

11

THE WORLD: ITS STANDARDS AND PORNOGRAPHY

As the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Our enemies, those forces that would keep us from becoming the sexual men God calls us to be are the ancient enemies of all Christians. Since its earliest days the church has recognized that man’s soul has three enemies, three forces that seek to separate man from God. Those forces are the world, the flesh and the devil, and they all find in man’s sexuality fertile ground for drawing him away from experiencing true sonship with the Father. This is not a theological book, so I am not going to deal with them as theoretical or abstract forces, but rather, will deal with them right where they cause us to sweat and struggle and sometimes falter in our everyday lives. Most of you are not reading this book because you want a better theology of sex, but because the *world* in which you live, your own *flesh*, and maybe unseen *evil powers* are keeping you from becoming the sexual man you believe God would have you be.

This chapter will deal with the world, addressing specifically two horrendous forces that are unique in our time and place in history. We will deal with “this present world system” that is so hostile to Christian beliefs about sexuality, and which probably influences most of us more than we think. Then we will address a true scourge that is upon us today, an instantly available almost limitless supply of the most graphic pornography man has ever seen.

As regards the flesh, our age is in no way unique, the battles are the same. In Chapter 12 our focus on the flesh will have us deal with masturbation and with the related matter of sexual fantasy. Then in Chapter 13, we will deal with the devil and demonic forces, mostly by my sharing a very personal story. Then, after we have (hopefully) put the devil in his place we lay aside the sin portion of this book and get back to God’s marvelous plan for who we are to become as sexual men.

THE WORLD’S STANDARDS

This is a unique time in history as regards sexuality. At least it is in the western world. The culture has changed radically in the last 50 years. Prior to the 1960’s in western culture the world’s standards for sexual morality were by and large Christian standards. Not that everyone adhered to those standards, certainly not, but the culture supported the ideas that sex belonged in marriage and that pornography was a bad thing. No longer. Now, through the elite who set our culture’s standards—the media, the government education establishment, etc.—opposite views have been aggressively promoted and widely accepted.

You and I are all affected by the culture, probably much more than we realize. Think of what you consider is acceptable today to be viewed or discussed in polite company, and compare that with what our parents or grandparents thought was acceptable. True, we have let go of some unnecessary prudery, but haven't we opened doors to invite temptation in, doors that would be better left closed?

Even churches are affected by the culture. Over the years many Protestant churches (including many evangelical ones) have changed their views on contraception, on masturbation, on divorce and remarriage, on what kind of clothes it is acceptable to wear, on what kind of relationships are appropriate for young boys and girls. Has this come about through serious theological and Biblical studies revealing new truths? No, by and large the churches have changed—or more accurately, drifted—with the culture. The Catholic Church has resisted many such changes, but vast numbers of individual Catholics no longer believe what their church teaches in these areas; they too have gone with the culture.

Right after telling us to present our *bodies as a living sacrifice* to God, Paul says we should *not be conformed to the world* (Romans 12:-2). How do we do this, or to use the popular expression, how do we live in the world, but in not of it? I suggest two things that I believe are both practical and effective: strategic withdraw, and redeployment.

STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL

By strategic withdrawal, I don't mean our moving to Pennsylvania and joining the Amish (although I have to admit the idea has sometimes appealed to me). Rather, it involves removing ourselves from those things that would feed the world's deadly values into us. It could certainly involve, where a man has special vulnerability, taking the radical steps described in the last chapter, but it is more than that. It involves seeking to remove ourselves—and our families—from the sources of hedonistic propaganda that assail us from every side in the popular culture, the primary sources being movies and television, and to a lesser extent, what we read and the people with whom we associate.

