

CELEBRATE THE JUBILEE

CHAPTER TWO: WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

(Mid-October and the sun is setting on a cool night. The air has a perceptibly refreshing affect on everyone present. The men are assembled around a rectangular table in the Upper Room, which is brightly lit and energized with anticipation.)

ROGER Welcome back, men. Good to see you all tonight. Hope you all had a good week.

PHIL I see an empty seat. Where's Jeremy?

KEN I don't know.

JOHN I talked to him this afternoon, after I got out of work. He said he had other stuff going on tonight and couldn't make it.

ROGER Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I hope nothing's wrong.

PHIL I'll give him a call tonight when I get done.

ROGER Good. I hope you guys have been thinking over what we talked about last week. Here's one of the questions I've been asking myself this week: "Is the pornography problem getting worse than ever or do we just hear about it more?" When I was young, it just wasn't that much of an issue—at least I didn't hear about it much if it was.

GEORGE Remember last week I told you, when I was in the service, we had pin up posters—but nothing like what is available now. Some of the stuff out there is just so raunchy. It seems to me it's getting worse.

PHIL I was a kid back in the 60s. I grew up in a Christian family. My parents were pretty strict. I knew porn magazines existed, but I would never be caught dead looking at them at the drug store like some of my friends.

I remember they had "girlie magazines" at the barbershop. I used to peek at them when I was there for my haircut. But I made sure no one else saw me. I'd put another magazine in front of it in case anyone saw me. I didn't want to get caught.

JOHN You sneaky devil!

PHIL Yeah, I was. We were really embarrassed about it back then. I don't know if more people are involved now. But I do know it's a lot more graphic - more hard-core than it used to be. I also know it's a lot easier to get a hold of. George, you were an adult in the Army before you ever saw porn.

KEN It used to be that you had to go somewhere to get it. Now, you just turn on that computer in your house. And you don't even have to pay anything. It's free!

ROGER I've found some statistics about that.

PHIL Here you go, George! Just what the doctor ordered.

ROGER Let me read this to you. In 1992, the average age of exposure to pornography was 15. I found a website by Family Safe Media with a survey that concluded that the average age of first Internet pornography is now 11, and the largest consumer age group of Internet pornography is 12 to 17 years old. And like Phil said, a lot of this is the hard-core stuff. The Feb. 17, 2005 edition of *USA Today* reported that incidences of child sexual exploitation have risen from 4,500 in 1998 to more than 112,000 in 2004^b.

JOHN What do they mean by “child sexual exploitation?”

ROGER Probably things like child molestation, sexual abuse, child pornography—any incident where the child becomes the target for sexual lust, acted out. Clearly, it does seem like the devastation in society is worsening. But also in the church...

PHIL I got to thinking about something that happened in my last church. I was the technology director there. The church had three computers—the pastor, the youth pastor and the secretary. The youth pastor is someone who I had mentored several years ago when he was still in the youth group. So I knew him really well. He’s 23 years old and has been married for three years.

One day, about a year ago, I got a call from this organization that provides an Internet accountability program that we had installed on the church computers. The guy explained to me that our IP address was being used to view thousands of hard-core porn sites. Apparently, whoever was doing it was opening fake accounts in an attempt to work around the program.

KEN Phil, I haven’t got the foggiest idea what you’re talking about.

GEORGE Yeah, what is this IP address you’re talking about?

PHIL You old coot! Think of it like your street address on your house. Everyone has one. It’s how they know where to deliver your mail. The same is true on your computer. An IP address could either be the address of your computer when you connect with the Internet or, if you have a firewall—which I recommend—

KEN Hold it—firewall. You’re losing me buddy!

PHIL OK, OK. I’ll go really slow here. A firewall makes it so your IP address is anonymous. It’s kind of like having a post office box for your address instead of your street address. When you send a letter to a PO Box, it doesn’t go to your house but to the post office. That allows the receiver to be anonymous. A firewall on a computer does the same thing. Anyone whose computer is behind the firewall can stay anonymous. And at our church, all three computers were behind the firewall.

