



# High-tech temptation

## Hope for healing the idolatrous heart

*The second article in a three-part series  
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and Ted Kober*

In its report on human sexuality, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations states:

It is necessary that the church, in its concern for the lives of human beings created by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, should address itself to the issues of human sexuality and offer guidance to all who seek to understand our identity as sexual beings. Few characteristics so deeply stamp our selfhood as our maleness and femaleness. There is nothing sinful about our sexuality per se, but like all other aspects of our lives this too has been disordered as a result of sin.

### **God’s design for our desires**

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:27-28).

God intended for a man and a woman to enjoy a special bond in marriage—intimacy in relationship to one another spiritually, physically and emotionally. As a result, a married couple could be blessed to have children and raise a family.

As part of his design he placed in us strong desires for this special union. These include spiritual desire to worship God together, emotional desire to love and be loved, and physical desire to share intimate love for each other.

But in our sinful condition desires become tainted. We seek to serve ourselves more than God and others. Our selfish desires then result in conflict with God and people. James writes:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

Anytime we seek to serve ourselves more than God and others, we are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry roots itself in the heart. Jesus said, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality...” (Matthew 15:19). An idolatrous craving often begins with a godly desire that turns into a sinful demand. Anytime we seek to fulfill good desires through sinful means we are guilty of idolatry. Luther states it this way in the Large Catechism:

Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart that pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help. Nor does it believe that whatever good it receives comes from God.

Sinfully seeking to satisfy our own sexual desires is worshipping a false god. The Bible specifically identifies sexual sin as idolatry (Colossians 3:5; see also Romans 1:21-27). Moreover, Scripture warns about the danger of such activity, which results in “losing all sensitivity...with a continual lust for more” (Ephesians 4:19).

### **The cure for idolatry**

When we realize how sinful we are, when we see how

easily we turn to our own idols, we cry with Paul, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). But then Paul quickly adds, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25). Our forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the cure for idolatry. God’s act of mercy heals our broken relationship and gives us power to live the fruit of repentance.

God loved King David and blessed him immensely with faith, talent, riches and authority. Nevertheless, David’s desires took control of his heart one evening as he noticed another man’s wife bathing. His lust began by looking at a naked woman—just as in pornography. Rather than serving God, he sought to please himself at others’ expense, abusing his kingly authority and engaging in adultery (see 2 Samuel 11:1-17). Desperate attempts to hide his sin finally led to murdering the woman’s husband. (Note that lustful desires fed by pornography lead to more sin, including desensitization to sin and denial of sin.)

Luther explains the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Instead of fearing God above all things, David feared others and losing his kingship, so he strove to cover up his sins. Instead of loving God, he loved himself more by disobeying God and harming others. Instead of trusting God, he looked to himself for fulfilling his desire for sex.

In spite of this horrific idolatry, God loved David and sought to restore him. God sent Nathan to confront him with God’s judgment (Law). Convicted of his sin, David confessed and immediately Nathan absolved him (Gospel). In forgiveness David was fully restored in relationship to God. And yet even with God’s forgiveness, David suffered earthly consequences (2 Samuel 12:1-20). These consequences served to teach David (and us!) about the seriousness of such sins and help change his behavior. Nathan provided accountability that included bringing both Law and Gospel to David.

After his son died David washed himself and worshipped the Lord. He exchanged the worship of his idols for contrition before God. Repentance is right worship. After this experience he wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

### **Are Christians involved in such idolatry as sexual sin through technology?**

These actual situations resulted in broken relationships among Lutherans (names and identifying information have been changed):

- Because her husband travelled so much for work, Jane became lonely and sought solace through the Internet. She met a man who seemed caring and attentive,

and became emotionally attached. Before she realized it they were exchanging sexual innuendos and talking about a rendezvous at his vacation condo.

- Seventeen-year-old Jake opened a cell phone text message from his girlfriend Suzie—a picture of her naked. He decided to respond in kind. Jake forwarded copies to close friends, but he and Suzie were later shocked when one of the friends posted the pictures on a personal web page for everyone in the school to see.

- Robert’s wife of 32 years asked him to leave the house. Robert couldn’t stop his addiction to Internet pornography, often spending four hours a day with it online. She told him he had a spiritual problem and was in danger of losing his faith.

- In her late 70s Emily faced deteriorating health from diabetes. Jack, her husband of 52 years, looked for comfort on the web. One day as Emily scanned files for a deleted email, she discovered her husband had met another woman online and they were exchanging racy messages.

- A congregation member started installing

new software on several church computers, but one computer—that of a key staff person—wouldn’t accept the new program. The problem? Lack of disc space. The reason? It was loaded with Internet pornography.

In each case the people involved sought help from the church. Thank God “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

We need not despair when we or someone we love is struggling with new forms of sexual temptation via technology. Unlike the unbelievers we confess hope in the One who brings good news. When wounded by our sin and others’ we find healing and strength for living a new life in Jesus Christ. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

*In Part 3 of this series, we will discuss how to apply God’s Word in ministering to people trapped in sinful patterns.*

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