In the minds of most Christian men a signal goes off in their minds when in a movie or TV show they see a partially naked unmarried man and woman climbing into bed together. It should. This is something that can be harmful for us to watch. But how many men are conscious of the corrupting influence of watching endless depictions in TV and movies in which it is just assumed that unmarried couples will have sex—often on the first date! For years I have had friends, including Christian friends, tell me how much they enjoyed the TV situation comedy *Seinfeld*. So I decided to watch it. The story line on the one show I watched had the lead characters, male and female, betting each other on who could go the longest without masturbating. How many of you reading this think of me as some sort of old fuddy duddy objecting to this? How many Christians are coming to see hedonism as the norm, and Christian standards of sexual morality as extremist, for the oddball?

All Christians can—and should—to some extent shield themselves and their families from being indoctrinated by the world's values. As will be discussed later, those who

advocate values that are hostile to Christian beliefs are not always benign individuals. The protection we need comes from taking care as to what we allow to come into our homes and what kind of entertainment we go out to see. Simple care, along with a humble recognition that we can be influenced by the world will do much of the job.

REDEPLOYMENT

A second strategy for resisting the world's influence, redeployment, has probably already taken place with many of our readers, and it came about naturally and with abundant blessings. By redeployment, I mean centering more of our lives in the Christian world, the local church first, but also in the Christian sub-culture that has arisen around us in recent years.

Let your local church become your community. Immerse yourself and your family in a body of believers where Christian standards, not world standards, are simply assumed to be true. Don't just go to church on Sunday. That may not be enough to shield you from the daily onslaught of the world and the promotion of its hedonistic and materialistic dogmas. Let your Christian brothers and sisters in your congregation or parish become your family, supporting one another in your chosen "alternative lifestyle."

If you are in mainline Protestant church or a Roman Catholic parish where there are divergent beliefs on basic moral issues, identify those within the larger group who share your beliefs and start to form a community within the community. This is not hard to do. In my years in the Episcopal Church, I found that other orthodox believers were as hungry as I to find those who shared their Biblical beliefs and values. There was an instant bond between us. If the presence of such believers in your church isn't otherwise obvious, find out who has a passion for pro-life issues, and you likely will have found your kindred spirits.

After—and I do stress after—finding a community of believers through or in the local church, a second means of redeployment is available to most Christian in the United States, it is the broader Christian sub-culture. I suspect that the world has no idea how broad and pervasive this sub-culture has become. Our ministry is headquartered near Baltimore, Maryland, a large eastern city culturally about as far from the Bible belt as you can get, and yet in Baltimore we have *five* Christian radio stations. Our Christian yellow pages runs 296 pages, giving us access to everything from Christian accountants to Christian weight loss centers. Christian entertainment is available weekly in many forms. A few years ago my son helped start a Christian football team (primarily for home schoolers) and now they have a league of such teams and a Christian lacrosse team has been formed.

Most of this sub-culture is known as "evangelical", and it does bear many evangelical distinctives. It may not reflect what is important to many Christians, particularly those for whom the sacramental life is important. But within this Christian sub-culture Baptists and Pentecostals exist together, as do liturgical-sacramental Christians and those who worship quite differently, as do mega-church non-denominational Christians and very traditional mainline Christians. We have theological differences and they are important,

but the Christian sub-culture of which I speak is generally not about theology. It is much more about morals and standards and a Christian world view, and in these areas we enjoy a blessed unity. (I would add here that these beliefs about morals and how we should live are rooted in a common view of the authority of Scripture and the basics of the faith as expressed in the historic Christian creeds).

Men, most of us cannot stand alone against the culture. We can't tear down the strongholds that block our growth and progress as Lone Ranger Christians. God didn't mean for us to. We need each other.

THE WORLD AS AN ACTIVE ENEMY

When we speak of the world and having to resist or fight it or flee from it, don't we risk becoming a bit paranoid? "The world" doesn't care what I do. Who is this world that seems to have a will of its own, that seems at times to have it in for us Christians?

