

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PORN AND ADDICTION?

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We are living in an era where the proliferation of pornographic material is epidemic. Many men are allured by the ease of access to smut and, consequently, become “addicted” to the visual stimulation of pornography. It is important, therefore, that we think biblically about addiction.

Popular “recovery” thinking (12-step type) views all addictions through the lens of disease. Pornography as an addiction is no different. As a disease, addiction is something over which the addict has no control—something he *has* rather than something he *does*. Looking at pornography addiction as a disease eclipses two fundamental theological truths: (1) the sense of bondage experienced by the addict is based on original sin (Romans 5:12-17) and (2) the experience of addiction is intentional. Though addictions are *like* diseases (metaphorically), this description has no literal value. Literal diseases (e.g., tuberculosis) have biological origins and external cures (i.e., there is no “self-cure”). As Christians, we must be wary of any theory that does not conform to biblical categories, not to mention one that cannot be empirically verified. We must look to scripture for biblical metaphors that are helpful in our understanding of addictions.

Idolatry is a rich metaphor that captures the phenomenon of pornography addiction. The addict who turns to pornography conversely turns away from the living God and seeks satisfaction from another source. His desire is for the creation rather than the Creator (Romans 1: 21-23). Dr. Edward Welch in his powerful book, *Addiction: A Banquet in the Grave*, writes: “*Old Testament idols were concrete, physical expressions of new loyalties and commitments that had been established in the human heart.*” (p. 48) Addiction to pornography (or anything else) is idolatry of the heart (see Ezekiel 14:3).

Idolatry “*includes anything on which we set our affections and indulge as an excessive and sinful attachment [I]dols that we see . . . are certainly not the whole problem. Idolatry includes anything we worship [T]he problem is not outside of us; the problem is within us. The problem is not the idolatrous substance [or material]; it is the false worship of the heart.*” (p. 49, underline, mine) A succinct definition of addiction as idolatry could be a state of expectation of a person, object, or relationship to be and do what only the living God can be and do.

The twisted nature of addiction is that the intention of the idolater is to use and manipulate the idol for his own desires. People use idols to get what they want. The end result, however, is that our idols come to control us. Idols only briefly cooperate, just long enough to get us hooked. Subsequently, they become the master and we the slave. What we intended to be our puppet becomes our lord.

Why do addiction idols have such power? Primarily it is an issue of desire. Addictions appeal to our physical passions and desires—they provide relief, pleasure, and comfort. Our enemy, Satan, is wise to this. He entices us to exchange our God-given physical sensations and

desires from secondary to primary. In addictions, entrenched patterns of temporary satisfaction related to our physical desires come to rule us. Our hearts come to have a new master. Though we cry out for “just one more,” we are only temporarily satisfied. As with all things, Satan strives to provide a replacement for the one true God as our master.

The idol of pornography is not the content of pornography. It is the power, the pleasure, and identity it seems to bring. The heart of man is engaged, actively seeking to provide for itself what it craves, independently from bowing before the Creator. The idol’s false claim of guaranteed satisfaction only brings bondage. To the degree that we begin to recognize addiction is a spiritual issue, we move toward the core of the problem. Without that recognition, we flounder for recovery and often exchange one addiction for another.

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