

**Xenos Christian Fellowship**  
**Christian Leadership 2**  
**Pastoral Counseling**  
**Week 6 - Common Pastoral Counseling Issues**

## **Introduction**

In the course of discipleship and basic pastoral counseling, we will commonly encounter certain sin problems and damage resulting from those sins. Christian workers need to be able to address these issues with biblical insight, direction and encouragement.

The material below provides basic insight and advice for such common issues. We are assuming that the person is a Christian who is involved in home group, wants to grow and desires effectiveness in ministry. This context is crucial for substantial healing. You will need to combine appropriate insight and direction with prayer and reminders that God is in the business of delivering people from slavery to sin and healing them from the damage of sin. In severe cases, you may need to get help from a more experienced worker or refer the person to professional counseling.

## **Sexual Damage**

### **Heterosexual sin**

People have been taught to deny they are damaged in this area.

The following areas of sexual behavior all involve deviations from God's design. Since they do not conform to his intended pattern for sex, they are damaging to various degrees. Very few people in our culture reach marriage as virgins. While there are various reasons for this fact, sexual impurity is very damaging (1 Cor. 6:19). But God's healing power is great if we turn away from sexual immorality and cooperate with him.

**When counseling Christians who seek such healing, consider these steps:**

- **They must be willing to take a strong stand for sexual purity within present romantic relationships.** This is highly unlikely unless both people make such a commitment from the heart. They will need to take very strict measures to avoid tempting situations. They need to be willing to terminate the relationship (or get married if this is a feasible option) if they cannot gain sexual self-control in the relationship.
- **If they are not in a romantic relationship, it is often wise to commit an extended period of time without involvement in a relationship to focus on spiritual growth and building a lifestyle of ministry.** God often honors this "fast" with surprising growth and healing. Such people should also commit themselves from the heart to date only Christians who are serious about their growth and sexual purity.
- **Help them identify the lies.** Most people have identity issues that are closely related to their sexual impurity. Some view themselves as having little to offer besides sex in a romantic relationship. Victims of sexual abuse (see below) often view themselves as worthless. Some are fatalistic, convinced that their sexual damage is so deep that they cannot possibly be healed. Help them identify the lies they believe in this area, teach them what God says about their identity, pray for their spiritual enlightenment, and encourage them with stories of people of similar background who are substantially healed.

- **Help them identify how to resist habits/temptations.** They must go to work on the habits that lead to sexual impure encounters. This includes turning away from pornography and sexual fantasizing, staying away from situations that lead to sexual encounters, and refusing to flirt with people who are not legitimate candidates for a healthy dating relationship.
- **Help them develop honesty in this area.** They should confess all sexual falls to another mature Christian friend as soon as possible.
- **Emphasize building healthy relationships**

**Christians with a background of heterosexual impurity who are considering marriage should ask themselves the following questions:**

- **Have you been able to maintain consistent chastity in your dating?** If not, why do you think you will be able to control yourself when married?
- **How long ago was your last immoral episode?** Has there been sufficient time for healing?
- **Are you gaining more self-control in turning away from acting on sexual lust?** Are you able to consistently turn away from actions like deliberate flirting, suggestive conversations and actions, etc.?
- **Is there evidence that your basic view of the opposite sex is healthy and biblical?** Would your close Christian friends confirm that you have a high view of sexuality?
- **What sexual problems do you anticipate in your marriage?** Warn them that they may feel bored or trapped, experience sexual disappointment, etc. in marriage. This is normal, and can be overcome over time if they keep growing spiritually and investing in their marriage.

## **Homosexuality & Bisexuality**

**You may need to counter the wide-spread myth that homosexuality is genetically determined.**

(Even if evidence for this existed, it would not prove that homosexuality is morally acceptable. In a fallen world, we may be born with many sinful tendencies.)

Summarize the footnote material in *Myth of Romance*, which surveys evidence for genetic predisposition, but not genetic determination. It also surveys evidence that homosexual preference is learned through homosexual abuse, pre-adolescent homosexual experimentation, etc. (If the person has been homosexually abused, you may need to refer him to a professional counselor.)

**Stress the biblical position** that homosexuality is like all other sin-habits: morally wrong, forgivable through Christ, and that substantial healing is possible over time through the power of the Holy Spirit--as we repent, feed ourselves spiritually, and replace with a lifestyle of Christian service.

Resist their tendency to view homosexuality as uniquely sinful or irreparable, and repeat and emphasize the power of God's grace to forgive and heal. We have many cases in Xenos of homosexuals not only successfully leaving the gay lifestyle, but also being successfully married (EXAMPLES).