The world, in the Biblical sense, is all of the people who do not know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These people, because they don't believe in our Creator God, see man in a very different light, and thus live by very different standards from those of Christians. In foreign lands we often call them pagans; in our land, they are the agnostics and atheists. Sadly, some of them are the people in the churches, those churches that have rejected the authority of Scripture and the historic teaching of the church in favor of whatever fads are popular in the world today.

Most of this world is fairly docile. They do their thing and are content to let us do ours. But this is not always so. In different ages "the world" comes out in strident, and sometimes violent, opposition to Christian beliefs and those who hold them. Jesus knew that this would be the way in the early years of the church and so he told his disciples, *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (John 15:19).

This hatred of the Christians and of the church is no doubt always present, but it only surfaces from time to time, when those who hold such attitudes feel strong enough to express them. It was present in the French and Russian revolutions, and it appears to be present today among those who have great power in our culture, those who control information, entertainment and education.

I am not speaking of people today who simply don't know the Lord and thus live by different standards. I'm talking about people who actively oppose every vestige of a Biblical world view in our culture. We are made in the image of God; they are for abortion. God gave us dominion over all of the creatures; for them animals have as much value as people. God created us male and female; they say that our gender is determined by how we feel about ourselves. God has said that a man and woman shall marry and become "one flesh"; for them sex is an energy, and how you expend it (as long as the other partner is willing) doesn't really matter.

God placed in every man and woman a spark that glows with the realization that there is a creator God. Some people desperately want to extinguish this spark because intuitively they know that if there is a creator God, they are not their own. They belong to someone else, and this Someone, therefore has the rightful authority to say how they should live every aspect of their lives—including their sexuality. Those who would fan this spark become their enemy.

The great battlegrounds in our culture today are in the related areas of sexuality, reproduction and life. The other side has chosen these because they are so basic to our view of man; he is either made in the image of God, and God therefore has a plan and purpose for him, or he is an accident of evolution. The more they can silence, through propaganda, oppression or ridicule, the Christian view of man, the dimmer grows that spark in them, and the more they can feel that they are alright—or so they think.

As men, our battle with the world is not always meant to be a passive one. We are not the mirror image of the indifferent agnostic who is content to “let them do their thing while we do ours.” At times we need to go on the offensive—for the sake of our children and grandchildren and for our neighbors, every neighbor who is at risk of being enslaved by the deceptions of those who promise “sexual freedom.”

We are becoming the sexual men we are called to be, not just for ourselves, but for all mankind. For some this can lead us into political or community action. Not every man is called into the public arena, but every Christian man can have a role in these cultural wars because every man, at least potentially, carries within him the most powerful weapon we have in the cultural wars. That weapon is himself as a man who loves his family, is faithful to his wife, and walks with the Lord in strength, integrity, and love. Such a man is irresistibly attractive to those in whom the spark of Truth is alive, and he heaps burning coals on the heads of those who oppose true goodness.

The world will never change from its hedonistic values unless there is present in our culture and army of strong men who can say, “We have found a better way.”

PORNOGRAPHY AND THE LUST OF THE EYES

At no other time in history has the world offered anything close to what man has to contend with today in terms of sexual temptation offered up in the form of an almost limitless supply of instantly available, incredibly diverse and graphic pornography. Combining modern technology with the male’s innate proclivity to be drawn by visual stimuli, the world has produced what to enormous numbers of men is a seemingly irresistible source for turning sexual desire into lust. The statistics on how many men use pornography—including those for Christians—are horrendous—and heartbreaking for those who have seen, as we have in our ministry, what pornography can do to a man, to his marriage, to his character, to his very soul.

When I was a young adult, you had to risk being seen going into a pornographic bookstore to get material to feed your lusts. Today, almost every man has that

pornographic bookstore right in his own home (and maybe his office). Now it is no longer identified by a glaring neon sign that says “Adult Books”; rather, it has a dignified little plaque that says “Hewlett Packard” or “Dell” or “Gateway”.

