

The Gnostic Disconnect and Evangelical Immorality (Part One)

By Jay Wegter

By *Gnostic disconnect* we mean that people tend to see spirituality as a set of private convictions rather than comprehensive truth which governs the totality of a person's life. When the *disconnect* is present, religion is regarded as a set of private convictions 'disconnected' from the whole person and his entire experience. To live with the *disconnect* is to NOT see the human body as the primary spiritual resource to serve God and others.

The *disconnect* is an aberration, for Paul and Jesus always remind us that out of the heart comes sin but the deeds of the body affect the soul. Therefore, those who say, "Jesus doesn't care what I do with my body as long as I have Him in my heart" are dead wrong. The premise of this chapter is to help the reader understand that the greater the disconnection between the spirit and body, the wider the entry point for immorality and pornography. God expects our body-soul unity to operate as one in our worship and service. As our Redeemer who purchased us and owns us, Christ has the rightful claim to every square foot of our life. There are no separate compartments. The body and soul operate together so that our Christianity cuts across all of life.

The Christian is dead to sin because he has *died with Christ*. The outworking our death to sin is to be lived out daily—we are to present ourselves to the Lord each day. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom 6:12-13). It is this principle of presentation consistently applied which ends the dangerous disconnect.

Porn finds an open door at the *disconnect* between faith and life.

*A Gnostic-like disconnect is re-emerging in the church today. The attitude of ancient Gnosticism was, "Since they had received divine knowledge and were enlightened, it didn't matter how they lived in the body."*¹ Ascetic Gnosticism taught that the physical things of the world were evil and that to attain holiness one must be detached from them. However, antinomian Gnosticism realized this was impossible and taught the false doctrine that God's free grace allows us to live in our body licentiously because the spirit alone is important. "Therefore, [according to this view of spirituality] whatever one does in the body doesn't matter; hence anything goes—sexual immorality, whatever."²

Modern *antinomian Gnostics* place a low level of significance on the material body. Their approach is that "only the heart matters," which is part of a "grand divorce" that justifies severing personal behavior from absolute standards of divine design, truth, beauty, and morality. Namely, this type of Gnosticism believes that the body and soul are separate, disjointed entities. Therefore, whatever happens to one doesn't affect the other. Consequently, the new Gnosticism touts that man has the freedom to do whatever he wants with his body, without it impacting his spirituality.

This type of Gnosticism is seen in our idolatrous culture with its values of boundless self-expression. As a result, we are abandoning God's values of self-control, delayed gratification, and the indirect pursuit of pleasure, which is creating a major collision between God's moral truth and the

culture's values. Our calling as born-again believers is to thrive within divinely ordained moral boundaries and limits. These limits were a part of creation, and they were very good. As creatures made in God's image, we are stewards of the creation who are bounded to these limits. The wise and merciful commandments God has placed upon us constitute a safeguard of human love and dignity. In the name of freedom, Adam's fall into sin illustrates the first abandonment of these boundaries and limits.³

Darwinism taught us that given enough time we will find a scientific explanation for everything (from maternal love, to the Protestant work ethic, to criminal behavior). The net effect in the minds of most was to replace biblical cosmology with philosophic naturalism. How did this impact the Western mind? The knowledge of God as personal, transcendent, and involved with creation was eclipsed and demoted.⁴ Though evangelicals stressed personal faith and piety, they also began to divide God's role—they saw Him as active in redemption but allowed science to define the creation and psychology to define man. Consequently, we allowed society to shove God into the 'upper story' where He was no longer Definer of our existence, OR, involved with the daily details of our lives. And we all accept this as benign as long as we have Jesus 'in our hearts.' But the fallout is deadly serious—it contributes the *disconnect*, opening the gate of the soul to let in the alien invader of porn.⁵

When one allows the Bible to describe salvation and science to comprehensively describe the creation, it produces a tear in our thinking. Why? Because the salvation-science dichotomy pictures God as having two radically different faces. It says the side of God that dealt with creation was far less personal than the side of God that dealt with salvation. As a consequence, the Jesus of salvation became very other-worldly and sentimental. He was no longer viewed as *Sovereign Lord of the cosmos*.

In our humanistic society, God's plan of "the proper constraint of creature before [his sovereign] Creator" becomes obscured. Because there is no transcendent meaning remaining, the greatest goal then becomes *what's good for me as there's nothing more than me*.⁶ This radical 'self-ism' opens the soul to lust and sexual immorality. When man compartmentalizes God's holy truths to the spiritual realm it produces a wide chasm in his experience. However, biblical cosmology teaches that the body and soul are designed by God to operate as one. The body expresses the desires and loyalties of the soul. The deeds of the body reveal who our master is and just who or what it is that we are serving (Rom. 6:15-22).

