

What is Pornography?

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 12 February 2015 16:07

Christians must be zealous for truth and against sin. But, zeal must arise *from* truth. Many Christians are zealous for Christian values and will fight sin at any level. This is commendable, so long as they know what they are talking about. In this case we are thinking about how Christians define 'pornography'.

I mulled over just what pornography really is, for many years, and found it a tough subject to handle. It was tough mainly because I was listening to reformed and other men, and just followed whatever they said. But, a lot of questions arose, partly because of theology and partly because I wanted to know *why* pornography should be condemned! (Any condemnation must be fully attributed to God's word).

Later, I discovered a marvellous truth – that we need not fret over this issue, because, as always, we should see what *God* says first! I soon found that what I had previously called 'pornography' was not, and what I did *not* include in this category should have been on the list!

So, let us look at what God calls 'pornography' before we make any rash decisions and take a moral stand on what may, or may not, be 'pornography'.

Porneuo, Porne and Pornos

In 1 Corinthians 10:8 Paul warns the Corinthians about their conduct and says "*Neither let us commit fornication...*"

The word for fornication is

porneuo

. It means to commit fornication. What is 'fornication'? A modern dictionary would describe it as 'sexual intercourse outside of marriage', but the New Testament meaning is wider.

Paul could have meant one of three things: (a) to prostitute ones' body to satisfy the lust of a partner, for cash or otherwise (b) To have 'unlawful' sexual intercourse. This can have one of many interpretations, and each is valid: for example, as an adulterer, or as a single person before marriage, or as one indulging in homosexuality (male or female), bestiality, or any other form of gratification that is not male-female; or incest, and so on. The emphasis is on the activity being illicit, and (c) idolatry – not just worship, but allowing ones' self to be drawn to it.

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Strictly speaking, 'pornography' today is really the *depiction* of sexual activity. But, is this necessarily '*porneuo*' as God defines it in His word? The definition given in scripture is of illicit sexual activity. So, is, say, the public depiction of a married couple in a sexual act '*porneuo*'

? No, not really. It may be foolish. It may be tasteless. It may be voyeuristic. It may be offensive. It may even be vulgar. And it might fall foul of Christian decency. But, none of these things is *porneuo*.

If we are to fight sexual immorality, then let us do so on proper grounds and not just because we feel offended. Otherwise we become pointless bigots or neurotic.

Porneuo is rooted in *porne*, which is the feminine of *pornos*. *Porne* is a reference to the person – an harlot or whore. That is, a prostitute who takes money for sexual activity. It also applies to any woman who indulges in illicit sexual behaviour either for money or favours or simply for her own lust, or the lust of another. It can also mean an idolatress. So, this covers almost all single women in the West today, who 'sleep' with one or more partners. Acceptable to modern people, but not to God!

Men do not escape this condemnation, for the masculine form, on which *porne* is rooted, is *pornos*.

It means fornicator or whoremonger: a male prostitute who sells his sexual activity to another, whether male or female. It also refers to a man who indulges in other illicit sexual behaviour.

There, in a nutshell, we have Biblical definitions for what we call 'pornography'. If we apply these meanings to what we normally call 'pornography' you will acknowledge that we might have some difficulty maintaining our stance. An example of this has already been given.

Conclusions

The overall definition of pornography is, then, illicit sexual activity. Not illicit in the eyes of the law, because each country and age views what is illicit differently, and their views may not agree with those of God. What is 'illicit' depends entirely on what *God* says.

Illicit is the same as 'unlawful', or 'prohibited'/'forbidden'. Those who depart from what is lawful are said to be destitute of holiness, violators of God's law, *nomos*, and therefore wicked. What

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is sexually 'illicit'? It is that short list given above.

We can sum up what is sexually illicit (and thus 'pornographic') as:

1. Worshipping idols, letting yourself be influenced by them, or condoning idolatry by your silence/attendance. Today we may list any cult (including promiscuity) or false religion.
2. Being a prostitute, allowing prostitution, being influenced by it, or showing sympathy for it. A prostitute can be male or female, of any age.
3. Living with someone, unmarried, and indulging in sexual activity with them, male or female, whether paid for it or not. Thus, thousands of couples who happily live together without being married are, in God's eyes, *porneuo* and no better than whores. They are just as guilty as, and no better than, prostitutes, male or female... a cold but true fact.

4.

Indulging in *any* sexual activity with a partner outside of marriage: adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, necrophilia, paedophilia, and so on. For centuries masturbation has been included in the list of sexual sins, but there is no scriptural evidence that it is one. It may sometimes be foolish, or misdirected, or sometimes lewd... but it is not pornographic as such. And if there is no evidence that it is 'illicit' we may not include it in the category of 'pornography'.

Is a sex film (blue movie) illicit and pornographic? If it depicts any of the above, then yes, it is. It is also wicked in that it tries to encumber the watcher with an addiction to what is illicit. It wastes the watcher's time and money and blunts the conscience, taking the watcher far away from holiness and purity.

What if the film is instructional, made *for* married couples and, showing married couples? Well, if it truly does that and is not needlessly explicit, it is *not* pornography. I am neither accepting nor rejecting such material, but just defining what is pornography. If it *is* wrong, it is not because it is pornography, but for some other Biblical reason e.g. indecent (if that is what it is). The same, of course, goes for written material on the subject.

To take this further – as a psychology graduate and psychiatric nurse I have studied sexual

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behaviour, and its aberrations, from a 'clinical' perspective. I can assure readers that none of the material is in any way titillating. What if this same material was depicted on film? Is it then pornographic? Not necessarily, just as a properly painted nude in art is not, in itself, pornographic. Nor is a nude picture of a male or female in a medical book 'pornographic'.

As a (male) nurse I saw women nude every day – is this pornographic? I am labouring these points because many Christians take the matter to extremes, seeing 'pornography' where there is none. We must strike at true pornography and label the rest what they are... indecent, or offensive, or unworthy, etc. Can you see what I am getting at? Christians can be just as hung-up about sex and sexuality as anyone else, so it is good that these matters are not hidden away, as if everything sexual is bad or sinful.

I hope you can see that the 'pornography' we ought to speak out against is living together, prostitution, false religions and godless sexual activities such as homosexuality, adultery, and so on. The rest come under a variety of categories.

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