The onslaught of instantly available porn has devastated many Christian homes. We see this daily in our ministry. Christian men know that it is wrong to view pornography. Most know that it has a huge potential of becoming addictive. Many know that men who use it regularly tend to become less active sexually with their wives—and less sexually attracted to them. Some know that by its nature, it isolates men, and this, combined with the guilt that it produces, starts to change a man’s personality—always for the worse. Some have seen how, drawing a man into himself, it sucks the life out of him, becoming, if there could be such a thing, death to his human spirit.

And of course, there are the consequences if the wife finds out, her heartbreak, possible severe damage to the marriage. (We have seen many marriages destroyed by it). And if it is being used in the workplace, there is the risk of a job being lost.

Most Christian men know these things, or if they hadn’t fully thought of them before, common sense will tell them that what they have just read is true and realistic.

LUST OF THE EYES

I am convinced that the problem of pornography among Christian men is so enormous today that we need a radical new approach to dealing with it. Just saying it is wrong or dangerous won’t do, for in most men, this truth only reaches the head. Our hearts need to be reached, our noble manhood must be stirred, our aspirations for God’s highest and best must be roused if we are to be successful in destroying the power that pornography has over men today.

I am going to suggest such an approach, but before I do, let me let me place the problem in its proper perspective.

Although a story may be pornographic (meant to stir up sexual lust), mostly when we think of pornography, we think of visual images on a computer screen or a piece of paper showing a woman’s body, parts of her body, or sexual acts. Mostly we are talking about “the lust of the eyes”. But lust of eyes, is not just stirred up by pixels on a computer screen or ink on paper, it can be aroused by the real thing, say the woman at work whose dresses or slacks are always a little too tight. So what follows in terms of a new approach can apply to anything that triggers the lust of the eyes, be it a real woman or an image.

The lust of the eyes can be triggered intentionally, as when a man seeks out porn on his computer, or it can be triggered unintentionally as when the next door neighbor decides to sun bathe while a man is cutting the grass. In the case of intentional triggers, all that was said in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 applies. Prevention, or stopping the lust process as early as possible, is always the best approach. But once we confront the enticing image, be it intentional or accidental, what follows has potential for stopping the process.

A NEW APPROACH

For several of us at Regeneration, Theology of the Body opened our hearts to a new and effective approach to dealing with lust of the eyes. It was not one that applied only to pornography—none of us has used pornography for many years—but one that could change totally the way we use our eyes when confronted with any sexually attractive image or person. It is an approach that opens the door to calling forth the better and stronger man in each of us, the man who can slam the door far more consistently when presented with an opportunity to view pornography or to misuse our eyes.

It came in such a surprising way, almost startling when we first read it, but our hearts knew immediately that it was a profound truth. Christopher West, in summarizing the Pope's teaching on the naked body and pornography wrote, "For John Paul, we could say that the problem with pornography is not that it reveals too much of the person, but that it reveals too little. Indeed, it portrays the naked human body while obscuring the person."¹²

Christopher West illustrated this theme in the Pope's teaching with this story from church history:

"Two bishops walked out of a cathedral just as a scantily clad prostitute passed by. One bishop immediately turned away. The other bishop looked at her intently. The bishop who turned away exclaimed, "Brother bishop, what are you doing? Turn your eyes!" When the bishop turned around, he lamented with tears streaming down his face, "How tragic that such beauty is being sold to the lusts of men."¹³

(The story goes on to say that the prostitute noticed how the bishop looked on her with love and delight, and eventually, under his counsel and preaching was converted, and is now known as St. Pelagia of Antioch).

The bishop did not see bare arms or legs or breasts; he saw a woman, a woman created in the image of God, a woman created to be an object of God's love, not an instrument to satisfy men's lusts. He saw the woman's humanity. He did not see her as an object.

Each of us who were touched by this story have found that with very little effort we can start viewing people less as objects and more as human beings created in the image of God. In doing this intentionally we are forming new habits that are replacing old ones; Godly ones in place of lustful ones. I am sure the good bishop prayed for that young lady. We too can pray for the woman or the image of a woman that stirs sexual feelings in us.

