

Biblical Counseling and Overcoming Pornography

BCC Partner Ministry Resource

November 2014



About This Resource

BCC Staff Note: The materials contained in this document have been posted at the Biblical Counseling Coalition’s *Grace & Truth blog site*. They each, in various ways, relate to the vital issue of *Biblical Counseling and Overcoming Pornography*.

We describe the BCC’s *Grace & Truth* blog as “Voices from the Biblical Counseling Community.” The modern biblical counseling movement spans a diverse spectrum of people and organizations committed to a view of people helping summarized by the Biblical Counseling Coalition’s *Confessional Statement*. It is with this diversity in mind that we have collated these resources into one document exclusively for our **BCC Partners**.

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14 Gospel Promises That Trump the Power of Lust: A Buzz Better Than Porn

By Luke Gilkerson

An Account of God's Transforming Grace

I opened my e-mail to find the usual assortment of business and junk mail, but then I saw an e-mail that caught my eye: an **Internet accountability report** for my friend "Matt." I get a report like this every week for Matt, detailing any questionable websites he visits. It is part of his ongoing effort to stay honest about where his eyes fall online.

I knew after looking at this report I was in for a long conversation with him.

The report indicated he spent about 4 hours one evening binging on porn, and it wasn't the first time I had seen this kind of thing. It seems to come in spurts for Matt. He goes weeks with a pretty clean record, then for a day or two he devours as much porn as he can.

As his **accountability partner**, my job is not to just *hear* an account of his sin; I'm also to *give* him an account of God's transforming grace.

I want him to remember that God's grace does not merely save us from the *guilt* of sin. It saves us from the *grip* of sin.

Looking to the Reward

When Dr. Richard Wiseman tracked the progress of 5,000 people who made New Year's resolutions, only 10% succeeded. But one of the things the 10% did differently was that they regularly reminded themselves about the benefits of their goals. What will be the reward? What will they gain?

For a lot of Christian men and women, the fight against porn feels futile because all they can see what they are losing. I know it was for me. For so long **I can't come to believe that sex was life**. Giving up the pleasure of porn felt a bit like dying. Leaving porn only left me empty. (It was idolatry, plain and simple. I didn't see that then, but I do now.)

In *Porn-Free Church*, **Tim Chester** writes:

"A life-with-porn versus a life-without-porn is a poor choice. If you set it up in these terms then you won't produce lasting change. We need to set it up (as it truly is) as a choice between life-with-porn versus life-with-God. We need to show how God always offers more than porn."

The Bible is filled with the language of reward. Moses could avoid the fleeting pleasures of sin in Pharaoh's palace because "he was looking to the reward" (Hebrews 11:26). This is what saving faith is all about. It is "the assurance of things hoped for" (11:1)—the anticipation that the life we are promised is *real*.

Porn vs. Precious Promises

I had to learn through a lot of prayer, a lot of good conversations, and a lot of failure, that saying no to porn is about saying yes to the life God promises—both eternally and in the here and now. There are tailor-made promises in the Scriptures that hold out to us the blessings of having a sexually pure mind and body.

The apostle Peter writes that we can become more like God Himself through His "precious and very great promises" (2 Peter 1:3). This is what a porn-filled mind needs the most.

1. If you are pure in heart, God promises you will see Him (Matthew 5:8).
2. If you are sexually pure, your mind will no longer be foggy, your heart will be teachable, and you will be filled with the life of God (Ephesians 4:17-19).
3. If you fill your mind with that which is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, then God's peaceful presence will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).
4. If you are sexually pure, your heart will not be enslaved to the worship of sex, which means you can wholeheartedly devote yourself to the true and living God (1 Kings 11:4).
5. If you are sexually pure, you will see and treat men as brothers and women as sisters, not as objects to be used for lust (1 Timothy 5:1-2).
6. If you are not enslaved to your lusts, you will be freer to serve others in love (Galatians 5:13).
7. If you are sexually pure, you will be more prepared to be a great lover and to enjoy sexual intimacy with your spouse or future spouse (Proverbs 5:18-19).
8. If you are sexually pure, you will keep your marriage bed undefiled (Hebrews 13:4).
9. If you are sexually pure, you will no longer waste time but instead make the most of it (Ephesians 5:16).
10. If you are sexually pure, your life will be fruitful, and that fruit will be full of goodness, rightness, and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9).

