this class. Addictive means enslaving.

And every sin has the potential to enslave us. But some sins are especially enslaving.

Some sins are especially sticky and difficult to get out of. And so just let me read some of this. Sin that powerfully deludes us can be especially enslaving.

Sin that works powerfully on our imaginations can be especially enslaving. Sin that gives immediate pleasure and satisfaction can be very enslaving.

Sin that seems to bring quick help to our problems can be especially very enslaving. Now, I just want to give you an example. Anger can be that way.

[6:42] Anger can be a very addictive sin. Because it feels good to be angry. And it feels like you're accomplishing something when you're angry.

Anger can give the idea that it can bring quick relief to your problem. So, that's why James says, he pokes a hole in that balloon and he says, the anger of man does not what?

Does not bring about the righteousness of God. Does it bring about the righteous life that God desires? Now, why would he say that? Because anger can have the appearance of having the ability to bring about the righteous life God desires.

And so my kids need to obey God's law. And I'm going to get angry with them. That will get them in line. That will bring about a righteous life that God desires.

But anger deludes us. It promises something that it really can't give in a lasting sense. It can only bring about a temporary and a surface change.

[7:53] But in the end, anger destroys the very thing that you want to accomplish. The very people that you are using it on. And it destroys you. And that's exactly what pornography does.

It works powerfully on your imaginations. It can give immediate pleasure and satisfaction. It promises and gives temporary relief to my personal problems.

It can do that. And so I'm lonely. I'm sad. I'm angry. I'm tired. And I want something.

And porn raises its hand and says, I can help. And it does in its own sinful, limited way. And that's why it can be so addicting.

But there's even a physical element to the addiction. John Piper wrote an article called Porn, the New Narcotic.

[8:54] And I have a pretty long quote here. But it's all, I think, relevant. And in that article, it says this. Neurological, so that's to do with nerves in the brain.

Neurological research has revealed that the effect of internet pornography on the human brain is just as potent, if not more so, than addictive chemical substances such as cocaine or heroin.

Cocaine is considered a stimulant that increases dopamine levels in the brain. Dopamine is the primary neurotransmitter that the most addictive substances release.

As it causes a high and a subsequent craving for repetition of that high rather than a subsequent feeling of satisfaction by way of endorphins. So cocaine stimulates dopamine in your brain, which gives you a high but doesn't satisfy it.

It only gives you a greater craving for it. Heroin, on the other hand, is an opiate, which has the relaxing effect. Pornography, by both arousing and relieving, is a type of polydrug that triggers both types of addictive brain chemicals in one punch, enhancing its addictive propensity.

[10:12] So it does what cocaine does, does what heroin does, and it does it at the same time. Going on. Internet pornography does more than just spike the level of dopamine in the brain for a pleasure sensation.

It literally changes the physical matter within the brain so that the new neurological pathways require pornographic material in order to trigger the desired reward sensation.

In other words, pornography can powerfully, physically change your brain, how it's wired and constructed. Now, am I saying that it's just a biological problem?

No. Not at all. But Proverbs 23, 7 says, as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. What we think about is reflected in what we are. And what we are is reflected in what we think about.

[11:19] And part of what we are is physical as a body. So, what do we need to say about all of that?

It's just this, that there is an actual physical aspect to the addiction that is real. It's not completely ethereal. It's not just completely out there, divorced from what's going on in my body.

It's not just out in the realm of the spirit. But, you know what, there is good news even on the physical level for this. More and more scientists are realizing that the brain has an amazing ability to be rewired, to change, even as we age.

It's called the plasticity of the brain. And so the brain never stays the same. You know, you have the most powerful growth spurts of the brain when you're a little baby. But your brain, all the way until you die, is changing, making connections.

And what I want to say here is the brain that sin has wired one way, God and righteousness can rewire for purity.

[12:35] And the addiction then becomes easier and easier to overcome the more you say no. Every no gives your brain a chance to rewire, to change.

And now, in the secular world, that's as far as the help can go. That's all the deeper the thinking goes. We don't want to ignore that.

Because that is part of the truth. That's part of God's world. We don't want to poo-poo that as something unspiritual or something. It is the truth. We want to include it. And there is truth, and there is even some help there.

A lot of times, porn addicts, people who are addicted to porn, feel like they are enslaved to some sort of all-powerful force that just comes upon them, that gets a hold of them, and they can't shake it.

But the truth is, part of this, not all of it, but part of it, is just chemicals. It's just chemicals in the brain.

