

Preface

Most men believe that accountability is the invincible weapon for fighting lust, but many of us have found that this method falls short. It helps for a while, granted, due to the repulsive power of embarrassment. But what's next? We need something more potent if we are to experience lasting victory.

Daryl Wingerd dug up and brushed off the Bible's core explosive device for defeating habitual sexual sin. You won't find this concept in most self-help books on the subject—even Christian ones. I'm convinced you will discover here the volatile material able to finally decimate lust as a pattern of life, in you and in those you help. Like others, you may say, "I've not read a book quite like this for clarifying the biblical way to succeed over this troubling issue."

The author writes in an easy style with short chapters, but handles large and powerful biblical concepts. You won't be intimidated by his words, but his words will intimidate your sin. Wingerd has provided some questions at the end of each chapter for those who wish to use the book for small group discussions, and for the man who wants to reflect privately on what he has read. Due to the brevity of the chapters, your small group may be able to cover more than one chapter each time you meet. The book will be invaluable to men in general—single and married, younger and older. Lust will nip at us till the end if we don't deal with it biblically.

I'm often sobered by the idea that a sin neatly hidden in one man's life is the same sin that entirely ruins another. Where one man will find lust and satisfaction of that lust an intermittent problem at worst, another man will say that what began as a private, occasional sin proved catastrophic later. We're not dealing with trifling matters when we talk about sexual sin. It has destroyed many men, torn up many families, and blighted many histories.

Women may wish to read this book also. It will help them understand what their husbands and sons may face. Though writing from the man's perspective, the author is not unaware of how lust can become a woman's problem as well. In fact, believers

in general may wish to read this book to discover how to overcome other habitual sins. The biblical principles will apply.

We rejoice at the wonderful liberty men are experiencing as they understand and apply these truths. Enjoy that liberty yourself.

Jim Elliff

President, Christian Communicators Worldwide

FACE REALITY

You probably experience pornographic temptation almost every day, and the Internet is not the only source. Try walking through a video store without being tempted to lust. Watch primetime TV without your conscience often telling you to look away. Find a grocery store where you can check out without standing next to a display of sexually provocative photographs.

The regrettable truth is, you live in a pornographic culture.

one

Two Men, a Park Bench, and a Confession

Two men sit together on a park bench, talking. Even from a distance it is obvious that one of them is troubled about something. His head hangs in discouragement as he speaks. The other man listens, but says nothing.

When a young couple walks by holding hands, the discouraged man stops talking and looks away, avoiding eye contact. The listener looks up at the couple and smiles politely.

Now we are closer and able to hear their conversation. The man who was listening begins to speak quietly, doing his best to preserve privacy. I'll call him Nick and the discouraged man John.

NICK. I can't believe you're looking at pornography again. I thought you gave that up when you became a Christian last year.

JOHN. I thought so too, but sometimes I just can't resist the temptation.

NICK, *sarcastically*. Can't? . . . or won't? I'm tempted too, but I seem to be able to resist.

JOHN, *sounding defeated*. OK, now I feel like scum.

NICK. Sorry, that's not the way I meant it. But looking at pornography isn't just a bad habit. It's a serious sin.

JOHN. I know it's serious, but there are worse things I could be doing. After all, it's not like I'm breaking the law.

NICK. Now wait a minute. Just because you can't get arrested for looking at pornography, what makes you think you're not breaking the law?

JOHN, *with a puzzled expression on his face*. What do you mean?

NICK. You call yourself a Christian, and Christians are people who obey Christ. So how can you say you're not breaking *His* law?

(Long pause as John hangs his head again.)

NICK, *exasperated*. Why don't you just quit? Just tell yourself you won't ever do it again.

JOHN. You're right. I should quit, and I want to quit, but . . .

(Short pause. John sighs deeply.)

NICK. But *what*?

JOHN. This may sound strange, but I've tried and tried to quit and I'm finally realizing that I don't know how.

Why do so many men who claim to be Christians fail in the area of sexual sin? One possible explanation is that some may not be true Christians. They have been deceived into thinking they can

be saved while they go on loving and practicing their sin.¹ Despite this possibility, the “false convert” answer should not be our first response to confessions like the one Nick heard from John.

Real Christians are subject to temptation and may sin in many ways as long as they live. They are even encouraged to confess their sins to one another (as John did to Nick) so that other Christians can pray for them (James 5:16). Also, the church is given instructions concerning how to deal with true believers who are “caught in any trespass” (Gal. 6:1; cf. Matt. 18:15–17; Luke 17:3). If a man goes on cherishing his sin rather than forsaking it when confronted by other believers (in other words, if he does not repent), the church must consider him an unbeliever and remove him from their fellowship (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5). But we are never told to automatically conclude that a sinning brother is not a true Christian.

