

How to Care for a Christian with a Porn Addiction

By Rick Thomas

Bob, a Christian, has been addicted to porn for the past 17 years. He is 33 years old, has been married for 12 years, and is the father of three beautiful little girls. He has never been to counseling for any reason. He comes to you seeking advice about whether he should see a secular or a Christian counselor and about your suggestions for long-term care. What advice would you give Bob? What would be your reasons for directing him to one and not the other?

Secular or Christian Care: Two Views

Cornelius Van Til said there are no neutral or brute facts. He taught Pre-suppositional Apologetics, which is a belief system that says all facts or truths are attached to our presuppositions. A presupposition is a belief that we assume or hold onto, which influences the outcome prior to embarking on the course. Paul Tripp said that no one ever responds to facts, but to [their interpretation of the facts](#).

These two truths are similar in that they both agree that we are subjective people.

No person can offer counsel while being detached from his core belief system or presuppositions. Whether right or wrong, our belief systems influence the advice we give. Take the illustration of the apple:

Two people are looking at an apple. One person is a Christian, while the other is an atheist. The Christian believes that God created all things. The atheist rejects God, believing that all things originated by random chance.



The Christian looks at the apple and gives glory to God. The atheist looks at the apple and is thankful that randomness brought about the apple. Their core belief system influences how they view the apple, while setting the trajectory for their thoughts about the apple and the subsequent conclusions they draw from their presuppositions.

What about Bob?

A Christian counselor would look at Bob and believe that Bob's problem is primarily a spiritual problem, rooted in the heart, while a secular counselor would reject the spiritual dynamic and see the problem primarily as a behavioral issue that needs modification and/or a genetic problem that cannot change or can be slightly altered with the help of medication. The former would use the Bible as his source of understanding, while

alternatively the latter would use the DSM IV as his source for understanding and resolution of the problem.



Neither one will be objective in what they believe about Bob and his addiction. Both will counsel Bob based on the outworking of their *faith*. The biblicist would place faith in God and work from his understanding of God and the practical application of God's Word. He would also rely on

[the work of the Holy Spirit to empower](#) Bob in his sanctification, while contextualizing him in a local church for long-term care. The secularist would place faith in his understanding of a human being as the highest order of animal and, therefore, man as the source of knowledge, power, understanding and practice.

No matter what we believe, we can be assured that we will not look at Bob in a neutral way. What we think about God will have a direct impact on how we counsel Bob.

More specifically where we place our faith (belief, trust, confidence), will determine how we counsel. If we believe 2 Peter 1:3, for example, then our counseling will come from our faith in God and His Word.

Psychology, in the purest sense, comes from the compound words *Psyche Logos*, which means “the study of the soul” or “the word concerning the soul”.

Unfortunately secular counselors have hijacked this word and now use it for their own purposes.

But it was God who not only created the soul in Genesis 2:7, but he gave us the Word concerning the soul in 2 Timothy 3:16.

***His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,
2 Peter 1:3 ESV***

***Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (soul).
Genesis 2:7 ESV***

***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness
2 Timothy 3:16 ESV***

He breathed into man and man became a living soul. He breathed into man again and man wrote God’s Word. We now have the Word concerning the soul, which we call the Bible. Jesus Christ is the greatest psychologist who ever lived. As Christians we have the privilege to follow the Savior as “little psychologists” by helping people with soul problems. Quite simply, we apply the Word, the purest form of psychology, to the soul.

Biblical Counseling is a Two-Pronged Approach

Biblical counseling believes that all problems have an inner to outer progression. The outer manifestation is a real problem that needs some kind of response and correction from the counselor, but the counseling cannot stop there.

Even though behavioral alteration is essential, there is an inner dimension to all of our sin problems that must be addressed. (James 4:8b)

All sin is rooted in something deeper than our behavior. (Proverbs 4:23) Sin does not sit on the surface of our lives, disconnected from who we are as beings. Jesus made this connection for us in Luke 6:43-45 where he drew a hard line from the external to the internal.

The analogy is strong and inarguable. Jesus is connecting the lip to the heart. If the mouth is speaking, the ideas that are formulated into words come from the heart of the man. If the words are wrong, then the heart is wrong. The porn that is destroying Bob's life and family is deeply rooted in Bob's soul, who he is as a person. There is something in Bob that drives him to crave the "twisted benefits" of porn. Bob has a "heart" problem. (Jeremiah 17:9)

The things that motivate Bob from the heart are what we call idols. Idols can be concepts that we worship and crave. Idols motivate us. They make us tick and generally cause us to feel good about ourselves. The following is a short list of idols that could be at the heart of the porn addict:

Sense of Power	Craving for Control	Desire for Acceptance
Significance	Respect	Need for Approval
Desire to be Loved	Fear of being alone	Comfort
Pleasure	Unmet Longings	Guilt & Shame

***"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
Luke 6:43-45 ESV***

The greatest encouragement for the porn addict is the hope he has in the knowledge that his problem is spiritual. Bob can be full of hope because of his God-centered theology that releases him from being bound to some form of genetic bad luck. Bob can repent of his sin. To repent means to change, or to alter the way you think and live, by acknowledging your selfishness, and seeking to follow God.