[13:41] Chemicals in my brain making me feel a certain way, making me desire certain things. And chemicals are just chemicals. They're not our masters. They aren't something that can't change.

They're not something too strong for the spirit-filled Christian. Christ is in us by his spirit. And Jesus Christ, son of God, was the agent in creating all of those chemicals, all those dopamines and all the rest.

He turned water into wine. He knows how to do chemistry. And he can change that chemical dependency that's going on in our brains.

But we don't want to just stop there. We want to go further. And so let's talk about the deeper struggles. because it is easier, or it's easy for your big, obvious sins, like internet pornography or whatever kind of pornography, to conceal the deeper sins that fuel that struggle.

So just like alcoholism can hide the deeper sins that you struggle with, it's the same way with porn. And if you're just trying to break the addiction without dealing with the underlying heart, deep heart sins, you're not going to be really fighting the right battle.

[15:16] You're not going to be winning. You're going to be forever trimming the top of the weed instead of digging out the weed or out the root of the weed.

And so let me give you an example so you can know what I'm talking about. And this example comes from David Powelson's article called Breaking the Porn Addiction and it's available online.

So if you want to look that up, David Powelson, Breaking the Porn Addiction. And in that article, he talks about counseling a man called Tom. Tom was a single Christian man in his late 30s who had been struggling with porn since he was a teenager.

He had tried all the right things. Accountability, memorizing the Bible, exercise, cold showers, being involved at the church, but he still struggled.

And then Powelson asked him, so tell me when? He asked him, when do you struggle? Keep a record of when the temptation is particularly strong.

[16:21] And Tom says, I already know when that is. it's usually on Friday night. And it is my, I want you to listen to this, it is my temper tantrum with God.

It's easy to think the big problem is porn, but all of a sudden what we're really talking about is a man who's angry with God. Now what does he have to be angry about?

Or does he have a good reason? Well, I guess it doesn't matter if he has a good reason or not. He is angry with God. Tom says, I'm tired and lonely on Friday nights. I think about my single friends on dates and my married friends with their wives and I feel sorry for myself.

I get angry at God because I think he owes me a wife and I don't have one. And pretty soon the temptation is overwhelming and I give in. Tom's fight was then focused on just the sin of pornography, but underlying that struggle was Tom's anger at God.

It was self-pity. It was envy. It was in this huge issue he believed that God owed him a wife.

[17:42] Now that's a very interesting and indicative belief. what is that called when we think that when we do certain things God owes us something?

Legalism. It's legalism. And so what is let me just ask you what's the exact opposite of legalism? Pardon?

Freedom. Freedom? Grace. Grace. Grace. Grace is the opposite of legalism. And so in Tom's heart functioning at that time the real engine that's driving his heart is not God's amazing grace.

Not gratitude. Not amazed. Well, he's amazed at grace. It's instead he thinks his idea, his relationship with God works like this.

I do this and then God should owe me something in return. return. He had his relationship with God based on works. And so at the bottom of Tom's sin is just this unbelief.

[18:56] And what I mean by that is he doesn't believe in the grace of God. He doesn't think God is for him, not ultimately. He thinks he has this sort of buyer-seller, king, master-servant, sort of like the relationship is not where God is on his side beside him.

It is I'll do this for you, God, and you can do that for me. Now, what did Tom not see? He's a Christian, but he didn't see God's promise to help him in his time of need.

He didn't see what he already had in Jesus. All he saw and all he felt was, I need a wife. God owes me a wife.

God hasn't given me a wife. And so when Friday night came around, his anger and his disappointment and just the sorrow of living in that kind of relationship with God swelled up into a temper tantrum with God.

At the bottom of pornography is a gospel problem. it's a faith problem. Yet there is a physical reality to it, like I was just talking about it.

[20:16] And yes, it is disobedience. But driving all of that is this profound not living on the gospel, not living on Jesus Christ, not being encouraged and built up in the faith.

faith. So what did Tom need to do? Well, he needed to face his deeper sin problems, sin patterns. He needed to see them, that legalism and that unbelief and that anger and that envy.

And he needed to confess them to God and he needed to replace that legalism with just a more living, vibrant, real faith in Jesus Christ.

So where he's living on the riches of Jesus Christ, he's satisfied with what he has in Jesus. And not just in theory, but in reality.

So when the rubber meets the road, when it happens, the temptation happens, he can live out of something other than his poverty. So porn at its deepest level is just like every other addiction.

