

Dealing with Pornography

The regular use of pornography for masturbation is a kind of sexual addiction. When Paul speaks about impurity and sexual greed as idolatry in Ephesians 5:3-7 and Colossians 3:5, he accurately describes how it works. It begins with sexual impurity, the defilement of our imagination by depictions of sexual intercourse that present naked bodies as idols for us to admire. Our fixation on these images arouses disordered desires and make us more and more greedy for sexual satisfaction from things that God has not given to us for our enjoyment. Yet they fail to satisfy us and serve only to feed our growing appetite for them.

If you are going to be freed from your addiction to pornography you can take the following steps to receive help from God.

1. You need to distinguish between your own sense of shame and your guilt before God. Shame can lead to misplaced guilt, guilt about the wrong thing, if it is not guided by God's law, his commandments. And Satan, in turn, uses our misplaced guilt to get us disgusted about ourselves as well as what we have done. Where masturbation is involved, he fills us with disgust at our sexuality and all sexuality as if it were something ugly rather than a gift from God. The more ashamed we become, the more secretive we become; the more secretive we become and the more we hide in the darkness, the more vulnerable we become to the accusation and condemnation of Satan.
2. You need to be careful that Satan does not distort your perception by making a fool of you and getting you to focus on the wrong thing. Nowhere in the Bible is masturbation explicitly forbidden. There is good reason for this because the problem does not come from masturbation, which is in itself neither good or bad, but the adulterous sexual fantasies that accompany it, as Christ makes clear in Matthew 5:28. That's the problem spiritually! That's what causes the trouble. That's what leads to sexual addiction. That's how Satan gets a hold on us through our imagination. If you use pornography to masturbate, you put another woman, an idol that promises heaven and gives you hell, sexually, in the place of your wife. It arouses your greed for what you don't have, greed for what God has not given for you to enjoy, greed that increases as you give in to it. The more you indulge it, the more dissatisfied and empty you become.
3. So focus less on the issue of masturbation and more on your use of pornography and your apparent addiction to it. You have already taken the first most embarrassing and most difficult step by bringing this hidden secret out in to the open, out into the light where it becomes exposed and its power can be broken (Eph 5:8-14). Every time you access pornography tell someone what you have done, your pastor or me or someone else. Don't let what you do and feel lie hidden in darkness, because as long as it remains there Satan uses it against you to accuse and condemn you!
4. Recognise that your apparent addiction to pornography is not just a moral problem which you can overcome by your own will power. It is a kind of spiritual bondage, the means by which Satan manipulates you mentally and emotionally. This means that only Christ can free you from this aspect of the problem with his redeeming blood and his powerful Holy Spirit. Like alcoholism, the key of liberation from addiction to pornography is the admission that you are 'addicted' and that you need God's help to break your addiction. So renounce it before God and hand the problem over to him in prayer; beseech him to set you free from the snares of the evil one. Go to Holy Communion to receive the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from impurity and purify your conscience from acts that kill off the life of God in you (1 John 1:7; Heb 9:14).
5. Since the problem with the use of pornography for masturbation lies in the hold that those sexual images take on your imagination, follow Paul's advice in Ephesians 5:4 by thanking your wife for her love and God for her as your wife! Keep your sexual imagination fixed on her rather than the picture of other naked women as they engage in sexual intercourse. Enjoy her imaginatively rather than just physically! And thank

God for her and her love! Offer your body daily to God for transformation by him and your imagination for renewal by his Holy Spirit (Rom 12:1-2)!

6. Since your use of pornography occurs at regular intervals, note when it happens, analyse what leads up to each lapse, and work out how to head it off before it is too late by doing something positive and enjoyable. For most people there is some trigger, such as self-pity or depression or boredom or the need for comfort, that sets off the habitual recourse to the use of pornography for masturbation. If you deal with that, you will have greater success in heading it off.
7. It may be wise for you to restrict your use of the internet at night or when you are alone. You could install a filter or even unsubscribe for a time. At the very least do not keep the addresses of any such site because that makes it far too easy to click onto them.
8. If you want some Lutheran internet resources to help you, here are some that may be of use.
 - See the Mercy Notes, Volume 4 and 5 from LCMS human Care Ministries at: www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2795
 - The downloadable resource Jesus' Place in MySpace at: www.cph.org
 - The booklet on addiction from Ambassadors for Reconciliation at: www.hisaor.org