11. If you are sexually pure, you will be an honorable person (1 Thessalonians 4:4).
12. If you are a sexually pure person, you will not be enslaved to your passions (1 Corinthians 6:12).
13. If you are pure, you will be more like the glorious, risen Christ (1 John 3:1-3).
14. If you are sexually pure, you will be living in the will of God for your life (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

C. S. Lewis calls these some of the “unblushing promises of reward” that are found in the Bible.

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

This is where the fight against porn gains traction. Write down these promises and read them every day. Study them. When you get together with your accountability partner, read them to each other. Take it one day at a time, and each day speak these promises aloud. When you do, say to yourself: “Today, this is the kind of person I desire to be.”

For Further Reflection...

What additional “precious and great promises” would you list in the grace-centered battle to say “Yes” to righteousness and “No” to unrighteousness?

Pornography, Radical Measures, and the Gospel

By Heath Lambert

Note from Heath Lambert: The Following is an adaptation of a section of *Finally Free: Fight for Purity with the Power of Grace*.

Are Works at Odds with the Gospel?

Last year I wrote a blog expressing concern that one author's book about pornography talked a lot about the gospel, but didn't do a very good job of showing practical application flowing out of the gospel. There was not much instruction for people who struggle explaining the practicalities of how to remove porn from their life by using things like Internet filters, accountability, and other such things.

I received some criticism for the expression of concern. One person expressed that I was indicating that the gospel wasn't enough to bring about change, and that I was advocating a dangerous "gospel plus works" idea of change with regard to pornography.

This is the kind of criticism that is common today with many who consider themselves young, restless, and Reformed. These folks love the Gospel and are committed to its centrality. They are rightly suspicious of anything that would detract from the glorious gospel, which alone leads to salvation. The commitment to exalt the gospel should not, however, be at odds with works.

The Importance of Works

Works are of crucial importance in the Christian life. We are saved by works. But we are not saved by *our* works. We are saved by the works of *Christ*. After we experience the salvation of Jesus by believing the gospel, works then serve the crucial importance of demonstrating our salvation. The only time works are condemned in the Bible is when we try to use them to attain salvation. When we do that, works are an offense to Christ and His saving work.

With regard to pornography, this means it is good for us to think about outward measures we would employ to defeat pornography. In fact, if we are serious about becoming free from pornography we must think about this. For all of us who are committed to the sufficiency of the gospel, however, we must be clear that outward measures can never change our heart.

You do need more than Covenant Eyes and a weekly accountability time with men to be different. You need a change in your heart. You can try and remove porn's availability and eliminate your time alone, but for the rest of your life you'll seek immoral images as long as you desire it. The

good news—the gospel—is that Jesus will change your desires as you trust Him to forgive you and change you by His grace.

Jesus, Works, and Porn

This emphasis on the heart does not mean there's no time or place for outward radical measures. Jesus says there is! For those who struggle with the lust for pornography Jesus commands:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-30).

When fighting lust, Jesus Christ thinks that there are things you need to do. Works are important. You just need to put them in their proper place. Outward radical measures do not save, and they do not change desires, but they are necessary for two crucial reasons. Both reasons are related to the fact that complete change will not be immediate.

Room to Grow

First, radical measures give you space in which to grow. If you are enslaved to pornography God will not change your desires instantly but by degrees (2 Corinthians 3:18). Radical measures make it as hard as possible for you to get access to porn. They allow space for you to direct your attention towards Christ instead of porn.

Bear Fruit in Keeping with Repentance

Second, employing radical measures gives you an opportunity to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8). As you struggle with God's help to be free, you want the full-blown change of new desires. But that transformation takes time. As you press forward in growth you can experience some change before that, however, in implementing outward measures like confession to a pastor, or using X3 on your cell phone. These external measures are the first steps of change, and though they don't automatically transform your internal desires, they are expressions of *real* change. You need the grace of Jesus to accomplish them, and when you experience His grace to take these first, hard, faltering steps you can have confidence that Jesus will also give you the grace to experience the fullness of change that you are seeking.

This wonderful and progressive change is given to you by Jesus in His forgiving and changing grace. As you continue to walk the grace-filled path away from pornography, you need to seek God's forgiveness and power to be different. Cry out to Jesus. Remember His death on the cross that purchases your forgiveness and your obedience. Believe in the blood of Jesus to pay for your sin, and then get busy fighting with the spiritual strength found only in the gospel.