GEORGE So, it was the address of the firewall the program was seeing?

PHIL Exactly . . . Well, I was really shocked when I heard about this. I mean there are three computers behind this firewall—the pastor’s, the youth pastor’s and the secretary’s. So it was one of these computers being used to look at porn. The question was whose?

I asked the guy on the phone and he told me that all the usage was associated with the youth

pastor's account. The fake accounts were always made within minutes of a valid login on the youth pastor's computer. It could have been someone else using his computer but we suspected it was really him.

ROGER I'm not sure I understand all that you said, Phil, but it sounds like the youth pastor should have been confronted with the facts.

PHIL Right. Well, to make a long story short, it *was* the youth pastor. And it turns out he had a porn problem for years. His wife had even known about it and didn't know what to do. They were both relieved when the whole thing came out into the open.

JOHN So, what did the church do with him?

PHIL Even though the church offered to give him counseling, they couldn't let him continue as the youth pastor. You can imagine what some of the church people would think if the youth pastor was doing Internet porn. So, he resigned.

ROGER What was the effect on the church?

PHIL Well, to be honest with you, that's why we're here at this church. Even though it seemed like such an obvious sin, there were a lot of people in the church who thought we had dealt too harshly. The church ended up splitting. We left, too, and came here.

KEN How could they possibly want to let someone like that off the hook?

PHIL Most people think Internet porn isn't that bad a problem. I found a statistic. "USA Today says that 79% of adults say it's OK for a wife or husband or boyfriend to reply to an instant message with a stranger of the opposite sex. 79% say it's OK"—^c

KEN Hold on—instant message? What's that?

PHIL You really are in the dark ages, Ken!

KEN I told you, I don't have a computer. Never will. And the more I hear you talk about them the more convinced I am!

PHIL OK. "Instant messaging" is a program on computers where you can start up a conversation with someone else.

ROGER Ken, a little screen shows up on your computer that contains a typed message from someone else. I know. My son has been after me for a couple years to start using it.

PHIL And the trouble is, there's a way to open up your username to anyone. So you can start chatting with just about anyone anywhere.

JOHN A lot of my friends spend hours every day chatting with people they don't know—kind of hanging out together like people do at a bar, y'know? Looking for a good time.

ROGER That sounds like a dangerous feature—especially for kids.

PHIL Exactly! Internet predators love instant messaging and chat rooms because they can exploit unsuspecting kids. You can have some 45-year-old pervert telling a 14-year-old girl he's really a 13-year-old girl and that he wants to be her best friend. And you can imagine what could really happen then. But anyway, back to the statistic. What do you guys think about that number? 79% think it's no big deal to start up a conversation with a member of the opposite sex with someone they don't know.

GEORGE If you asked most people in our church if they thought it was wrong for men and women to flirt at work, what do you think they would say?

KEN I know what I would say—

GEORGE Yeah, we all know what you would say, Ken. But I suspect most people in churches don't think it's that big a deal. I think that's the same attitude reflected in Phil's statistic.

PHIL Right. And I think that explains why my old church split over this issue.

ROGER So, obviously this is a very divisive issue, if Internet pornography can split a church.

PHIL —And companies too. I found that something like 1,500 companies were surveyed and about 30% had terminated an employee for inappropriate use of the Internet while at work^d. That probably means Internet porn. I ran across another statistic. It's from *Focus on the Family*. Back in 2003 they surveyed families and concluded that nearly half of all families say that pornography is a real problem in their family^e.

ROGER It may even be higher. Don't forget my number from last week—that 70% have viewed Internet pornography in the last month. And I read somewhere recently that as many as 50% of pastors admit to struggling with Internet pornography^f.

KEN 50% of pastors! You've got to be kidding! If that's true then the church is in big trouble!

