

2007 Pornography: Breaking Silence, Breaking Free

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Context for Concern

We live amidst an explosion of pornography. It is pervasive: what was once limited to magazines and movies is now proffered on cable and satellite TV, the Internet, satellite radio, videotapes and DVDs, and through strip clubs and sex tourism. It is aggressive: what was once hidden and hard to find is now widely advertised, from ubiquitous billboards to endless email solicitations. It is treated as legitimate: what was once taboo is now celebrated in culture, given product placement in television and movies, and included in the portfolio of mainstream media corporations.

Despite attempts to repackage pornography as essentially harmless “adult entertainment,” the truth remains: pornography hurts women, children, and men. It exploits those involved in making it, whether their participation is voluntary or coerced. Under the guise of sexual liberation, pornography enslaves many of its users and produces patterns of addiction, deception, and despair. Pornography and its supporting culture show no mercy to innocence or to the innocent among us. It directly or indirectly encourages sexual violence, abuse, obsessions, broken trust, and even the global market of trafficking and enslaving human beings.

In addition to its effects on individuals, pornography damages society by spreading deception, confusion, and callousness. Pornography distorts and devalues God’s gift of sexuality, even as it feeds on feelings of insecurity and alienation between men and women. By offering a false semblance of intimacy, pornography undermines relationships in marriage, family, friendship, and the church. Pornography also coarsens our society as indecency, immodesty, disrespect, and even sexual exploitation come to be seen as acceptable.

The church has not been immune to the epidemic of pornography. Pornography has ensnared many laypersons and pastors with devastating results. Virtually every congregation is touched in some way. While we have known that pornography is sin, this knowledge alone has not protected us. Too often we have been silent, fostering an atmosphere that invites secrecy and promotes shame. Our unwillingness to speak clearly about pornography means, further, that we fail to offer an appropriate context for repentance and a network of support and accountability. And so we remain prey to pornography.

Biblical Basis for Our Response

We affirm sexuality as God's gift, to be used in accordance with God's will (Genesis 1:27-28). Being called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40), we cannot accept an enterprise that dishonors God, wrongs our neighbor, and wages war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11). Accordingly, as Christians we reject pornography.

The Bible recognizes that the battle against any sexual sin is difficult, because human sexual brokenness runs deep. Genesis tells us that in the garden, the man and the woman are naked together without shame—a beautiful description of "one flesh" union within the goodness of marriage (Genesis 2:24-25). But when Adam and Eve fall into sin, they also fall into shame; they become alienated from their bodies and from one another, and in turn flee from God's presence (Genesis 3:7-10). This cycle of sin, shame, and avoidance is not a cycle we can escape on our own. The Bible does not single out sexual sin as worse than other sin in God's eyes (James 2:10), but clearly warns against its self-destructive effects. These are compared to playing with fire (Proverbs 6:27-28) or being caught in a deadly trap (Proverbs 7:22-23), wreaking harm the Bible describes as sin against one's own body (1 Corinthians 6:18).

The good news is that sin does not have the last word. God's gracious purpose is to remove our shame and restore our freedom by recreating us in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). This redemption includes our bodies, as well as our minds and spirits (1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Romans 6:12-14). We put

off our old nature, corrupted by deceitful lusts, and put on a new nature reflecting God's righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24). Whether we have been harmed by our own sin or victimized by the sin of others, Christ offers us new life and complete freedom from condemnation, as the Spirit indwells us (Romans 8:1-2 and Ephesians 3:14-19).

God also provides for our healing and restoration through the body of Christ, the church. As members of one another within that body, we care for one another, knowing that when one part suffers, all suffer (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). Serving one another in all humility (Mark 10:44 and John 13:14), followers of Christ are called to extend the same forgiveness to others that we have received from the Lord (Colossians 3:13). This means addressing sin in our midst, not with fear, denial, or condemnation but with a gentle boldness grounded in prayer (1 John 5:16) and the awareness that we all need grace (Galatians 6:1). "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

Knowing the goodness in which we are created and the holiness to which we are called, we are filled with hope that our congregations can become bodies where God's covering grace, Christ's forgiving love, and the Spirit's transforming power will truly make us whole. To that end, we call for the following from the church.

The Call

To break free, we must break silence. As with all sin, silence is a barrier to restoration and grace. It is imperative that we identify and confess the instances where pornography has ensnared and compromised our lives. By naming, confessing, and seeking help, we receive the grace, healing, and restoration of Christ within the community of faith. We call on Covenant churches to break the silence in which pornography finds its strength, replacing silence and avoidance with a culture of speaking to this issue in truth and love.

Action Items

We call on all Covenanters to use and share resources available for prevention, healing, and deliverance from pornography, including support groups for individuals and families, counselors, accountability relationships, and Internet ministries. Possible venues for this can include: men's groups, women's groups, confirmation, youth camps, Christian formation classes, and ministers' meetings at the denominational and conference level.

We will encourage each other toward healthy media habits, setting positive examples for our children and each other.

We accept our responsibility as a church to teach our children, youth, and adults a positive, biblical vision of human sexuality and relationships. We recognize and support the key role of parents and families in protecting children and youth from pornographic material, equipping them to respond to pressures and temptations, and modeling healthy sexual expression within the context of marriage.

Recognizing God's promises to forgive and deliver from sin, and to heal our brokenness, we encourage pastors and leaders to integrate the following forms of prayer into the worship life of the church, as well as settings of pastoral care:

- confession, naming pornography as a sin that afflicts the body both individually and corporately,
- petition for the cleansing, healing, and recreating work of the Holy Spirit,
- healing prayer, including anointing (a practice used throughout Scripture),
- prayer for deliverance from powers that seek to dominate or defile individuals, families, and congregations, and
- celebration of God's gift of forgiveness, healing and hope through Christ.

We accept responsibility to speak out against pornography in our global society, and to encourage legal and economic strategies to expose and oppose the human misery caused by pornography. We also call on all

Covenanters to examine critically any economic relationships to companies that produce or distribute pornography.

As we recognize the enormity of pornography, it is right to grieve and natural to feel discouraged. Yet we remain confident in Christ's power to transform individuals, congregations, and cultures. It is Christ who says, "Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).