For Further Reflection...

How do you see the relationship between gospel grace, works/effort, and overcoming pornography?

Ensnared by Lust

By Julie Ganschow

Bound and Trapped

I grew up hearing that women do not enjoy looking at naked bodies the way men do. Yet, women are being seduced into the world of pornography. Young and old, Christian and non-Christian, married and single, women are viewing pornography in record numbers. The temptation for involvement in sexual sin is enormous, particularly since women can now view anything from their couch in the living room.

“Patty” is a young woman who describes herself as addicted to erotica. She states she began reading it at the age of 14. She used to have to go to the library, but now accesses it on her tablet. She finds erotica exciting and regularly fantasizes she is the woman in the storyline of the book she is reading. She has tried many times to stop but always finds herself in the online bookstore for another download.

“Doris” is a middle-aged woman who began watching pornography with her husband when he suggested they view it as foreplay. She has participated in activities in which she is deeply ashamed, but cannot wait for the next time she can act out a scene. Doris has been downloading porn on her laptop when her husband is not home. She realized she has a problem and has tried to stop, but has failed repeatedly.

“Bella” is a woman whose marriage has fallen apart. Her husband has left her for another woman. It came as quite a shock to Bella who was quite happy in her marriage. She reads erotica and views on-line pornography as a way to cope with her sexual desires. She knows it is wrong and wants to stop but does not know what to do with her physical desires now that her husband is gone.

Women and Porn

Women like Patty, Doris, and Bella describe their attraction to pornography in surprising ways. They want excitement, stimulation, adventure, and the ability to do things in their imagination they would never dare do in reality. Pornography and erotica provide an escape from everyday life and allows them to experience things without risk. They believe it is pleasure without consequence.

Women keep their pornography use secret from other women because they fear judgment and shame. Many of those who have confided in their pastor’s wife or older women in their life tell me they have found little support and a lot of condemnation. The counsel they have received has amounted to “STOP IT!”

God's Intention for Sex

In Genesis 2:18-25, we see God designed and “created” sex. Prior to the fall there was no shame between Adam and Eve, they reveled in each other's bodies and their love was pure, sweet and rapturous. We only need to read a few verses of Song of Solomon to understand that what is detailed is the intimate joining of a husband and wife. That is how God intended it to be.

Our physical union is to reflect the oneness God and man are to have in Christ. The intimacy of the physical relationship between man and wife is to be a visual expression of the love between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Intentional Destruction

The perversion of the sexual relationship is not accidental; it is intentional. Our enemy the devil has taken this beautiful picture, this one-flesh relationship and warped it in the most grotesque and sinful ways. In our western culture, sex sells everything—hamburgers, tires, beer, and hot wings only to name a few things.

When a woman indulges in sexual immorality and impurity, she participates in destroying the image and picture of what God intends for the intimate act of sex. There is nothing righteous about pornography; it leads to perversions of mind and body. A desire for pornography reveals a heart that is not set upon glorifying God, but is instead set upon feeding the sinful lusts of the flesh, something Scripture commands us to abandon.

“For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1 Peter 4:3).

Debauchery (extreme indulgence in immorality) will be the inevitable result of pornography. While many claim to be able to be “moderate” with pornography, statistically people gravitate toward more and more forbidden behaviors as they view it. This is evidence that the flesh grows more corrupt the more it is fed (Ephesians 4:22). Scripture is clear on the obligation to put to death the desires of the flesh.

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4).

Breaking Free

Breaking free involves making a full and complete confession. She might consider fasting and praying before the Lord for repentance. She should ask Him to cleanse her heart of the images and words she has taken into her mind, and the desire for pornography.

She must learn how to control her own body (1 Thess. 4:3-8) and gain a proper view of godly sexuality in marriage.

Practically speaking, breaking free includes taking every step necessary to cut off access to pornography even if it means no Internet. While computer blocks and strict accountability are necessary for avoiding the near occasion of sin, they will only address the behavior.

While pornography is a problem, it is a visible symptom of her self-centered and idolatrous heart. What she truly needs is change of heart, for what guides and motivates her heart is what will change her actions. Heart change is the only real hope for transformation.

For Further Reflection...

How would you describe the critical importance of heart-level transformation in the life of a person with a pornography addiction?

