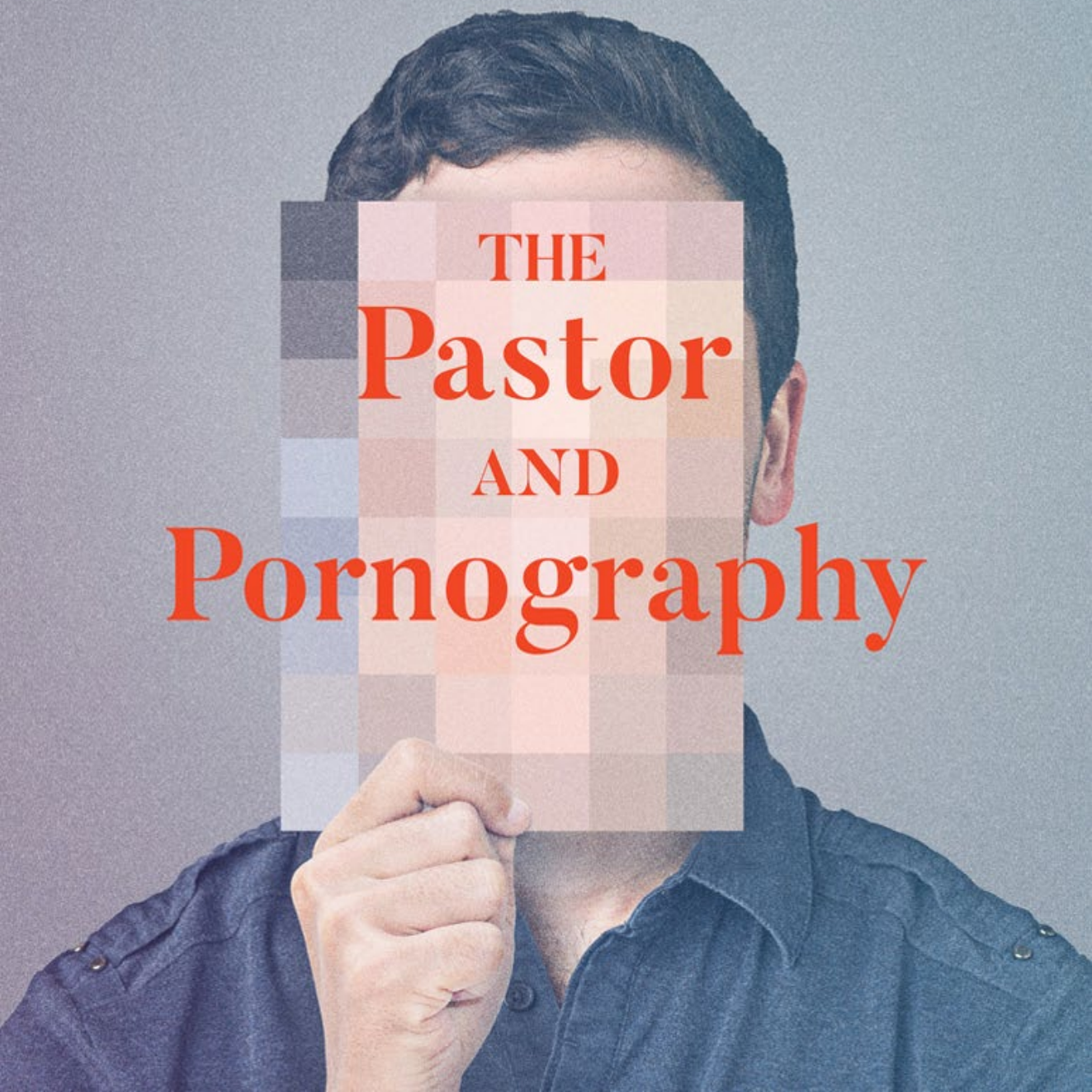


Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches

Fall 2018

IX 9Marks Journal



THE
Pastor
AND
Pornography

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches

9Marks Journal

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Editor's Note



Jonathan Leeman

Why would 9Marks devote an issue of the 9Marks Journal to the topic of pornography and the pastor? Because it's an increasingly common sin, and its commonality tempts us to downplay its destructive power in our marriages and ministries. We want you to take it seriously if you're not, and to have the tools to help others fight if you are.

Think of how much ink Paul spilled on sexual sin in his letter to the Corinthian church. He took it seriously. So should we.

Start with Andy Naselli's piece for a sobering warning, especially if you're tempted to downplay it in your own life. See also Aaron Menikoff's wise counsel. Then jump to Jason Seville's piece for all the potential corporate consequences of this sin.

Garrett Kell takes up the complicated question of whether it disqualifies a pastor, while Garrett's wife, Carrie, counsels the pastor's wife.

Deepak Reju, Jaime Owens, PJ Tibayan, and James Choi offer critical help on cultivating a church that fights this sin together.

And don't miss the pastoral tools offered by Brad Wheeler and John Henderson.

I want to keep going. Every article offers a critical tool in the battle. But you get the point. Equip yourself to fight pornography in your own life and in the lives of others. If you struggle with pornography and have concluded it's inevitable, you have been deceived. It's not. Christ died to sin so that we would sin no longer. Encourage others with this same good news.

Watch Out! To a Pastor Indulging in Pornography



by Andy Naselli

Pastor, are you regularly indulging in pornography and rationalizing to yourself why it's okay for you to do that?¹ If you indulge in pornography without remorse, then you may have what Paul calls a seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2).

