

Of Porn and Pride, Part 1
By Mike Genung

If I were to name the one sin that has been the most destructive in my life, it would be pride. This is in spite of the fact that my struggle with sexual addiction led to adultery as both a single and married man, with traumatic effect (an enraged husband and destroyed family of five on one side, and a marriage that could have ended in divorce on the other).

If not for my pride, I might have gotten help sooner and avoided a lot of pain, both to myself and others. I refused to seek help because I didn't want anyone seeing anything other than the image I'd carefully crafted and polished over the years. I wanted others to see "the good Christian" who said all the right words, knew the right verses, and did the right things. When that image fell, so did the big lie my pride was wrapped around. I'll never forget when my wife told me that she'd had me up on a pedestal—until I committed adultery. Overnight I went from Mike the anointed one to Mike the adulterer.

Pride causes blindness. Samson was the Biblical version of Hercules; he once caught 300 foxes (I'd run out of gas trying to catch just one), killed one thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey, and, when he was trapped in a city of men who planned to kill him, ripped the fortress gate out of the ground and carried it off on his back. Samson was also the ruler of Israel for 20 years. With such a resume, Samson must have thought he was invincible, that the consequences of his sexual sin wouldn't catch up to him. Eventually it did, with the tragic outcome that Samson lost his life.

Over the years I've heard many men say "I didn't think I would get caught... I thought I could handle this on my own... it's just looking at pictures of pretty women; I can walk away from this ..." and then, "it" happens. Their wife somehow finds the one image they neglected to erase from their hard drive, or a girlfriend's phone number is found on an errant slip of paper, or the porn stash is "accidentally" discovered (one wife told the story of how her teenage daughter stumbled onto her father's stack of magazines in the attic). Once the dominoes fall, the damage can't be undone.

In the past I hated the idea of asking for help. Admitting moral failure was too humiliating; it went against the grain of my "can do" mentality that had worked so well in the business world. But, "can do" fails miserably when it comes to overcoming sin. I repeatedly bloodied my nose on the brick wall of reality, until my pride-induced madness caused so much pain that I had to get help.

Pride is porn's alter ego. Pride wants the perfect woman who worships it, always smiles, never complains and above all, never takes effort to love. Masturbation, porn's twin sister, is all about me: "I will please myself quickly by using myself to get what I want without having to do the hard work of loving another." The resulting sickness from this warped concoction of pride, porn, and self-sex is devastating. We become increasingly addicted to ourselves, which produces emotional retardation. We get angry when someone interrupts our fantasy world of "all about me" and react with a critical, judging heart. The ego over-inflates, and, because it's never satisfied, we fall into depression and

become more miserable. Since the answer for misery is more porn, the cycle perpetuates and intensifies until we become a hollow shell.

Love, the thing we crave the most, becomes that which we are least capable of giving—or receiving. Pride is the polar opposite of love. First Corinthians 13:4-6 describes love this way:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

But pride turns First Corinthians love on its head:

Pride is impatient; it always wants its way, now. It is unkind, especially to those closest to it. Pride brags, and is arrogant. Pride always seeks what it wants, and, due to its hair-trigger action, is easily provoked. Pride takes into account many wrongs suffered, both real and imagined, unless it is to Pride's benefit to invoke false humility. Pride rejoices with the truths it likes and rebels against those that confront it. Pride bears little, believes in itself, hopes in the approval of others, and endures for adulation.

Pride corrupts every part of life: work, play and ministry.

Several years ago, a reporter from the local newspaper came out and interviewed me for an article he was writing on porn addiction in the church. Later, he sent a photographer to my office to take my picture. I was brimming with excitement as I anticipated seeing my image in the paper with a hard-hitting article that was sure to attract attention.

A few weeks later the article came out—without my picture. Several other persons had been interviewed for the article, and the newspaper went with a graphic of a woman. I was angry at first, especially about not seeing my picture in the paper. And then, it hit me that something was seriously wrong with my response. Why was I so upset? A topic that is normally hush-hush was brought to light, and I had been privileged to be a part of it. I realized later that I'd wanted the glory, to be seen by others; my flesh went off because it didn't get its way.

I've heard men rattle off their list of ministry accomplishments as if they had earned a place of honor high in the clouds, and then rip into their wives for getting in their face about their "little porn problem." I wonder if Christian pride on rampage grieves the heart of God when He sees His children treating others this way.

Pride has a negative impact on every relationship; especially our relationship with the Lord.

...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble
James 4:6

God is *opposed* to the proud. No matter what our accomplishments are in ministry, family, or business, God is *against* those who are walking in pride. James 4:6 doesn't say we're cast out, but perhaps the Lord takes on the role of a father who needs to discipline his child for willful sin. This ought to strike fear in the heart of every believer, because God's chastening can involve leaving us to our own devices. Perhaps this is why Samson fell so hard, and why countless others have too, including myself. We can't have pride and grace; if pride is our choice... shudder. The outcome can't be good when we're setting ourselves up for a divine spanking by the Creator of the universe.

Fortunately, there is redemption. Every man, woman and child will struggle with pride, but the good news is that the blood of the cross covers every sin. Part 2 of this article will focus on the antidote to pride.

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Bio: Mike Genung struggled with sexual sin for 20 years before God set him free in 1999. He is the founder of Blazing Grace, a ministry to the sexually broken and their spouses, and the author of *The Road to Grace; Finding True Freedom from the Bondage of Sexual Addiction* (www.roadtoGrace.net).