[21:33] It is idolatry. And idols in the Bible serve two purposes and they always serve these two purposes. They always go together. They serve the idols allow me on the one hand to live as my own God.

Now, idols offer a way for me to escape the real God and put myself on the throne. So idols, well, whatever our idol is, we put it in the place of God, but I think we really have to see that in so putting the idol in the place of God, we are actually taking the highest place.

The idol allows us to be our own God. And then secondly, serves two purposes. The idol offers me a way for me to save myself.

it's a way for me to be my own savior. So porn is a Christ substitute.

It is a self salvation. So how does that work with pornography? Well, look at the first place.

[22:51] How does it make me God? Well, it works like this. You create a world in your own mind. and you create this world.

Well, first of all, who creates worlds? God, but who's creating this world? Me. And you create this world where you get what you want. Who's the one that gets what they want?

So porn has nothing to do with living in the real world. It has nothing to do with real people. It pretends to be real.

And the actors and the actresses and all that, they pretend to be real, but it's all fake. And so the porn invites the person, you, to live in that world or those romance novels.

You project yourself into that world. You project yourself there. And so they create this world in their mind, and that's acting like God, the real creator.

[23:52] And then they populate that world with people who worship you. that's what you do with pornography. You populate this world with people that worship you, who find you exotic and interesting and thrilling and alluring and sexy, who love you.

And so you are God, and you get to be worshipped like God, and you get what you want, and you get what you deserve, whatever that might be.

and that's why it's so powerful and so addicting, and that's why it's not just chemicals. Porn allows us to be God, it allows us to be king, and it's good to be the king.

And so you keep going back again and again, you go back when you're sad, you go back when you're mad, you go back when you're lonely or tired or a hundred other things. Because in that world, it's all about you.

The people live for you, all the events are for you, everything's for you. And so ultimately, idols are about making you God, and porn does that.

[25:00] And then idols are all about self-salvation. So what does God give us in the gospel? Acceptance. I'm accepted.

Flawed though I may be, I'm accepted and loved. Porn offers that acceptance, but it does it without Jesus.

The gospel gives us love. And porn says, I'll give you love, but it's just without any real relationships. Jesus Christ gives us companionship and friendship.

Jesus Christ is a listening, available friend. The gospel says we matter to God, that we deeply matter to him. And porn lies and says I can give you that.

You matter. You count. You're accepted. You're important. Do you see what I'm saying when I say porn is about living? It's about living not on the riches of Jesus Christ.

[26:05] It's not living on what is already ours in Jesus. And that's why when counseling, one of the most powerful things that you can do is to take that person through what is theirs in Jesus Christ.

What is already theirs? What is true about them? Because when you already have riches, you don't need to go seeking the sacred ones. And when you already have real water, you don't need to go to the sewer to drink.

Well, that's what Tom needed. And as he believed more and more in the goodness of God, and the love of God, and the grace of God, when he got his relationship with God, right, and he understood it right, when he understood I'm justified, I'm accepted, I'm adopted, I count to God that he was loved, that God was with him, porn lost its power.

And he didn't need self-salvation because he already had what he needed in Christ. You don't need an idol. You don't need an idol when you have a real savior to turn to.

God and so as he lived more and more on the goodness of the gospel, as he began to experience more and more the riches of Jesus Christ, he replaced his old ways of thinking with new ways of thinking, his old habits with new habits, his old patterns with new patterns, and instead of throwing a temper tantrum with God, he learned to go to God, to bring his needs to God, to talk to God about his problems, and he replaced self-worship with God worship, and he replaced enjoying sin with enjoying God.

[27:55] But all that changes a process. It's a deep process. It goes all the way down to here, and it replaces your thoughts and your motives and your habits and your patterns, and it changes your physical body even.

And that battle, let me tell you, and if you only hear two things, this is the first thing I want you to really hear, that battle is winnable.

It's winnable, but it rarely happens at once. And we can't get trapped into thinking that our battles with addictions is an all or nothing thing, where there's no such thing as progress unless it's just ultimate victory.

There is such a thing as progress. Sanctification is a process. We saw this last Sunday. We go from glory to glory. We go from glory to glory in this life, and then we graduate to the ultimate glory.

That's the way it is with every sin. We go from one level of holiness to another. And so what does progress look like against this sin?

[29 : 08] Well, two things. It looks like a new goal and a new direction. It looks like a new goal. What is the goal now?