**As with other sin-habits, distinguish between spontaneously emerging lusts and temptations on the one hand, and acting on these lusts and temptations on the other hand.** Luther's

maxim is instructive: "You can't prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair."

Spontaneously emerging lusts and temptations are the product of being fallen and past sinful experiences. They are sinful, but not volitional--and the accusation that this proves the person doesn't want to change, can't be healed, etc. should be rejected.

Instead, the person should focus on how to respond to such lusts and temptations. Fight the battle in the mind, or you will soon be fighting it in your actions, and then in your habits. Judge and turn away from such thoughts, thanking God for his truth and grace, and replacing such thoughts with what is good, true, etc. Do not feed the fire with pornography. Stay away from flirting or tempting situations. If he falls in any of these areas, he should confess to a mature Christian friend as soon as possible to break the power of the sin.

**Prioritize building healthy close friendships with other growing Christians of the same sex *to whom they are not sexually attracted.***

Resist their tendency to build close friendships with "safe" women--especially when this is at the expense of building healthy friendships with other men.

Resist any attempts to build friendships with other gay men or men to whom they are romantically attracted. This includes the desire to counsel other gay men. Only those who have gained substantial victory should do this, and even then usually for short-term encouragement rather than long-term counseling.

Since most gay men are diffuse, they need to be committed to these friendships rather than dropping them to seek the stimulation of new relationships.

Most gay men need to learn "righteous aggression"--not backing away from otherwise healthy men who are sometimes crass and insensitive, learning to confront and resolve rather than retreat, etc.

**Celibacy for homosexual Christians is a valid option.** But be willing to challenge them on this, especially if this choice is rooted in fatalism about being to reorient sexually, etc.

**Considerations for Christians from a homosexual background who are considering marriage:**

- Realize that heterosexual arousal will usually be specific rather than general, and only through sexual contact. In other words, they should not expect complete and general sexual reorientation. They will continue to have homosexual lusts and temptations. But they can reorient specifically to their spouses and experience a satisfying sexual relationship. Since Christians should not get involved sexually prior to marriage, they will have to trust God for this reorientation to occur fully. They should practice hand-holding, embracing, kissing, etc. before marriage--and they may experience sexual arousal in this context, which will increase their confidence that this process will continue in marriage.
- They should divulge the fact of their homosexuality to their prospective spouses before marriage. They should also divulge the general extent of their homosexual involvement--although the gory details are not needed. (This is the same as what we would call on heterosexual sinners to divulge.) The prospective spouse should affirm that he/she is ready to be patient and make the necessary sacrifices to achieve a healthy sexual relationship.

- They should have achieved victory over physical homosexual involvement for at least many months (preferably years). This development of sexual self-control will be important when difficulties arise in marriage.
- They should have developed the ability to perceive themselves as both aggressive and sensitive/caring. The best place to work on this is in healthy same-sex friendships with heterosexual men or women.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY: Stanley R. Strong, "Christian Counseling with Homosexuals," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*: 1980 (279-287); John White, *The Fight*, pp. 105-139; *Straight and Narrow*; Gary DeLashmutt, "An Approach to Christian Counseling for Homosexuals and Bisexuals"**

## **Pornography**

With the advent of the Internet, pornography is now epidemic in our culture. Those of us who work with college students find that virtually every male student has been exposed to Internet porn, and very many of them are addicted to it. I suspect that the same situation exists among adult men. An increasing number of women students are also involved, which is unprecedented.

We need to call on our people to get freedom from porn, even as we deal with them in a gracious manner. **Those who are immersed in pornography habit are doing serious damage to themselves**

- Pornography teaches and reinforces a view of sexuality that is extremely self-centered. This will inhibit the development of a healthy sexual relationship in marriage, which requires self-control and a serving attitude which seeks to satisfy one's spouse.
- While probably not as damaging as sexual promiscuity, pornography produces lasting sexual images that interfere with a monogamous sex life. Men who have been addicted to porn commonly report feeling bored with their spouses because they cannot compete with the super model porn stars they have watched. If the porn habit persists after marriage, spouses who discover they are competing for their spouse's sexual attraction will feel hurt and betrayed.
- Pornography severs sexual arousal from relational intimacy--while biblical sexuality insists that these two things belong together. Because pornography is a counterfeit to healthy relational intimacy, porn addicts are also usually deficient in building and sustaining healthy close non-romantic friendships.
- Christians who are habitually involved in pornography are submitted to sin, and this causes serious problems in their walks with God.

