

John Piper: No One Is Absolutely Addicted to Pornography

Not all sexual desire is lust. God made sexual desire. It has its good place and it can, in fact, become an act of worship in the temple of marriage. But lust is sexual desire gone wrong. Here's my definition:

Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God. Disregards the promises and the warnings of having or losing the beauties of Christ.

The lusted-after woman or man in your head, or on the screen, or on the street, is dishonored—not treated as a sacred, precious, eternal person made in the image of God, whose eternal destiny is always paramount, and whose holiness we either long for or ignore. And the only way this dishonor can be so daringly carried out is by disregarding God while we are in the sway of our lust—disregarding the promises and warnings of having or losing the beauties of Christ. So lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God. Ponder with me for a few minutes the natural and the spiritual role of self-control in relation to lust.

Faith in Christ Conquers 'Addiction'

Addiction is a relative term. I would stake my life on the assumption that no one in this room is absolutely addicted to pornography or any sexual sin. What I mean is this: If the stakes are high enough and sure enough, you will have all the self-control you need to resist any sexual temptation.

For example, if tonight you are feeling totally in the sway of sexual desire—more blazing, more powerful than you have ever felt it in your life—and you believe that you cannot resist the temptation to look at some nudity online, and suddenly a black-hooded ISIS member drags your best friend or your spouse into the room with a knife at his or her throat, and says, “If you look at that website, I will slit their throat,” you will have the self-control you thought you didn’t have. You won’t click.

Or if a man walks into the room and says, “If you do not look at that nudity, I will give you \$1 million cash, tax-free, tonight,” you will suddenly have the self-control you thought you did not have.

Addiction is a relative term. The fact is, 99 percent of those who give way to lust in pornography or fornication or adultery, are not decisively controlled by sexual desire. They are decisively controlled by what they believe—what they believe will happen if they act on their lust or don’t.

The Spirit of God Controls Us

The decisive issue is whether they believe the stakes are high enough and sure enough. If we are sure a friend will die a gruesome death, we will have self-control. If we are sure we’ll get the \$1 million we will have self-control.

Now there is nothing distinctly Christian about that analysis of motivation. That is simply the way human beings are wired. Self-control was a Stoic virtue before it was Christian, and there is nothing distinctly Christian about it.

And yet Paul lists self-control (*engkrateia*) as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). So for those who believe the gospel of Christ, and are justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:28), the Holy Spirit becomes the decisive cause of “self-control.” That’s what I take “fruit” to mean in Galatians 5. The Spirit

produces self-control in the believer. The action of the self is vital and essential, but not decisive. The Spirit is decisive.

Work out your salvation for God is at work in you, Paul says in Philippians 2:12–13. That means “Control your lusts because the Spirit is controlling them through you.” Exert self-control, because the Spirit is working it in you. The blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant, secures for us the working of the Holy Spirit. And when He works, we act. His working appears in our acting. He creates the miracle of self-control, and we act the miracle of self-control.

But the Holy Spirit doesn’t produce the same self-control that the Stoics had. The Stoics did not depend on Christ, or live for Christ. But the Holy Spirit is in the believer because of the death of Christ, and for the glory of Christ (John 14:16). The blood of Christ was His price. And the beauty of Christ is His mission.

The Beauty of Christ Is Better

Therefore, the way the Spirit produces self-control in the believer is by revealing the beauties of Christ to our souls as supremely beautiful and supremely satisfying. He removes the hardness of heart and the blindness of our souls, so that we see and savor the beauties of Christ for what they really are.

And what He shows us through the Word of Christ is that the all-satisfying beauties of Christ can be lost forever, if in the bondage of lust we prove to be a hypocrite and really love sex more than we love Christ. And he shows us that the day is coming, and now is here in measure, when we will enjoy Christ with a fullness of joy that outweighs every possible pleasure of lust.

Which brings us back now to the ISIS member ready to slit the

throat of our best friend, and the man with a million dollars. The Holy Spirit shows us that the stakes are much higher than either of those situations when we face the temptations of lust. These beauties of Christ that the Holy Spirit reveals can be lost forever, or they can satisfy your soul forever.

He opens our ears to hear Jesus say, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5:29)—the final and ultimate ISIS attack. And He opens our ears to hear Jesus say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8)—a reward infinitely superior to a mere million dollars.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. He creates the miracle. We act the miracle. He creates it by opening our eyes to see the beauties of Christ—that they can be lost forever in bondage to lust, or enjoyed forever by the pure in heart.

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