Your conscience is your sense of what you believe is right or wrong, and if you have a seared conscience about indulging in pornography, then your conscience is so desensitized that (1) it no longer warns you not to indulge in pornography and (2) it no longer accuses and condemns you (and thus makes you feel guilty) after you indulge in pornography.²

If that describes you, then you are in danger. Here are eight motivations to repent.

¹ By indulging in pornography, I mean sinfully enjoying the pleasure of printed or visual material that explicitly describes or displays sexual body parts or activity in order to stimulate erotic feelings.

² Cf. Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

1. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY WILL SEND YOU TO HELL

People who habitually and unrepentantly indulge in pornography will go to hell (Matt 5:27–30). One evidence that you have genuine faith in Jesus is that you are fighting lust. Indulging in pornography is a form of sexual immorality. And the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–11). God’s wrath is against the sexually immoral (Eph 5:3–6). Yes, Christians sin. But Christians are *repenting* sinners.

If you are indulging in pornography, then you are not pure in heart. And only the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8). *I’m trying to scare the hell out of you*—or more precisely, to scare you out of hell. Whatever it takes for you to win the battle over lust, it is worth it because indulging in pornography will send you to hell.

2. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY DOES NOT GLORIFY GOD WITH YOUR BODY

“Glorify God in your body.” That’s how Paul concludes a section on sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:12–20). God commands you to glorify him with your body by not committing sexual immorality.

Glorifying God is a way of feeling and thinking and acting that makes much of God. It shows that God is supremely great and good. It demonstrates that God is all-wise and all-satisfying. You glorify God with your physical body when you use it the way God intends. When you indulge in pornography, you sin against God himself because God owns your body. Indulging in pornography does not glorify God with your body.

3. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY IS A POISONOUS, FLEETING PLEASURE

Moses chose not “to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb

11:24–26). That means sin can be pleasurable—at least for a time. But that pleasure is fleeting.

Indulging in pornography is immediately pleasurable, but that pleasure is fleeting. It leaves you feeling empty, unsatisfied, yearning for more. It's like eating a sugar-coated poison pill. “He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself” (Prov 6:32).

Don't desire pornography; desire God. To paraphrase John Piper, *we most glorify God when he most satisfies us*. That's what God created us for. The pleasures of pornography are poisonous and fleeting; the pleasures of God are eternally and infinitely satisfying.

4. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY FOOLISHLY WASTES YOUR LIFE

When you indulge in pornography, you waste your time and energy and sometimes money. You cripple your church because you are like Achan, deceitfully loving your sin instead of forsaking it. You act like what the book of Proverbs calls a fool. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:15–17).

5. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY BETRAYS YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN

This applies to you if you are married or ever will be married.

When you indulge in pornography, you are being unfaithful to your wife. You are betraying her. You are committing adultery against her. You are making her compete with the database of racy images you have lusted after.

When you indulge in pornography, you harm your children. You will lose your moral authority with your family. Your children will suffer. And if it leads to divorce, then your children will suffer even more.

6. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY DISQUALIFIES YOU FROM BEING AN ELDER

If you are indulging in pornography, then you do not meet these elder-qualifications:

- “the husband of one wife [NIV: “faithful to his wife”], sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable” (1 Tim 3:2)
- “the husband of one wife [NIV: “faithful to his wife”] ... a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined” (Titus 1:6, 8)

A pastor is a shepherd. A shepherd *leads* the sheep (Ps 23:1–3; 78:52). And the most significant way shepherds lead is by “being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:1–3).

7. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY RUINS YOUR MIND AND CONSCIENCE

Indulging in pornography ruins how you think about sex. Sex is a gift from God that is exclusively for one man and one woman who have covenanted together in marriage. Sex is God’s idea, and we should praise him for it. Pornography corrupts and perverts sex. If you indulge in pornography, you will think about sex perversely.

Indulging in pornography ruins how you think about women. Women are humans whom God created in his image, and they beautifully display God’s glory. If you lust after the bodies of wo-

men, then you will think about women as sex objects to satisfy your sinful lusts rather than as fellow image-bearers.

Indulging in pornography ruins how you think. It destructively rewires your brain. It ruins how you think and thus warps your affections.

Consequently, indulging in pornography ruins your conscience. Your conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. When you indulge in pornography, you desensitize your conscience because you suppress and silence your conscience and rationalize away your sin. Eventually, you can damage your conscience so badly that it doesn't condemn you when you sin.

8. INDULGING IN PORNOGRAPHY PARTICIPATES IN SEX SLAVERY

Pornography is to sex slavery what gasoline is to the engines of motor vehicles. Gas fuels engines. Pornography fuels the demand for prostitution and thus for sex slavery. Therefore, indulging in pornography to any degree is participating in sex slavery.³

CONCLUSION

Pastor, those are eight motivations for you to repent if you are indulging in pornography without remorse. Turn to Christ, the source of genuine freedom and happiness.⁴

Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom 12:12–14)

³ For a more detailed argument, see Andrew David Naselli, "When You Indulge in Pornography, You Participate in Sex Slavery," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 20:2 (2015): 23–29.

⁴ On what genuine repentance looks like, see Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 23–28, which Lambert unpacks in chs. 2–6 (pp. 31–105).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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