**Consider the following steps in helping Christians get freedom from pornography:**

- They must be willing to fight this problem environmentally. Since cable and Internet porn is so easily accessible, they must take steps to make it more difficult to access. This may involve dropping their cable or Internet connection, or installing screening software, or having someone else keep a secret password.
- Accountability is also helpful for beating this habit. Brothers may agree to confess to one another after a fall. They may also agree to ask each other periodically how they're doing in this area. Married people should usually confess to Christian friends instead of their

spouses, to spare them unnecessary pain. But if this is not effective, they should usually have to confess to their spouses.

- Resistance is usually not sufficient for a deeply-rooted porn habit. They will also need to practice replacement--especially by building healthy personal intimacy in their marriage and close friendships. This connects permanent love values with present love feelings--the very connection that a porn habit severs. The healthy stimulation of Christian ministry is also a valuable replacement. Once this appetite for ministry is in place, we should insist on increasing freedom from porn for advancement in ministry and leadership roles in the church. Connecting what someone wants (increased responsibility in ministry) with what he needs (more freedom from porn) is a legitimate and powerful motivator.
- *Sexual Integrity* is an effective anti-porn ministry in Xenos. Make use of this if the above measures are ineffective.

**NOTE:** Some married men engage in pornography as a passive-aggressive behavior toward their wives. When this is the case, the men need to learn proper leadership and confrontation in their marriages. While their wives are not responsible for their husbands' porn habits, they will help their husbands and the health of their marriages by making it easier for their husbands to start practicing this kind of righteous aggression.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY:** *False Intimacy* by Harry Schaumburg (NavPress, 1997)

## **Rape, molestation & incest**

**Many sexual abuse victims are reluctant to bring this out into the light with other trusted Christian friends.** The first step for such people is to bring this out into the light with other trusted Christian friends. Yet people are often afraid to do this for a **variety of reasons** (their own pain; possible repercussions; disappointment over previous confession, etc.). **Common symptoms** for victims include vulnerability to sexually immoral encounters or aversion to all romantic relationships, frigidity within marriage, severe alienation and bitterness toward certain family members, rage at people who attempt to manipulate or control them, unhealthy enmeshment with parents or siblings, etc.

**Be Careful:** Remember that the above symptoms can have other sources. While you may ask people afflicted with such symptoms if they have been victimized, accept their answers. Do not insist that they must have been abused, or suggest that they may have repressed memories! Pray that God will bring out the truth in the proper time to the proper people.

**Especially with long-term abuse victims, you may need to enlist the help of others. Biblically based professional counselors.** Christian workers who have had ministry experience in this area can give valuable advice. Christian **abuse victims who have been substantially healed** can offer great hope and encouragement as well as valuable insight and advice. Christian professional counselors who are committed to biblical principles (especially forgiveness) may be needed. If you ask the person to get additional help, offer to go with him/her at least initially.

**Sexual abuse victims usually need help in the following areas:**

**They usually have severe guilt feelings.** These guilt feelings usually include both false and true guilt. Guilt over being raped or molested as a small child and experiencing sexual arousal during those encounters is false guilt. But there are often issues that involve true guilt, like returning for additional encounters because it was pleasurable, not taking steps to stop the abuse of siblings, etc. Ultimately, the cross of Christ is the answer for all of

these guilt feelings, but helping the abused one walk through these painful issues and separate true guilt from false guilt is often very helpful.

**They usually have anger and bitterness problems.** Obviously, they are usually embittered toward their abuser(s). They may also be embittered over others who were aware of the abuse but failed to intervene or protect them. They may react with extreme anger toward people who remind them of their abusers--especially those who manipulate or unrighteously control in a similar way. They will need help in realizing that they are responsible for their bitterness, that it is damaging them, and that they can and should forgive their abusers. You will often need to explain the difference between forgiveness and trust--that forgiveness should be granted freely, while trust must be earned. They may need to confront their abusers. In such cases, they should seek advice from experienced workers or professional counselors on how to do this most effectively.

**They usually have problems with righteous discipline and setting appropriate boundaries.** Abuse victims tend (according to temperament) either toward excessive controlling and confrontation, or toward refusing to discipline when needed or set boundaries with demanding or manipulative people. You will need to correct their rationalizations for these behaviors and help them learn to act according to biblical love in these areas.

**Urge single abuse victims to take steps toward healing before they get married.** They will be much more successful in adjusting to marriage (especially sex within marriage) if they do this.

Some abuse victims should be warned against sharing their abuse too early in dating relationships. But when it is clear that the dating relationship is heading toward engagement, they should confide the manner and duration (not all of the details) of their abuse to their prospective spouse. They need to know that their prospective spouse accepts them in spite of the abuse. Their prospective spouse needs to know so he/she can help in various ways.