In God's world there is always hope for our spiritual problems. If Bob were to imbibe the secular model, his hope would be in some form of medication to mitigate his cravings.

The biblical model places the origin of his sinful desires in the heart rather than attributing it to genetic randomness. Thus there is hope for Bob. By repenting he can enjoy the freedom that God gives to those who have become entangled in sin.

All Counseling is Seasonal. It Demands Additional Long-Term Care

A biblical counselor will let Bob know that though his counseling is seasonal, he must be aware that his sin is not. Sin is relentless and will always seek to make an inroad into Bob's life. Therefore,

all wise biblical counseling will seek to give Bob [a context for on-going care](#) and accountability. The biblical model for counseling is able to do this.

Artificial Context for Change

[Counseling is an artificial context for change.](#) It is not where real life happens. Think about this. I generally counsel for two hours. Let's say that I am meeting with Bob one time per week. A week consists of 168 hours. We meet for 2 hours. The equation looks like the following: 166 versus 2 = Lasting Change? Not impossible, but certainly very difficult.



If a person, like Bob, has been living without consistent care and accountability, while habituated in the entanglements of porn, two hours of counseling would be like trying to dip the ocean dry with a bucket. By the time you meet with him the following week, his sin patterns will have, for the most part, swallowed-up whatever good was accomplished in the counseling office the week before.

From Chaos to Order

When God spoke, as recorded on the first page of the Bible, he brought order out of chaos. Whenever God speaks, he brings order out of chaos. When God first spoke to me 25 years ago, he spoke into my chaos and began a process of bringing order into my life. This is the advantage of being a Christian. The world is *out-of-order* and living in their own chaos. Should God speak into their chaos, as he did mine, the process of reorienting them toward order begins.

Counseling is similar. The person comes to counseling out of their chaos. The Christian counselor speaks God's truth into their chaos and the reorientation process begins. This is the power of the Gospel. The problem, however, is that the counselee goes back to their chaos and the ground gained in the *order-speaking counseling session* gets lost. It is 166 to 2, chaos versus order. In most cases, chaos will win.



Chaos Competes with Order

It is unreasonable to expect counseling to be able to overcome chaos all by itself. At best, you could hire the counselor as a personal coach. And you could meet with him or her for the rest of your life. I've called this the [Rent-A-Friend](#) approach to sanctification. If a just man falls down seven times, according to the Bible, then what is your guarantee

that you will not fall down when the counseling season is over? Not only do we all fall down repeatedly, but usually overcoming life-dominating sin is a process that takes time.

Thankfully, the bible does not leave us without hope, but offers a real and practical solution for our progressive sanctification. This contextual solution is the local church. What better context is there to sin? If you are going to be sick, what better place to be sick than the hospital? If you are going to sin or be sinned against, what better place for this to occur than a local church?

Christian counseling can serve the local church in some valuable ways. But Christian counseling was never meant to replace the local church. By all means, use Christian counseling. But never forget that it is not a replacement for your lifelong context for change. The best advice I could ever give a person who is struggling is to find a local church and to get some long-term help there.

Bob could be helped a great deal by a Christian counselor, but he must not stop there. He and his family must get plugged into a local church. He must share with someone on the church staff what he is going through and seek pastoral care, not only to get him through his immediate problem, but to provide long-term care for him and his family. (See Hebrews 13:17)

Summary

The goal of all counseling is change. Change brought about by a Christian counselor is God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered, Scripture-saturated, prayer-immersed, and heart-focused, with on-going and follow-up care contextualized in a local church. These elements are far superior to the methods of the world.

For more teaching on counseling and a church model for care, please checkout our [YouTube Training Videos](#) to grasp a better vision for what long-term care could look like in the context of the local church.

Also checkout our breviaries on Abraham Maslow and Carl Jung, two popularizers of secular psychology during the last century, go to [The Christian Counselor Resource Center](#) to read these articles.

I've also provided the following chart-[Psychology & Scripture Compared](#)-courtesy of The Master's College, where I earned my MA in Biblical Counseling. It clearly shows the differences between secular and biblical counseling models.