How does this divided view of reality manifest itself in the Evangelical church today? Here is the disturbing answer: redemption tends to be viewed as a private, subjective, personal preference without an objective basis. In this sense, salvation exists only in the mind and heart apart from concrete reality. It is seen as less real than the physical elements of the universe. Christianity deteriorates into a religion of faith only and is no longer grounded upon faith in The Truth.⁷

Evangelicalism's accommodation to the modern, or *divided view of truth*, has pushed redemption further into the cloudy haze of subjective experience. Christians are living with an open 'gash' between *objective* and *subjective* truth. Consequently the majority of professing Christians have lost the cosmological foundation for redemption—they have lost sight of the unbreakable link between the moral structure of the universe and holy living.

Church life has seen the abandonment of Biblical Cosmology—we are witnessing the phenomenon of being Christian, yet 'metaphysically lost.'

The absolute truth of cosmology is essential in interpreting the universe.⁸ “Cosmology” is that branch of philosophy which deals with the origin and structure of the universe. At the heart of biblical cosmology is both the Creator-creature distinction, and the creation of male and female as the image of God. God’s relation to the creation is the ordering principle of the universe and of reality. In the study of biblical cosmology, we learn that the Creator has set forth His ‘blueprint’ for His creation. His blueprint is not only our moral map, but also our fixed point of reference which provides our understanding of the nature of reality. All of life is ethical and moral BECAUSE the Author of life and the Creator and Ruler of the universe is holy. Currently, a generation is rising which is oblivious to the fact that God is ultimate reality.

As we mentioned earlier, Darwinism has deepened the divided view of reality. In this fragmented view of reality, *quantifiable* (measureable) things such as time, space, and mass are considered more real than the *transcendentals* of truth, beauty, love, purpose, morality, dignity, justice, and rationality.⁹ We may accurately say that today’s divided view of reality, which places the objective as ‘down to earth’ and the subjective as ‘up in the clouds’, has a blinding effect upon people. They view reality as larger than God. Our Creator’s self-revelation in the creation is ignored and explained away; thus, they find their God-given view of *first principles* increasingly obscured (Rom 1:18-20). Truth, beauty, love, purpose, morality, and justice are placed in a subjective category and are treated as less real than the matter and motion measureable by science. Biblical cosmology corrects this misconception by teaching us that the creation is made up of both physical order and moral order. In order to tear down this wall between the two (*physical and moral order*) we must apply biblical truth to all areas of life.

In the present state of affairs, it is most common for Christians to begin with soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) instead of cosmology. As a result, the doctrine of salvation is easily privatized (reduced to something inward, personal, and pietistic). Without the unifying foundation of cosmology, the rising generation hears biblical principles as disassociated bits and pieces of moral truth instead of seeing God’s moral blueprint and creation structures as reality grounded in the character of God. Without cosmology, we cannot see God’s moral blueprint as the genuine structure of reality—as the ‘very furniture of the universe’!

In the present state of affairs, human sexuality is being redefined. It is being taken out of its moral context and removed from the framework of divine design. In the culture war (which is really a spiritual war) we are seeing sexuality *deconstructed*, torn from its teleological framework of divine design and goodness. The world sees this as acceptable because it has placed a partition, or *disconnect* between the physical and spiritual realm. As sexuality is reinterpreted according to the worldview of popular culture, we are seeing a new definition of freedom joined to it. Pop culture is pursuing happiness through *freedom from design* while in the biblical worldview true happiness is through *freedom to design* (or freedom in God’s design). The present worldview shift which characterizes modern man’s rebellion is characterized by defining freedom and happiness as breaking free from divine design.

The Human Body: is it merely a ‘Commuter Vehicle’ OR, the Center of Personality and Moral Volition?

A fragmented worldview without a biblical cosmology will ultimately affect the way one views the human body. Author Randy Alcorn has coined a term for the spiritual-physical disconnect life view: “christo-platonism” (a spirit-body dichotomy patterned after Plato’s philosophy, but incorporated into Christianity). In his book titled, *Heaven*, Alcorn notes that a dichotomized view of the spiritual world and material world is prevalent among Americans. He states that among Americans who believe in the resurrection, two thirds believe we won’t have bodies after the resurrection (to have bodies that eat and walk in a physical paradise just sounds so unspiritual).¹⁰

Christo-platonism views the material realm with its experiences, blessings, and human relationships as “God’s competitors, rather than as instruments that communicate His love and character.”¹¹ One woman who read Alcorn’s book, *Heaven*, describes her christo-platonism, “Because I believed that my spirit was really all that mattered to God, I didn’t let my body matter to me.”¹² Unfortunately, too many Christians are buying into the lie that Christ is interested primarily in the spirit, thus the body is viewed as merely inconsequential. It is easy to see how this opens a huge gateway for sexual immorality of all kinds.