**In marriage, both spouses should be prepared to make special sacrifices in their sexual relationship, in accordance with 1 Cor. 7:3-5.**

**The victim's spouse** must be ready to help if/when the victim struggles with various forms of aversion to sex. An selfish, impatient attitude will only exacerbate the problem, while an understanding and patient response will pay great dividends in their relationship.

**The abuse victim** must be willing to lean against his/her aversive feelings about sex, rather than use these as an excuse for withdrawing sexually. It is possible to choose to give oneself to one's spouse out of love, even when aversive feelings are present. Over time, God honors this step of faith with increased freedom from aversive feelings.

**What about those who are guilty of past molestation and/or incest?**

**FOR FURTHER STUDY: Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart*; Jan Frank, *A Door of Hope***

## **Other Issues**

### **Divorce & Remarriage**

Once again, we need to take a position on divorce that avoids the damaging extremes.

**A biblical view of divorce includes these emphases:**

- Our culture has accepted the disastrous proposition of "no fault divorce." As biblical Christians, we reject and deplore this low view of marriage (Mal. 2:14-16). God designed

marriage to be permanent (Gen. 2:24), so Christians should enter into marriage solemnly committed to remaining with their spouses for life. Lasting marriages are important not only for the health of the spouses and their children; they are also a crucial testimony of the power of Christ in our society. Divorce is a terrible tragedy at best, and a serious act of rebellion against God that warrants formal church discipline at worst.

- On the other hand, the Bible is realistic about human fallenness. This is why it permits divorce in some situations as the lesser of two evils (Deut. 24:1-3; Matt. 19:3-9), and in some cases divorcees to remarry (see 1 Cor. 7:27,28). And because God is gracious, he not only forgives repentant divorcees; he also calls them into ministry.

#### **When counseling people in fellowship who are contemplating divorce:**

- **Urge them to expend every effort to save the marriage.** Remind them of their vows before God to stay committed to one another for life. Remind them of God's commitment to their marriage and his power to heal it. Point them to examples of couples who successfully worked their way through serious marital difficulties and have reaped the fruit of a good marriage. Point out that as painful as the present situation may be, divorce often results in even greater pain.
- **Have parents who are contemplating divorce read *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*.** The notion that divorce is "better for the kids" is a super destructive lie! On the contrary, children of distressed marriages usually fare better than children of divorce.
- **When one spouse is willing to work on the marriage while the other has given up and is pursuing divorce, church discipline may be in order.** Sometimes one spouse is willing to work on the marriage, while the other has given up and is pursuing divorce. Except in cases where there are legitimate reasons for seeking divorce (e.g., adultery; chronic violence; etc.), we should call on the running spouse to work on his marriage and warn him of potential formal church discipline for unrighteous divorce.

#### **When counseling divorced people who are contemplating remarriage:**

- **Urge them to seriously study the biblical passages on divorce and remarriage.** After doing this, they may not be able to enter into remarriage with a clear conscience that God permits it for them.
- **Probe to see if they can articulate their part in their failed marriage, and ask them what steps they have taken to allow God to change them in those areas.** Second marriage have a much higher divorce rate, because divorcees usually blame their spouses for their failed marriage and thus carry their own serious sin problems into the next marriage.
- **NOTE:** On the other hand, we have seen several divorced people get remarried successfully when both people are growing spiritually, have taken the time to learn the lessons from their failed marriages, and are seriously committed to fellowship and ministry.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY:** Donald W. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce According to the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969); John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 153-186.

## Substance abuse

The relational, physical, and spiritual damage resulting from substance abuse and addiction is well known. Biblically, Christians should be free from both seriously intoxicating episodes and dependence on substances even though not seriously intoxicating. We understand that this lifestyle is an escape from reality and a destructive counterfeit for the Spirit-filled life (Eph. 5:18). God wants us to experience emotional stimulation--even times of euphoria--but this should be the by-product of a lifestyle of worshipping him and sacrificially serving others.

**Drug abuse, including not only illegal drugs but also abusing legal prescriptions, should be terminated. See below for guidelines on helping them do this.**

There is a wide variety of alcohol abuse, ranging from very occasional over-drinking episodes to a long-standing habit of daily all-day drinking. Treatment will vary according to the severity of the problem. **We disagree on biblical grounds that total abstinence is God's will for all Christians--even those who have abused alcohol.**

Some can learn to drink responsibly; others may be able to do this after practicing abstinence; others may need to abstain permanently. Alcohol abusers should be willing in principle to permanently abstain, and experiment with responsible drinking only with agreement and accountability from mature Christian friends.