Dumb Down Your Smartphone

By Deepak Reju

Hot Coal in Your Pants

There was a time when porn was primarily a problem for desktops or laptops, but over the last few years, technology has expanded to a host of different mobile formats—ipods, smartphones, tablets (and who knows what APPLE will come up with next year?). So, if you are helping someone fight a porn problem, you've got to ask about all of their devices.

Think of hot coal. If you had a piece of burning coal in your pocket, it would burn a hole through your pants, and sear the skin all the way down your leg. Not a pretty picture, right? Mobile technology that gives us access to the Internet anywhere and at anytime is like sticking hot coal in our pockets. If you don't have the self-control it takes to fight off temptation, you're going to get burned.

Protect Yourself from Yourself

Most guys, as I talk to them about this problem of porn on the phone (or ipod, or tablet), take a posture of negotiating. I suggest to them, after repeated failures of looking at porn on their smartphone, that they don't have the self-control and maturity it takes to have access to the Internet anywhere and at any time.

Then the deliberating starts: "But what if I..."

"...cut out all of the dangerous apps?"

"...put the parental controls on?"

"...let my best friend program the administrator's password so I can't get into the app store?"

"...put covenant eyes on my phone?"

Chances are you probably know how to get around all of these measures, and with some scheming, you could find out how to easily get access to porn once again.

Don't get me wrong, I think constructing boundaries to prevent a porn addict from committing foolishness yet again is a good thing. In fact, it's an important first step in helping any struggler. But my concern here is three-fold:

1. An unwillingness to accept your immaturity and inability to maturely handle unfettered access to the Internet anywhere and at any time.
2. The treasuring of mobile technology as if it is something we can't live without.
3. An unwillingness to make the sacrifices needed to protect yourself from sin.

Here's the principle: You've got to protect yourself from yourself. If you don't have the maturity to handle unencumbered access to the Internet, and if the boundaries and software programs are not protecting you from stumbling, then you've got to do what it takes to stop the problem.

The biggest problem is not the pornographic picture on the screen. The problem starts with the lust brewing in your own heart. In other words, *the biggest problem is you*. You've got to find ways to protect yourself from the lust that comes from your heart.

Be Radical

Jesus says you need to take a radical step:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-30, ESV).

I've read this text with a lot of strugglers, and I usually ask: “What is Jesus' approach to your sin?” It's certainly not passive. He doesn't negotiate. He suggests one thing—**aggressively** get rid of it. “Tear it out and throw it away.” “Cut it off and throw it away.” Take a radical step in dealing with your sin.

What is a radical step *for you*?

There are a lot of different things you can do to cut the sin out of your life. Let me make one suggestion: Some of you need to consider dumbing down your phone. Believe it or not, they actually still sell “dumb” phones—something that doesn't give you access to the Internet or e-mail or apps. All it does is what phones were originally meant to do—call someone else, or maybe even text them. If you ask the salesman at your local AT&T store, after he has removed the confused look from his face, he'll walk you over to the corner of the store and show their somewhat small selection of Internet-free flip phones.

Several years ago, a young man I met for counseling explained to me that his fight with porn was a difficult battle, and so he decided to not have a computer or television access at his apartment,

and to only carry a simple flip-phone. No one told him to do this. He actually decided this on his own.

Now before you judge him as being a pre-historic Neanderthal, realize that he was just trying to do what Jesus told him to do—recognize that when you sin (and especially if it is a habitual problem), it is better to take a drastic step to protect yourself from sinning again.

Friend, don't be passive with your sin. Don't underestimate how much power sin has over your heart and your life. Be aggressive with your sin. Cut it out and throw it away.

For Further Reflection...

What additional applications can we make from Matthew 5:29-30 regarding being aggressive in our fight against sin?

Dealing with Stubborn Desires through Worship

By Ernie Baker

There is a line from the Disney movie “Frozen” that is destined to be quoted often. The wise troll Grand Pabbie said:

“The heart is not so easily changed, but the head can be persuaded.”¹

Whether the writers of Disney intended it or not they were capturing a thoroughly biblical idea and a tension that many feel regularly. It is easy to know intellectually what to do but our desires won't cooperate. In other words, it is easy for desires to overwhelm the logical part of our being. Or as Paul said, “...But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23, NASB).

This leads to the logical question of what do we do with stubborn, entrenched desires? These could come in the form of strong desires for overeating (when intellectually you know you shouldn't), or to just relax (when you know you shouldn't) or to turn to pornography for a little bit of pleasure (when you know you shouldn't).

