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REASONS TO FILTER

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Why Filter?

This article intends to give reasons that, in the mind of this author, justify Internet filtering in the author's library on the campus of Liberty University. These are given in a very brief format, and are not intended to be inclusive, but rather to foster ideas, debate, and discussion.

Campus Philosophy, Mission, and Aims

The mission, aims, and general philosophy of Liberty University point toward guiding the student into a deeper, more fulfilling, more enriching walk with Christ.

The mission statement says that the university is to produce Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills required to impact tomorrow's world.

Some of the aims of the university are to provide its students with intellectual and cultural pursuits that:

- Explore the moral dimensions and ethical implications in the disciplines offered by the University.
- Promote the synthesis of academic knowledge and Christian values in order that there might be a maturing of spiritual, intellectual, social and physical behavior.
- Cultivate sensitivity to the needs of others and a commitment to the betterment of humanity.
- Encourage a commitment to the Christian life - one of actively communicating the Christian faith, personal integrity and social responsibility, which as it is lived out, points people to Jesus Christ as the Lord of the universe and their own personal Savior.¹

Even the general philosophy includes statements regarding the spiritual life of the students:

"The Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty has committed Liberty University to the highest standards of educational achievement and Christian conduct. The campus environment provides students with the opportunity to mature intellectually, socially and spiritually. Liberty University seeks to develop men and women of strong moral character."²

Pornography is not a Godly, Christ-centered activity, and it does not contribute to the moral or spiritual growth of the students on campus. Pornography is not merely ambivalent or indifferent in regards to its effects upon individuals. As will be discussed in the next section, it causes serious harm and is a deceitful trap to those enticed by it. It is this author's viewpoint that this type of content should be filtered from campus Internet access.

Irredeemable Quality of Pornographic Content

Pornography destroys minds, ministries, and marriages. (Does this really need to be defended?) Does anyone think that pornography helps people develop a positive view of women? Does anyone think that pornography helps solidify and strengthen marriages? Chuck Colson writes that:

"The spread of pornography is evidence that society has lost its sacred respect for human life. For the Christian, who has a high view of individual dignity, pornography is not only disgusting, it is debasing, a many-fingered beast that rakes dignity from both those it exploits and those it titillates. It corrupts the

very root of life — the sexual union ordained and blessed by God.”³

First, pornography ruins marriage. According to psychologist Douglas Kenrick’s research, “men shown pictures of Playboy models do later describe themselves as less in love with their wives than do men shown other images.”⁴ Earl Wilson, in his book *Sexual Sanity* writes: “Pornographic material is not designed to help you fantasize about your spouse, but about someone else’s spouse, or about children, or about someone of the same sex, and so on.”⁵

Second, pornography makes people dissatisfied with the beauty of God’s creation.⁶ “Many people get so engrossed in making comparisons that they ignore beautiful people with great potential for love and marriage. They also ignore their own potential and retreat deeper into the fantasy world of pornography.”⁷

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:12 that, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Pornography is an addiction that ruins the idea of self-discipline and self-control. In addition, “. . . Using sexually explicit material leads to being controlled by the fantasies and obsessions which the pornography industry seeks to create.”⁸ Pornography can create an obsession in which a person lives to read or watch sexually explicit material.⁹

David Alexander Scott writes that “. . . many professional people who deal with pornography’s victims feel there is already enough evidence to indict pornography as a public health menace.”¹⁰ James Dobson gave a number of things he views as the harms of pornography:

1. Depictions of violence against women are related to violence against women in real life.
2. Pornography is degrading and humiliating to women.
3. For a certain percentage of men, the use of pornography is progres-

sive and addictive in nature.

4. Organized crime controls more than 85 percent of all commercially produced pornography in America
5. Pedophiles, who abuse an average of 366 boys and girls in a lifetime, typically use pornography to soften children’s defenses against sexual exploitation.
6. Outlets for obscenity are magnets for sex-related crimes.
7. So-called adult bookstores are often centers of disease and homosexual activity.
8. I want to give special emphasis to the harm associated with pornography that falls into the hands of children and adolescents.”¹¹

I am aware of no patrons arguing that they could find no information on their topic because of Internet filtering software.

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop writes that pornography seems to have a persistent presence in the areas of sexual dysfunction, suicide among young people, copy-cat rapes, and child pornography.¹²

There is substantial evidence that pornography is a dangerous thing, and it has no place at a Christian university. As one individual wrote: “Pornography and spirituality do not coexist.”¹³ Though there would assuredly be debate over what is pornography and what is art, it is this author’s opinion that the above points alone serve as a justification for a Christian library to filter Internet content.

