

CYBERSEX & CYBERPORN

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The story is told of a young Christian man who moved into the attached apartment of a boarded-up storefront. Shortly after moving in, renovations began, and the store was reopened as a XXX bookstore. Night after night the young man wrestled with himself, knowing that just beyond the second door of his bedroom lay every sexual fantasy he could imagine. It was only a matter of time until he arose one night and turned the doorknob, opening Pandora's box and stepping into its evil.

At the close of the 20th century, we find ourselves facing an even greater temptation than this on a daily basis. Our turn of the doorknob is the click of a mouse and, via the World Wide Web, we can enter into every imaginable sexual sin in the privacy of our own homes. *If we are connected to the Internet, we must acknowledge that we have attached our homes to the world's largest porn shop.*

I can easily recall the first clients I saw who were hooked on cyberporn. After being lured to a website by lurid text and/or revealing photographs, they had been invited to view more for a fee, which was billed to a credit card. Without ever having to risk being seen in a peep show, bookstore, or strip club, they had easily run up tens of thousands of dollars in debt in a few short months. In the process, they often destroyed their families, reputations, and Christian lives.

I long ago lost count of those who have followed in their footsteps or have been caught by their spouses having "virtual affairs" over the Net. I have read their portrayals of sexual escapades written to faceless lovers in e-mail and chat rooms. These dialogues provide fantasy material for masturbation, and sometimes result in real-life rendezvous. One of the most graphic exchanges I have seen was between a 67-year-old man, who assumed a virtual persona as a much younger Don Juan, and a (supposedly) young woman in another state. Though they never met, the affair devastated his marriage.

Therein lies perhaps the greatest drawing card of cyberporn and cybersex: *anonymity*. The ability to act under a greater cover than even darkness. The ability to assume any identity—even that of the opposite sex if desired. From the time of the Fall, humans have always sought to hide their sins, and the Internet provides not only one of the most powerful invitations to sin, but the ability to hide that sin in ways never before possible.

Like it or not, the Internet is here to stay, and it will become increasingly difficult to function in the 21st century if we are not online. While some will argue that the best response is to simply avoid the Net, most will find this almost impossible. So-called "E-commerce" is entirely changing the business world and predictions are that the web will impact nearly every industry over the next 10 years. Not being online will be like not having a telephone.

How do we guard ourselves and our families when we are daily presented with so great a temptation? First, I believe we must call the temptation by name: voyeurism, fornication, adultery, lust. We must recognize how great a sin it is and then, to the best of our ability, make no provision for that sin.

Second, we must establish hedges to protect ourselves and decrease the likelihood that we will fall. These might include installing filtering software or utilizing a filtered Internet access provider. We may need to establish a password for Internet use that only our spouse knows. We might post photos of our spouse, our children, or Christ on our monitors as screensavers. It is certainly wise to place the computer in an area of the home or office that does not allow for uninterrupted privacy, and stay off the Net at night or when everyone else is in bed.

Third, if we still find ourselves struggling with this temptation, we must make ourselves accountable to our spouses and to select brothers or sisters in the body who will pray for us, ask the difficult questions, and be available when we need their strength. If necessary, we must seek out a 12-step group or a trained Christian counselor who can work effectively with sexual addiction.

In short, we must be willing to do whatever is required to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). If we do, the Internet can be a tremendous blessing. If we do not, it will destroy us. **CCT**

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