Instead of being the goal about all about me satisfying myself and getting whatever I want and getting what I deserve or whatever is driving the sin, instead of that goal, the goal is now absolute purity.

absolute purity. It can be summed up by 1 Timothy 5. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with absolute purity.

So what is the goal? Well, for men, it is to treat women not as objects, or men as objects, but to quit thinking about them sexually and to start thinking about them as family, as sisters, as brothers.

And so you don't think about them sexually or romantically because now you're thinking about them as family. That's what absolute purity looks like. And so it's purity in life, it's purity in your thoughts, it's purity in your imaginations, in your heart, in your intention.

[30 : 25] And so that's the new goal absolute purity. So I'm not having fake relationships with fake people, I'm having real family relationships with real people in a very pure way.

That's the new goal. What does progress look like? Well, it looks like a new goal, absolute purity, and second, it looks like a new direction. Direction.

Now we're talking about movement. You're facing a different way, and you're driving a different direction. So you were on the highway going this way, you have now said, I am not traveling to that city anymore, I am traveling to this city, and then it actually means you turn around and you start driving towards that city.

Unless you live in like Star Trek world, that whole process of getting somewhere is a direction. It's time, it's progress, it's motion in a different way, and that's what we're talking about.

So that means thought, thought by thought, you're replacing the old ways of thinking with new ways. So instead of creating your own world, and living in that world, and populating it with people that worship you, you need to start living in God's world.

[31 : 50] That's the opposite direction, that's the different new direction. Instead of living in your own world, you're living in God's world. You're living as God as the creator. And instead of populating your imaginary world with people who worship you, you start living in this world.

This world with these people, real people, who don't care about you as much as you care about you, who have flaws and sin, whose lives are not all about you.

with people who need you, with people who you need to serve, with people for you to love and for you to be loved by.

But the point is, you start living in that, with these people and loving them as they are, real flesh and blood people. people. And instead of imaginary people worshiping you and giving you everything you want, you're now serving the real people in your life.

You're present with them. You're present for them. You're bent from going bent in, now you're bent out.

[33 : 16] So progress, what does that mean? It means more openness, more accountability. Porn is very secretive, very dark.

Go into the cave, hide. It's living all wrapped up in a coffin that you've built with your own hands, of your own choosing.

But holiness is walking in the light. And so what does progress look like? It means that you're turning away from the dark and you're moving towards the light. You're living with real people in open, honest relationships.

Porn is all about fake relationships. But growing in holiness is growing in real relationships. So instead of saying, when someone says, how are you?

Everything is good. When everything is not good. Instead of that, you find someone to share your struggle with. And you're being honest and open about it.

[34 : 26] You're finding someone to walk with you in it. And I guess that's the second thing I want you to know is the sin is very rarely beaten all by yourself.

It requires so much of a real person because it is so bent in. It is so dark. It is so secret. It is so selfish. The only way to actually get help out of that is to have a real person to walk with you and to live with you in that life.

And so instead of really what it is, is you're actually living like what you really are. A sinner. Nobody pretends to be more righteous than a porn addict.

But the gospel meets us as real sinners. Half of the battle of evangelism is getting the person lost.

The gospel allows us to live with God and it allows us to live with one another, not as perfectly righteous, with no flaws, no chinks in our armor.

[35 : 40] The gospel allows us to live what we are because Jesus Christ came to save, not the righteous, but sinners he came to call. So what else does progress look like?

Progress. I'm just going to run through a few things because I want you to see it's not an all or nothing. There's progress. It's a process.

It's a change. It's a new goal. It's a new direction. So what does the progress look like? A decrease in the frequency of the fall is progression.

It's a new direction. A lot of times when you're changing direction, you've got to slow down. And slowing down is the first step to turning around. And that's not to make an excuse of anything.

But it is just to say that slowing down is part of turning around. A change in battleground is progress. If it goes from outward to inward, if it goes from actually buying things to just now the battles in your imagination, that's progress.

[36 : 50] An increase in accountability and honesty is progress. Telling the truth more and more and more is progress. Different responses to difficult circumstances is progress.

Remember Tom? His hard thing is Friday night and he's feeling lonely in the hardness of his life. But instead of running to porn to help you, you're learning to go to God.

Go to God. I'm lonely. I'm going to pray. I'm going to go to God with my loneliness. I'm feeling hurt. I'm feeling tired. I'm feeling like I can't do this.