Alcohol abusers who want to drink responsibly should clarify their own rules for drinking, and be willing to stop drinking for a time if they cannot keep their own rules. For example only: one or at most two drinks for a whole day; only after other responsibilities are completed; with Christian friends rather than alone; not when depressed; not more than once or twice a week.

Long-term, serious substance abusers usually need complete and permanent abstinence. When such a person decides to go "cold turkey," you should insist on medical supervision for their health safety. They usually also need (at least for a while) the help of AA or NEVER ALONE more than once a week. They usually need help learning to persevere through relational difficulties and giving and receiving loving confrontation rather than raging or withdrawing.

**Abusers will usually need to take the following measures to gain freedom:**

- They need to be honest about their weakness when hanging out with certain friends, going to certain parties, etc.--and avoid these situations. If they are pressured or scorned for this, this is an opportunity for a gracious witness to their friends.
- They need to confess all falls immediately to mature Christian friends. This brings their sin out into the light, which cuts its power. It also avails them to God's grace through their friends, which encourages and empowers them to move forward. Be aware that alcohol abusers often lie about their drinking, and even disguise it by using cough drops, breath mints, etc.
- They should also ask for accountability in this area, giving permission for their Christian friends to ask them periodically how they are doing in this area until they have attained solid victory for a long time.
- They must replace the stimulation of substance abuse with the healthy stimulation of close friendships and ministry. Growing involvement in this lifestyle gradually weakens the temptation power of substance abuse. As the importance of these relationships and

ministries increases in their lives, they usually do not want to jeopardize them by substance abuse.

**Remember** that most substance abusers do not gain immediate and permanent freedom, even when they are serious about pursuing it. You must discern between a fall from grace and volitional regression, and respond accordingly. Remember that church discipline is legitimate and often effective for this sin problem--especially if the abuser has experienced the goodness of Christian community.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

<http://www.xenos.org/ministries/crossroads/OnlineJournal/issue4/alcohol.htm>

## **Abortion**

**Many may be reluctant to bring this into the light**

**Usually need help in the following areas:**

**Encourage participation in the H.E.A.R.T. ministry**

## **Masturbation**

**Our outlook on masturbation by singles should steer a course mid-way between two extremes:**

- On the one hand is the outlook common in fundamentalist circles--that masturbation is a serious sin that brings God's wrath, spiritual ruin, etc. This view is without scriptural support. The fact that the Bible explicitly condemns virtually every other kind of sexual sin, but is completely silent about masturbation, probably indicates that it is not (in itself) a serious moral or spiritual problem. Experience confirms that single Christians virtually never gain complete victory in this area, but they can grow steadily in sanctification (including more self-control over sexual lust) and ministry fruitfulness while still masturbating. We feel that it is unwise to make a big deal of this issue unless it is accompanied by other practices (see below).
- On the other hand, we should call for restraint in this area. Specifically, Christians should resist excessive frequency, use of paraphernalia, pornography, and masturbating in the presence or assistance of others.

**Masturbation is a more serious issue for married people**, since now sexual desire can and should be satisfied with one's spouse. Those who masturbate instead of having sex with their spouses are violating 1 Cor. 7:3-5, which calls us away from sexual selfishness to serve our spouses. Sometimes a spouse masturbates rather than place excessive sexual demands on his/her spouse. Usually, the preferable solution is for the other spouse to be willing to increase their willingness to have sex.

We should note that **mutual masturbation by dating or engaged couples constitutes serious sexual impurity**. Many couples (including those from a conservative church background) insist that they are not in sexual sin even though they engage regularly in mutual masturbation. This is the rankest kind of legalistic hypocrisy. Such couples should admit that they are involved in serious moral compromise that is damaging their individual walks as well as their

relationship. They should take serious measures to return to sexual purity, including confession to Christian friends and staying away from tempting situations.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY: John White, *The Fight*, pp. ; Dennis McCallum, "Observations on Masturbation"**

### **Be sure to keep people focused on God's power to heal!**

Use stories of people who have had victory.

End with this emphasis and talk about the hundreds of people in Xenos who have been substantially healed.

### **Assignment Due Next Week**

**Study for Final Exam (to be taken at the Study Center between 3/22/07 – 4/5/07).**

### **Memory Verses**

None this week

### **Key Points to Know for Exam**

**Be able to describe the six steps that can help Christians seeking healing from a past of heterosexual impurity.**

**Understand the four steps that can help people gain freedom from pornography.**