The culture’s wrong-headed ideas about spirituality (which are closely related to the rise of the new Gnosticism) are contributing to Christians’ misunderstanding of the body. The devaluing of the human body among professing Christians is a symptom of *christo-platonism*, says Alcorn. “From the christo-platonism perspective, our souls merely occupy our bodies like a hermit crab inhabits a seashell. And [once those bodies are sloughed off,] our souls could naturally, even ideally live in a disembodied state.”¹³ Needless to say, a Christian holding to this view will won’t live a spiritually unified life.

The biblical doctrine of the soul-body unity preserves the truth that the human body was created to be the vehicle of human personality. It is biblical to say that the human form was created for an interactive relationship with God. To abandon this unified view of human nature is to jeopardize the nature of true spirituality. The Gnostic view regards spirituality as something wholly inward, but that is to divorce the use of the body from its role in true spirituality—that role expressing itself in the vast dimension of social corporate relational spirituality.¹⁴

In Romans 12:1-2ff. we are to present our *bodies* as a living sacrifice. The order is to first present your body and then you will find your place in the Body of Christ. Life as a living sacrifice immediately translates into the discovery of your contribution to the body in service. It is common in Evangelicalism to “view the human body as merely physical, a mere mechanical device.” But that perspective is a “platonic imposition” upon the biblical view of the personality of man.¹⁵ James Herrick is immensely helpful in providing insight into the Gnostic view of the human body:

The Gnostic view of the body and physical existence runs consistently against the grain of the Revealed Word, a spiritual outlook that elevates both. According to the Word, a personal God intentionally created the physical universe, and it was from the beginning essentially good. Human physical existence—our embodiment—is purposeful and meaningful, not a cosmic accident. People have a body . . . that we might have at our disposal the resources that would allow us to be persons in fellowship and cooperation with a personal God.¹⁶

The epidemic of cyber-porn among Evangelicals is not merely attributable to technical advances which have increased both availability and anonymity. It is this author’s premise that the spirit-body

dichotomy contributes to the *disconnect* between faith and practice found in the lives of so many believers. If you live with the spirit-body dichotomy (*disconnect*), you are much more likely to let down the drawbridge of the heart and allow the stronghold of the soul to be breached by pornography.

The Ethical Symptoms of Disconnect—the ‘Pornification’ of a Generation

The epidemic of Evangelicals viewing pornography may be the most telling index, or symptom, of the Gnostic disconnect. Internet pornography is the unexamined “crime scene”—it is a substantial and traceable contributor to countless devastated lives, dysfunctional families, and divorced couples as well as contributing to spousal abuse and child molestation.

Al Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has warned that “the pervasive plague of pornography represents one of the greatest moral challenges faced by the Christian church in the postmodern age.” Says Mohler, “Eroticism has been woven into the very heart of the culture.” And, concerning its breadth of impact upon our culture and our perceptions, he says, “It is virtually impossible to escape the pervasive influence of pornography because it has been mainstreamed through commercial images and entertainment.”¹⁷

“The effects of the sin of pornography extend to almost every area of a person’s life,” Mohler continues. “Instead of pointing the sex drive to covenant fidelity in marriage, it degrades that drive into a sinful passion that robs God of His glory.” By yanking God’s gift of sexual intimacy from its context of marriage covenant it is changed into something idolatrous.¹⁸ *The world sees this as permissible because the body and soul are separate. The world’s defense is “My spirit and soul are for religion but my body is for myself.”*

Mohler also states that “pornography represents one of the most insidious attacks upon the sanctity of marriage and the goodness of sex within the one-flesh relationship. It is the celebration of debauchery rather than purity, and it leads to incalculable harm because it subverts marriage and the marriage bond.”¹⁹ By removing sexual relations from their place in Christian worldview, pornography declares war on God’s great purpose of glorifying Himself through the marriage bond. Mohler rightly notes:

[For] marriage is not merely the [lawful] arena of sexual activity, it is presented in Scripture as the divinely-designed arena for the display of God’s glory on earth as a man and a wife come together in a one-flesh relationship within the marriage covenant. Rightly understood and rightly ordered, marriage is a picture of God’s covenant faithfulness. Marriage is to display God’s glory, reveal God’s good gifts to His creatures, and protect human beings from the inevitable disaster that follows when sexual passions are divorced from their rightful place.²⁰

However, the Gnostic disconnect rips out the transcendental aspect from sexual relations. As Mohler observed, the world is using sex to fulfill its own selfish desires. The Gnostic disconnect is telling the world that every sexual expression is okay because sexuality is a separate entity from the spiritual realm. As a result, the Gnostic disconnect paves the way for people to commit all types of sexual immorality because the spirit, body, and soul are not one.

Mohler argues that by divine design God's gift of sexuality is meant to pull us out of ourselves and our self-occupied concerns and desires and toward our spouse. A husband cannot have a secret 'disconnected' life of pursuing lust and then expect to have God-glorifying emotional and sexual intimacy with his wife. The man committed to sexual purity is living in a state of sexual integrity toward his wife. In order to pursue their mutual pleasure in the marriage bed, the husband "is careful to live, to talk, to lead, and to love in such a way that his wife finds her fulfillment in giving herself to him in love." Their marital relations then become "the fulfillment of the entire relationship, and not an isolated physical act that is merely self-centered personal pleasure." "[T]his man can be confident that he is fulfilling his responsibilities both as a *male* and as a *man*. . . His sexual desires are being directed toward the one-flesh relationship that is the perfect paradigm of God's intention in creation."²¹ This is, by God's plan, the polar opposite of disconnect.

Sexual relations in marriage as a holistic expression are significant for how we are to understand the unity of God's plan for husband and wife. Marital relations, as God designed them, are *character-building* and *culture-making*. These relations are character-building because a man brings his entire lifestyle of masculine responsibility to the marriage bed. And, marital relations are culture-making because emotional and spiritual bonding takes place. These bonds are essential to the building up of the family environment in which children are nurtured and instructed so as to develop the ability to shape culture.²² A man's role in character-building and culture-making demand that he operates from the position of soul-body unity and not from the lie of soul-body disconnect.

Now, by way of radical contrast, consider another man enmeshed in the disconnect who uses his sex drive as a dynamo of lust. As he turns to pornography, his desires are NOT turned toward a spouse; but are turned inward. His arousal through illicit images is tantamount to the seduction of the imagination and the corruption of his soul.²³ This self-directed misuse of sexual desire becomes a 'tutorial' in selfishness. We are warned in 2 Peter 2:14 that by habitually sowing to lust it is possible to develop "a heart trained in greed." Mohler chides his disobedient readers with the following admonition:

Pornography is a slander against the goodness of God's creation and a corruption of this good gift God has given His creatures out of His own self-giving love. To abuse this gift is to weaken, not only the institution of marriage, but the fabric of civilization itself. To choose lust over love is to debase humanity and to worship the false god *Priapus* in the most brazen form of idolatry. The deliberate use of pornography is nothing less than the willful invitation of illicit lovers and objectified sex objects. . . The damage to a man's heart is beyond measure, and the cost in human misery will only be made clear on the Day of Judgment. . . In this society, we are called to be nothing less than a corps of the mutually accountable amidst a world that lives as if it will never be accountable.²⁴

Like an unseen internal parasite, porn feeds upon the very faculties of soul which we need for kindness, gentleness, self-control, empathy, mercy, and agape love. In Kevin Scott's book, "The Porning of America," the author observes that "the influence of porn on mainstream culture is affecting our self perceptions and behavior in everything from fashion to body image to how we conceptualize our sexuality.

Our kids are growing up in a “hyper-sexualized” environment. In MySpace photos and cell phone ‘sexting’ teens are imitating the porn they have actually seen and absorbed through the internet.²⁵

“Internet porn plays a part in an increasing number of divorce cases,” notes author Ross Douthat, who has gleaned this fact from a survey of matrimonial lawyers. This has prompted Douthat to pose the question, “Is pornography use a form of adultery [for a married man]?” He “suggests that we should . . . regard infidelity as a continuum of betrayal.” In other words, “The internet era has ratcheted the experience of pornography much closer to adultery than I suspect most porn users would like to admit.”²⁶ It is high time we warn our Christian brothers that porn use in any amount deepens the lying deception that the body is disconnected from the spirit. The satanic lie has always been that the deeds of the body are inconsequential to one’s spiritual state. In the Garden of Eden it was, ‘you may eat and not risk death and damnation’. Today the ancient Lie is propelling us toward Armageddon at warp speed.