ROGER It could even be higher than that. Pastors are no different from other men. I'm sure there are many pastors and missionaries who have a problem but won't admit it in a survey like this. Do you remember the story in the news of Pastor Carmisson from First Christian Church across town?

JOHN Yeah, wasn't he the guy that ended up in jail for messing with a minor?

ROGER Yes. That's the way it ended up but that is not the beginning of the story.

I knew Pastor Carmisson. No one would have imagined there were any problems with his marriage or his family. They seemed like such a nice family. But his wife had known for years he had a pornography problem. What she didn't know is that he had had an affair with another woman for many years. She also didn't know that he was sexually molesting this other woman's teenage daughter.

At the trial it came out that his computer was filled with child pornography. And under oath he admitted that he attempted to act out the scenes from the child porn with the girl he molested. Pornography is what got him started.

GEORGE That's a pretty extreme example.

ROGER Yes. But there but for the grace of God go I.

GEORGE And I too, Roger. I wasn't criticizing your story, but it seems extreme.

ROGER I know, George. But men if it can have this effect on men in the pulpit—on men in the church—it certainly is imperative that we talk about it. Don't you think? And that we do something more than just talk about it!

KEN Well, all I can say is I'm glad I don't have a computer. I'm not part of this problem.

ROGER I hear what you're saying Ken. But we're all in this together. The underlying problem here is not *having a computer*. The underlying problem is not even the Internet pornography—although I'm certainly not minimizing the issue. The problem is deeper than all that. And it's a problem we all have.

KEN Sin!

ROGER Yes. Sin. But specifically, it's the problem of wanting to be king of my own life, of wanting to call all the shots, of putting my wants and desires first, before anyone and anything else. There are all kinds of sin struggles in the world. Some people have a problem with sinful anger or bitterness or stealing or adultery—like we've talked about. But underneath all of those sin struggles is something foundational to all sin; something that is so much a part of our human nature that we just assume it's the way we are supposed to be. Theologians call it "autonomous reason." We can just call it "pride."

JOHN Auto-what?

ROGER Autonomous reason. The word "autonomous" means "self-rule." It means we make the laws and then we live by them. So, autonomous "reason" means that my mind makes up the rules or laws—the moral code—by which I decide how to run my life. In short, pride.

The problem is God didn't design us to live this way. When we start making our own rules instead of following God's, we're in trouble. That's how Internet pornography becomes such a problem.

John, I know you were just asking a question, but when you said Internet pornography is "just pictures," I'm afraid that's a result of autonomous reason. I'm not criticizing you, OK?

JOHN I know—

ROGER I'm just using it as an example. And you're right. Most people would agree with you. It's not that big a deal to see some pictures of scantily clad women. It's only when you act out your lusts that most people start to get concerned. But this isn't God's view. It's man's pride in action. God has a very different standard. We read it in Matthew 5:27, 28. Let's look at it again, right now. In fact, I'm going to give you a little assignment. I want you to try and memorize these words this week. Would you be interested in what God thinks, not just what we think?

Who wants to read it?

GEORGE I'll read it. "*You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, . . . but I say to you*

that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

ROGER Read the next verses too. I’m not going to ask you to memorize them, but I want you to see how God looks at this danger:

GEORGE *“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”*

JOHN That sounds serious—

ROGER It is, John. Because of our pride—because we like to make up our own rules to live by—we so easily minimize and trivialize these things. We say, “oh, it isn’t that bad.” But Jesus said if you have a lust problem—a problem with wandering eyes—it would be better that you have your eye balls gouged out and go through life blind than end up spending eternity in hell. Sin seems to have pleasure for a short time. But long term, it ends in death.

PHIL So, Roger, you want us to memorize that verse?

ROGER Yes, I do. In fact, I’m going to have several verses for you to memorize as we go through this.

KEN I don’t have much of a memory anymore, Roger. I don’t know—

PHIL Don’t you know, Ken, a memory is what you forget with

GEORGE I’m older than you, Ken. I’ll try if you try

KEN Oh, alright. I didn’t mean I wouldn’t try. But I’m just not very good at it—my wife says I’d forget my head if it wasn’t screwed on.