You go to God. That's what it looks like to make progress. Repenting more quickly is progress.

After you have sinned, if you repent quicker than the last time, that's progress. Not wallowing for days or weeks or months after a fall is progress.

[38 : 05] After you've fallen, you don't lose heart and you don't give up and you don't give in, but you immediately pick yourself up. You go to God. You hold on to Jesus. You really believe that the gospel, what it says, that Jesus Christ died for sinners and that's what I am.

You hold on to Jesus and you start fighting again. That's progress. Loving others. Caring for others.

Serving others is progress. Porn is living like you're the king. Holiness is living like you're the servant.

Holiness is Philippians 2. It's acting like Jesus who though he was great came down in humble service.

more gospel joy and communion with God is progress. So instead of having this relationship where it's like slave master and slave, you're living more as a child with a father.

[39 : 15] Instead of this distance between you and God and you feel like God is this cold hearted person, instead now you're seeing more and more that it is true.

he's abounding in love. Slow to anger. That's his heart. Not this cruel taskmaster heart. Love.

Fatherhood. And you're enjoying that. And you're worshiping God. More happiness in God is progress.

The porn addict is not happy. They're miserable people. Happiness in God is progress. Well, let's talk practical.

This is where we're going to end. Practical. First, just a few things. A word to parents. Parents, make sure you are doing everything you can to protect your children.

[40 : 19] Porn is so ensnaring, so powerful, so enslaving. It is a mousetrap that snaps shut like that and closes down hard. The average age that kids are exposed is 11, maybe even younger than that.

And it is so easy to accidentally run into it. I guess my question for parents are, would you let your kids hang out with a sex trafficker?

You wouldn't do that. And so don't let your kids hang out with a wide-open computer. There is absolutely, I mean, I don't, you know, we don't use absolutely very often.

There's absolutely no reason that you shouldn't have accountability software, blocking software, on your computers. I mean, if you can give me a good reason why you don't that really outweighs what I'm saying, then please share it, but you're going to have a hard time convincing me.

Second, so that's first to the parents. Second, if you're trapped, or someone you know is trapped, really the first step, or one of the first steps is cutting off all access, gouging out the right eye, cutting off the right hand, and that initially means accountability software where reports of what is being looked at on your computer is being sent, and you're looking, you can find it if they accidentally run into it.

[42 : 00] They can run into it, and you want to be able to know that they ran into it, so you can go talk to them, so you can make sure it doesn't happen again, and that's for children, for all adults, that's part of it too, accountability, and that means someone else setting it up, and it means someone else having the password.

You don't give the drunk the key to the liquor cabinet and say, no, you watch that. That means if you're caught in the sin, you're going to need to tell someone.

That goes back to the second thing that I want you to remember. It's winnable is number one. Number two is it's almost, it's not winnable if you're going to try to do it by yourself, or it's almost not winnable if you want to do it.

Telling someone, that means the hardest step, that is the hardest step, because that's the night turning to day. That's the sun coming up in the sky.

That's leaving the cave and coming out into the open air. It's the hardest step, but it is probably the most powerful step because it breaks the slavery of the secrecy and the selfishness.

[43 : 22] So cut off excess. Get someone else to help you with that, and then you need a partner an accountability partner, a friend, a pastor who can help you, who can speak into your lives, who can walk with you in this, with you.

And then you need to get to work on those inner heart issues. And sin is deceitful above all things. I'm the last person that sees my sin a lot of times, that sees where I'm deluded, where I'm confused, where I'm living on lies, and that's why we need someone.

And so you start looking for those inner struggles. You look at where your believing lies, and you look at where Jesus has already given you what you need, and you aren't living on it.

So freedom from porn comes when you start living in the goodness of the gospel, when the old lies about God are replaced with the truth of God's word, when the old lies about people and the world and yourself are replaced with the truth.

and it's a change in heart. It's a change in your mind. It's a change in your life with God and with others. And it's a happy change.

[44 : 36] Because you're giving up the lies that make you miserable to replace it with the truths that make you happy. This is where we're going to end. Jesus has come that we might have life.

Holiness is what it means to have happiness and life. Freedom from porn is life. Jesus Christ has come that we might have life.

So God is for you. No one is a bigger help, a bigger, a cheerleader, a more encouraging person, more helpful, more willing to help you in this fight than God is, than Jesus is.

And so there is hope. You can be free. So those two things, it's winnable and you need someone to help you win. Well, we're dismissed.

Thank you.