The Disconnect is widening—broadened by Techno-Consumer Culture.

Author and professor of literature and film studies, Grant Horner opines that “the [computer] screen has been framed as the real world—we have gone from Windows as a ‘window’ to the world—to Windows is the world. The screen has become the world.” The screen is moving ever closer to the brain. The fighter pilot of previous wars looked out of his windscreen at the enemy. Now the computer display is often on the canopy of the cockpit and the latest technology offers the pilot another display on special contact lenses. All this to say that the screen “presents a limited visual space that [increasingly stands for] our entire visual plane. . . The screen is more than a window on the world—the screen *is* the world, as it is.”²⁷ Life in front of a computer screen has plunged us into “a far more ‘immersive’ state of consciousness than working in a factory or on a farm,” says Horner. “The screen has become THE visual space, visibility itself.”²⁸

The “pornification of culture” is shaping the way in which this society approaches sexual curiosity and the way in which it invents itself sexually. The vision of freedom without truth has radically removed the body from the realm of the sacred. Philosopher Michel Foucault championed this disastrous view of human freedom. His false view of personal liberty sends the message of *no consequence sex*. The result is a generation immersed in *erotica* and with mangled lives to show for it.²⁹ Auto-eroticism in front of a computer screen is sucking the life out of professing Christian men. The sexual compromise of internet porn makes a man ‘mute’ for Christ. It ‘hollows out’ his godly masculinity and makes his sword of truth inactive, corroding it to its scabbard where it sits useless, immobile, and idle.

Sexual Sin—misplaced Drive or Dysfunctional Worship?

When sex is taken out of its good, God-given context, it becomes a false integration point which fragments the person. Sex in its proper context, as said earlier, is a God-honoring celebration of our respective masculinity and femininity in covenant. We see this glorious truth best when we realize that the body and spirit are created by God to function as one. Marital relations are meant by God to deepen a man’s character and godly masculinity—and there is very clear reason for this. The marriage bed is to be the consummation and expression of a man’s whole life of godly masculinity toward his wife. In that sense, marital relations are unifying for the married couple. When we bow before God’s good, wise, and just creation structures, it

strengthens and enhances our humanity because we are functioning according to our design and according to the goal of divine teleology. In other words, the man is living for God's honor by living as His image.

By contrast, viewing illicit pornographic images fragments a man and leaves him with sexual brokenness. In essence, pornography is a kind of theft—it involves taking what is not ours. It short circuits character-building by allowing a man to serve the idol of pleasure and to experience a rush of endorphins. There is a momentary pleasure payoff, but without the character-building price of service, leadership, communication, love, and self-denial. Direct self-focused self-gratification brings the fallout of personal shame. It corrupts the soul because it enslaves and degrades, debasing a man to operate on the level of animal passions. God in Christ has an infinitely better plan for us.

Endnotes:

¹ Peter Jones, "Truthxchange"

² Tim Gallant, "Material Girls and Boys," (www.truth-and-beauty.com) p. 1

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James White, *Alpha Omega Ministries*, 11/5/08 webcast

⁷ Vishal Mangalwadi, "How Christianity lost America," 2011

⁸ Dave Doveton.

⁹ Divinely ordained *teleology* (or design), is the foundation of these transcendentals.

¹⁰ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), pp. 52, 112

¹¹ Ibid, p. 176

¹² Ibid, p. 481

¹³ Alcorn, p. 112

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988) p. 77

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 82

¹⁶ James Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2003) p. 271

¹⁷ Al Mohler, "The Seduction of Pornography," *Boundless Webzine*, 2005, p. 1

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview with Vishal Mangalwadi, missionary to India

²³ Ibid, p. 3

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 3-4

²⁵ Kevin Scott in "The Pornification of a Generation," book review, Jessica Bennett, *Newsweek*, 10/7/08

²⁶ Ross Douthat in Roberto Rivera y Carlo, "Porn Adultery & Marriage" *Boundless Webzine*, 2005

²⁷ Grant Horner, "Theorizing the Weightless Rhetoric of the Digital Spatialization of Knowledge," (The Master's College, Santa Clarita, CA, 2007), p. 5

²⁸ Ibid, p. 8

²⁹ Ravi Zacharias, "An Ancient Message, through Modern Means, to a Postmodern Mind," Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle, "Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Rorty, Foucault, and the Gospel," *Telling the Truth*, D. A. Carson, Gen. Ed. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), pp. 24, 83