

Week Seven: Sexual Sin and Temptation

Summary Document

We received the following questions which were addressed in this message:

Is masturbation sinful?

Does God forgive Sexual Immorality?

Where can we go if we're faced with sexual immorality as an uncontrollable addiction?

Overcoming a porn addiction (not just from a male point of view)/ helping someone else who is struggling with a porn addiction?

In considering issues of sexual immorality, it is helpful to hold three truths at the same time – not just intellectually, but in your heart and in your life.

1. God has a high view of sex

From the perspective of the Western world, almost all and any sexual practice is permissible and to be encouraged. But God's perspective is different. God has a high view of sex, and in Nicholas Tuohy's previous message in this series "Jesus' teaching on Sexuality", Nicholas outlined that God's good plan for sex is between one man and one woman in marriage. But Jesus goes even further than this, clearly stating that even lustful thoughts are outside God's good plan (Matthew 5:27-28).

So what about masturbation? While some people point to Onan in Genesis 38:1-10, this passage is more about family responsibility and duty than masturbation itself. Instead, the link between masturbation and lust suggests that it would be contrary to God's plan. In addition, masturbation takes sexual practice outside marriage, which also suggests it is counter to God's desire.

However, the Bible does not suggest that sexual immorality is *worse* than other sins. Most commonly sexual immorality is in a *list* of vices, which are all spoken against in the Bible (e.g. Rom 13:13, 1 Cor 5:11, 1 Cor 6:9, Gal 5:19, Eph 5:3-5, Col 3:5, 1 Tim 1:10, Rev 21:8, 22:15). In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, sexual immorality received special treatment as a sin "against the body", but this reflects more the specific nature of sexual immorality, than any suggestion it is worse than other sins. A similar case could be made for Jesus' treatment of greed in Matthew 6:19-24 as a particular sin against the human heart. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that sexual immorality has other, non-spiritual consequences. Neurologically, exposure to sexualised content can cause strong cognitive pathways that can be hard to break. Socially there can be heightened stigma associated with sexual immorality, especially in Christian communities. Personally, sexual immorality can lead to significant feelings of guilt and shame.

2. Sins are forgiven through Jesus

To the Western world, forgiveness for sexual conduct is almost always either unnecessary (in most cases), or impossible (in cases of paedophilia or rape). But in Jesus, all sins can be forgiven. The challenge for Christians is holding to both truths; that God has a high view of sex, and that all sins (including sexual immorality) can be completely forgiven in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11).

This can be hard to believe, because our sinful conduct can weigh heavy on our heart, even after we have confessed it to God. And yet the promise of God is that for those who confess their sin and trust in Jesus, the slate is wiped clean (1 John 1:9, Romans 8:1).

King David sinned horribly in sleeping with another man's wife, and then arranging the husband's murder to cover his tracks. When confronted with what he'd done, David was heartbroken and confessed to God, turning away from his sins. Centuries later, David is remembered as "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22). Despite his sin, because of God's forgiveness, David's slate was wiped clean.

This is true for you as well. If you have faith in Jesus and confess your sin, you are truly forgiven. Your status before God is Not Guilty. If this is something for which you need a reminder, read Psalm 103:8-13 slowly, and let the promise of God's total forgiveness wash over you anew today.

3. God's people are called to obedience

It is particularly difficult to hold to this third true statement alongside the first two. One temptation is to slip into immoral license, that "since all sin is forgiven, I can do what I want" (see Jude 1:4). Alternatively, the risk is works-based righteousness and guilt, a sense that "since obedience is important, my sin weighs heavy upon me" (see James 2:10, Galatians 3:10). In both cases, we struggle to maintain all three truths at the same time, and our theology becomes horribly imbalanced.

For Christians, who have been forgiven in Jesus, the problem with sinful practice is that it gets between us and God, but it never severs the relationship we have with God. The language of the Bible is grief; as a child grieves their loving parent (who never stops loving them, even at their worst), so our sin grieves God (Eph 4:29-30). The key is repentance, a daily (Matt 6:9-13) practice of acknowledging our sin before God and turning back to walking in God's way (2 Cor 12:21). For those struggling with habitual sexual immorality (e.g. pornography addiction), it is crucial to know that your sins have been forgiven, and your relationship with God is intact, even though temptation takes hold from time to time. You never stop being a beloved child of God.

Our two questions about addiction were quite practical. The most important way to pursue change to live God's way is to do so out of our new identity in Jesus (Col 3:1-12). It can be tempting to think that *if I live an obedient life, I am one of God's children*. But the reverse is true: *Since we are children of God, therefore I can live an obedient life*. We have been adopted and given a new identity, and God calls us to live out who we truly are! But work is needed. While occasionally God works in a startling way to completely remove all temptation, more commonly change is incremental, as we become more like Jesus day by day (2 Cor 4:16, Col 3:10). Some great steps to take include (1) Telling

someone trustworthy who will not judge you, (2) Taking practical steps to avoid temptation, (3) Forgiving yourself as God has forgiven you, and (4) Praying to God for strength to resist and forgiveness when you fall into temptation.