Maybe you've tried willpower and a filter for your computer. You've tried Scripture memory but the desires are still entrenched. Despair then comes as you wonder if you are destined to struggle with these desires the rest of your life.

It seems that while we have done a good job in biblical counseling of identifying the source of these strong desires and why we keep giving in (Proverbs 4:23), I'm not confident that we have been equally clear with the solution. Let's explore this further.

True Versus False Worship

Many have become experts at identifying idolatry of the heart as the source. Humans have false treasures in the inner person (Matthew 12:33-35). It is obvious what people need to “put off,” but is it equally as clear how to “be renewed in the spirit of the mind” and “put on” (Ephesians 4:21-32) related to strong desires and true worship?

We have been clear that false worship is the problem. I would propose then that true worship is the solution. And if so what does this worship look like in detail?

1 Frozen, directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee (Disney, 2013).

Sanctification through Worship

I believe we have the powerful tool of superior worship to kill the false worship of the soul. Instead of “lovers of pleasure” we can become “lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). The essence of this view of sanctification would be that as the soul becomes more captivated with the beauty of the Lord “the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”²

How then is the lion of desire tamed in the inner person? The mechanism of change is worship, and this is made possible because of the gospel. Jesus said to the woman at the well that God is seeking worshipers (John 4: 23-24). He said this as He addressed the false worship of her soul (which had something to do with lusting after relationship with men).

Grow in Worship

The theory sounds nice, but what does it mean? We all understand the need to grow in our understanding of and practice of worship. It’s like saying, you should pray more. We all know it. The principle is more cogent than that though.

To demonstrate the power inherent in this principle, think of worship words with me. By worship words I mean what we are commanded to do in Scripture in relation to the Lord. Among others we are told to praise, love, trust in, hope in, sing the praises of, believe, rejoice in, serve, fear, bow down to, and obey.

Thus, to grow we need to rejoice in, praise, obey, love, hope in, and trust the Lord instead of the strong desires of our hearts. Each one of these words could also be used to describe what is happening in our souls with the areas where we struggle with strong desires. “I *love* food” can be like saying, “I use food to cope with the stresses of life.” Or, “I look at pornography as an escape for life’s pressures” can mean I *hope* this will make life more enjoyable.

As an illustration of this principle let’s consider why “love one another” is the most often repeated command of the New Testament (see John 13:34-35 for starters). We have already established that love is a worship word. Now, let’s see how it can be used to fight strong desires.

Grow in Love

My father was a Sherman Tank machine gunner during WWII. I grew up hearing stories about Panzer Tanks and how difficult it was for our little Sherman to defeat a Panzer unless the correct strategy was used. One Sherman against a mighty Panzer was almost like trying to shoot it using a BB gun. But multiple Shermans ganging up on a lonely German Tank, aiming at the right spots, brought victory.

2 From the hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.”

Our flesh is like the German Panzer. It is mighty and formidable. It's laughable to use mechanisms for victory that are more like BB guns against the desires of the inner person. I have come to believe though that one of the most potent weapons against the flesh is love.

Romans 13 clearly exhorts us to, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another. For this, You shall not commit adultery....Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

It is obvious; if I truly love my wife, I will not commit adultery. So, how do I combat the adulterous tendencies of the heart (e.g. looking at pornography)? The answer: grow in love and keep growing in love since it leads to holiness (Philippians 1: 9-11).

Did you read that? Love leads to holiness. True worship (loving God and others, as an act of worship) pushes out false worship. This same principle is true of any worship word.

Growing in love can happen as we meditate on and then delight in the qualities of the Lord. Enjoy reflecting on Him as you do others you love. Think of how His beauty is revealed in creation. And then worship Him as a result. As true worship increases in your soul, false worship is being pushed out.

So, are you desperate in your fight against strong desires? Then, grow in love and in using every other worship word you can think of.

Counselors, teach counselees how to love God and others and how to excel in every other area of worship.

Educators, let's teach our students the importance of true worship defeating false worship and how this, through the power of the Spirit, is the mechanism of change.

Therefore, there is hope in our battle against the flesh since we can always learn to love the Lord and others in greater ways.

For Further Reflection...

How do you believe change happens?

What have you found helpful for experiencing victory over strong desires?



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