ROGER I believe memorizing and reciting God’s Word is one of the most important things we can do in conquering this problems of lust and pride. I’ll talk more about it next time. Right now we need to wrap up for the evening.

But in closing I’d like to ask you to do something. Please close your eyes for a few minutes so you’re not looking at anyone. Just look into your own heart. Let me ask you something from earlier in our discussion.

I mentioned to you that national statistics suggest 70% of men struggle with Internet pornography. That means seven out of ten. Ken said he doesn’t even have a computer. On the other hand, I admitted to you that I am one of those seven out of ten. After all, we’re all in this together. So, here’s the tough question.

What about you? Think about it now. Be honest. This is deadly serious stuff. Remember Jesus’ warning about wandering, lustful eyes. John, think about it. Are you one of the 70%?

JOHN (silence)

ROGER George? How about you?

GEORGE (silence)

ROGER Phil?

PHIL (silence)

ROGER And what about Jeremy?

JEREMY (absent)

(Roger's last question unsettled the men greatly. The Upper-Room, which only an hour ago was full of energy and light, now seems ominous—even threatening. There isn't much talk and banter as they leave. Most of the men are thinking about themselves and the places their eyes have gone. Roger is very concerned about Jeremy's absence tonight.)

STUDY GUIDE: Chapter Two

There are a variety of ways you can use the lesson material in Celebrate the Jubilee—by individuals, by accountability partners, families or groups. You have permission to duplicate or distribute the materials freely for non-commercial use. Listed below are suggestions for ways to get the most out of Chapter Two. Feel free to pick and choose from among them. If you have ideas we'd appreciate hearing from you.

FOR ONE

- Read through the lesson in the chapter.
- Think about the statistics of Internet pornography use in the lesson. Do you think the problem is that serious? Why or why not? If not, are you willing to do some of your own research to draw different conclusions?
- Do you have some kind of Internet filter or accountability program on your computer? What has been your experience with it?
- Roger said that the root of most sin is wanting to be in charge of our own life—wanting to set our own rules and call all the shots—what he called pride. Do you agree with this? If so, what are some examples of this in your own life?
- Do you believe that memorizing scripture is an important practice for dealing with sin struggles in your life? When is the last time you memorized some scripture for this reason?

FOR GROUPS

- Distribute copies of the lesson or ask the others in the group to download it for themselves and read it prior to coming together.
- If you have at least three people in your group, have each person read one of the parts out loud in the group. Some may need to read more than one part. If you want, you can even “act” it out (but you don't have to).
- There were several statistics and statements about the seriousness of the Internet pornography problem in society today. Discuss these together. Do you agree or disagree with the way this lesson characterizes the problem?
- Ask if anyone has experience they could share with Internet filters or accountability programs. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of them.
- This lesson talked a lot about wanting to be king of our own lives—pride. Discuss ways in which this kind of pride makes a struggle with moral integrity much more difficult.
- Talk about the importance of Scripture in dealing with a sin struggle in our lives. Ask someone to read Psalm 119:9-11 and discuss what it means. What does it mean to “hide” or “treasure” God's Word in our hearts? When is the last time they memorized Scripture for this reason?

FOR EVERYONE

- Be sure to spend some time in prayer. Pray that God will teach you about integrity through these lessons. Ask God to open your eyes to see areas where you can improve in this area.
- If you are using the material in a group and any personal problems were shared, remind everyone about the importance of respecting the person's privacy and not sharing personal information outside the group.

^b www.nationalcoalition.org/resourcesservices/stat.html

^c USA Today July 10, 2000

^d Websense Inc. Center for Internet Studies, year 2000

^e Focus on the Family, 2003

^f Christianity Today, Leadership Magazine survey, 2001

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1525 W. King Street
Owosso, MI 48867
877.479.1119

www.covenanteyes.com

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