The Root of the Problem

Much of the difficulty among true Christians who feel powerless against sexual temptation stems from a lack of understanding (or even a complete *misunderstanding*) of the fundamental spiritual difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. Christians are not merely people who have been forgiven of their sins through faith in Christ. They have also been radically re-created by the Spirit of God. The Bible calls this creative miracle “regeneration.” I’ll discuss regeneration in more detail later.

The lack of understanding about regeneration affects Christians who are sinning and those who try to help them. Much of what Nick said to John was true and necessary, but was his response a model you should emulate? Should he have been more understanding and encouraging? Should he have been even more severe in attempting to shame John into reforming himself? Most importantly, how should he respond to John’s last statement? How would you respond? Is it enough to say, “Just quit”?

In this book you will discover the biblical response to a professing Christian who says, “I’ve tried and tried to stop looking at pornography, but I’m finally realizing that I don’t know how.”

1. Appendix A addresses the New Testament warnings about false assurance. Men who consider themselves to be Christians yet habitually view pornography or commit other sexual sins are encouraged to read this appendix thoughtfully.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What do you think are some of the factors contributing to the growing problem of pornography among professing Christians?
2. What would you have changed about Nick's response to John?
3. In what ways can you identify with either Nick or John?

two

The Significance of Desire

Moths are drawn to light. I don't know why, and I'm not sure the moths know either, but on warm summer evenings they fly away from dark places to flutter around whatever light they can find. Something in their nature makes them happy there.

Cockroaches, on the other hand, are repulsed by light. If you have ever lived in roach-infested quarters (like my apartment during college), you know that when you come home at night and turn on the lights, the roaches abandon the pizza crumbs and scatter for whatever dark place they can find. Light disturbs them. Something in their nature makes them happy only when they are cloaked in darkness.

Light and Darkness

In the Bible, the word “light” often depicts the nature and character of God—His holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth, and faithfulness. John wrote, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

The attributes of God are summed up in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3), and Jesus described Himself this way: “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

Darkness, on the other hand, describes sin. The Apostle Paul warned Christians to stay clear of sinful practices by saying, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). He also told us that “[God] has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

People naturally prefer moral darkness, even over Jesus. Notice how Christ described this preference:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19–20)

Every Man Has a “Wanter”

Please forgive my non-technical language, but whether you typically respond like a moth or a cockroach when faced with a choice between Light and darkness depends on what your “wanter” wants. Your “wanter” is the deepest part of you—the part that produces and expresses your most meaningful desires. In the Bible it is called your heart. It is who you really are, the moral and spiritual center of your being.²

Getting a New “Wanter”

The man without Christ is self-willed, inclined toward disobedience. As Paul said, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8). Just as a pig could never fly unless God were to redesign it with wings and a lighter body, a man cannot love and obey God in a way that actually pleases Him unless God gives him a new heart.

When God gives a person a new heart, it is called “regeneration” (Titus 3:5) or being “born again” (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). This New Testament language of new birth comes from God’s Old Testament promise to His people:

2. See appendix B for more about the meaning of the word “heart” in the Bible.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

Notice that God promised to “cause” them to walk in His statutes. *His* miraculous work causes their obedience. Regenerate people “*will be careful to observe [His] ordinances.*” This promise applies to every regenerate person, not just to those in the Old Testament. Jesus was referring to this promise of a new heart when He spoke of the new birth in John’s Gospel.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

If you are a true Christian (even if you cannot identify the precise moment when you became one), God has removed your old heart and has given you a completely new one—a heart that is inclined toward believing in Christ and practicing righteous behavior.

Regeneration does not totally destroy a man’s desire for sexual sin. As long as the Christian lives in a mortal body, he will experience desires for sin and for righteousness. John (the man in chapter 1) obviously wants to stop looking at pornography. That is why he confessed his sin to Nick and asked for help. At the same time, his desire for sexual sin seems relentless. The purpose of the next chapter is to help you understand and respond to both types of desire you experience.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What would your closest friend say you desire more than anything else? What would lead him to this conclusion? Do you think his conclusion would accurately reflect your heart?

2. Read John 3:19–20 carefully and answer the following questions:

- What is “the Light”?
- Does *everyone* who loves the darkness hate the Light?
- According to Jesus’ words, can a man love both the darkness and the Light? Explain your answer.