We need to turn back to the truth offered earlier in his book; the body is not evil. It is good. If a man sees an attractive woman and she is showing a bit of cleavage (innocently we will assume), he is going to be attracted. God did make a woman's breasts to be a beautiful sight to a man. But so many Christian men, on catching sight of such beauty, are plunged into feelings of guilt and shame and feeling "dirty". Oftentimes, this is

¹² West, *The Theology of the Body Explained*, 290

¹³ Ibid, 215

where sin enters in. The voice of Satan, the accuser, is heard. This can be that admittedly hard to understand situation where *the law brings wrath* (Romans 4:15), or *our sinful passions are aroused by the law* (Romans 7:5).

Am I saying that you can just stare at her breasts and nothing wrongful should happen? Certainly not, because what happens inside you is largely involuntary. Your body's response is largely determined by your years of practice—what habits you formed. Sinful habits should not be fed, and staring at her breasts can feed a sinful habit. On the other hand, habits are rarely done away with by suppression, but rather, by replacement. Remembering that she is beloved by Jesus, thanking God for her, wondering about her life, praying for her, all of these things will train you to see the whole woman, and in doing so the power of the sin will be weakened.

You did not pollute yourself by seeing her breasts. You pollute yourself when you allow sin to come into the picture.

PORNOGRAPHY AS IDOLATRY

There is another way in which to battle pornography and the lust of the eyes. I have not found it as effective as making human the object of my attractions, but it has helped me at times. It has to do with recognizing what might be the deeper sin involved in the lust of our eyes—idolatry. Let me explain this.

I worship Jesus. He is my savior. He is the object of my devotion. In some ways I offer sacrifices to Him; my time, my financial resources, my body. Some men worship the image of a woman's body, or a part of it, or the things a woman can do to a man. They look to it for salvation—to meet their deepest needs. Their adoration of it shows in how much time they spend thinking about it. And oh do they make sacrifices to it; the risks they take at home or work to be with it, the loss of their manly strength and self-respect. Some even seem willing to sacrifice their wife or marriage for it..

I think it would be appropriate if some men's computer screen were made in the shape of a church or cathedral. It could have a spire or bell tower at the top. The sides of the screen could be lined with arched windows with stained glass in them. Instead of a screen saver, there could be two beautifully carved wood or bronze doors. When a man dialed up the internet, a great bell would toll. And for the liturgical Christian, the computer desk could be equipped with a fold down kneeler for use at certain times. All of this would be appropriate because this is where some men go to worship.

In the Judeo-Christian faith an idol is something we worship in place of the one true God. Sexual sin is very often idolatry. This doesn't necessarily mean we totally abandon God for the woman's body or a part of it—although some men do—but that we have times when we choose the idol over God. In fact, any time I have given in to mulling over lustful sexual images in my mind, I have know that I have to confess the sin of idolatry.

It surprised me how often in the Bible, sexual sins and idolatry are mentioned together, sometime linked by coveting and sometimes not. *Now the works of the flesh are evident:*

sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry...(Galatians 5:19). *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry* (Colossians 3:5). Similar connections are made in 1 Corinthians 5:11 and Ephesians 5:5.

The connection is seen perhaps most clearly in Romans 1:22-25: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.* Paul then goes on to describe some of the forms sexual immorality can take when we worship the creature rather than the Creator.

Viewing pornography, or objectifying a woman and lusting after a part of her, is not wrong just because it is bad for us or because it perverts God's plan for our sexuality, for the Christian who knows better, it is a choice of something in lieu of God, and is therefore idolatry.

Men, our freedom from lust will come when we become free from ourselves. We do this by loving God (forsaking idolatry) and by loving others (seeing the woman to whom you are attracted as one of God's precious creatures whom your lust violates). *You shall love the Lord your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets* (Matthew 22:37-40)..