Libraries Don’t Purchase Everything

Libraries choose which material they will have available in their facility and which they will not. To do so they inherently find value in one material over another. It is this author’s opinion that simply because some content is put on paper in word or picture does not make it worthy of purchase by a library. Though some may not purchase material if it receives a poor review for

content or style, this author has rarely seen material rejected because it is immoral.

Is this censorship or merely a wise use of resources? At a university, is a library intended to be a storehouse of any and all information for the campus community or a storehouse of information that is necessary for the furtherance of the student’s educational goals? (The opinion of this author is that it is important for both, but that the primary focus is and should be on the latter.) Given those two acquisition goals, can anyone justify that the student community needs access to pornography? Filtering pornography does not block the needs of the campus population

with regard to entertainment, personal needs or in regard to educational resources.

Bible Mandates Holy Living

God commands Holy living. Pornography is not a part of that lifestyle. Those dedicated to holy living would want no part of it. Verses used in justification for this include, but certainly are not limited to:

Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Matthew 7:22-23 (KJV)

22 “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

1 Peter 1:13-16 (KJV)

13 “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ:

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:
15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation:
16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. "

Philippians 4:8 (KJV)

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. "

Internet Needs Self-Ratings

There are restrictions in place in the community to prevent minors from accessing adult-oriented content. For example, video games, music lyrics, and movies have rating systems or warnings to let adults know the types of content they would be viewing. Unfortunately, restrictions of this kind are not commonly available on the Internet. There are places which state that you must be eighteen or older to enter, but they do not check or verify whether the surfer is eighteen or not. Any reason for justifying the need for wrapping adult magazines, putting them on high shelves, and asking for proof of age before letting an individual access this content applies to the Internet as well. It is this author's opinion that there is more harm in allowing minors to have access to this content than there is in denying adults access to this content, and therefore it should be filtered at least until adequate protections are in place. (Should the Internet one day be able to regulate itself and limit access to adult sites, there is still no justification for having those adult sites made available for the students of our Christian colleges and universities.)

Free Thinking

The title of this section may appear to some as being a justification for having free access to the Internet. Actually this is meant to encourage

schools and libraries to think for themselves. Should an organization decide or dictate how we practice our behavior? Is not that the common practice of accreditation review boards? Certainly. Wherever possible, this author is all for following accepted standards and evaluations of behavior. What is to be done, though, when that organization recommends a practice that is incorrect? An argument can be made that whatever is legal is not necessarily moral. One need look no further than the tragedy of the Jewish Holocaust to see an example of a legal, required behavior that was certainly immoral and wrong. In addition, to the above, there is Peter's proclamation that "We must obey God rather than men!" Behavior that is against the mission of our university and is against the dictates of our Creator should not be practiced.

Quality of Filters

In this library there have been arguments from the patrons that the filter is too restrictive. This could be used as an argument against filtering as a whole, except for the fact that the software of this university is able to open a site that is incorrectly restricted. It is an extremely rare case when that needs to be done, and for the most part there seem to be very few comments of frustration because of the filters. This author has been aware of no patrons arguing that they could find no information on their topic because of the filtering software.

Conclusions

In the mind of this author, there is sufficient reason for the libraries of private Christian universities to filter internet content. As is hopefully obvious, the intention was to use an extreme type of content (pornography) to show that there are at least some things that should be filtered since they are in opposition to the mission of the university and in opposition to the

lifestyle prescribed in the Bible. It is not justifiable to follow a practice simply because it is dictated, if that practice is simply wrong. Providing access to this type of content is not justifiable, and thus there is a justification for some type of filtering at a private Christian university.

How much filtering should be done is certainly debatable. The purpose of this article was to show justification for some filtering, and by opening the door, move the discussion from whether to filter, to how much and what kind of material to filter.

¹ *The Liberty Way, 1999-2000*, (Lynchburg, Va.: Liberty University) p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ Tom Minnery, ed., *Pornography: a Human Tragedy*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) p. 19.

⁴ Wendy Shallit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*, (New York: Free Press, 1999) p. 53.

⁵ Earl D. Wilson, *Sexual Sanity: Breaking Free From Uncontrolled Habits*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1984) p. 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰ David Alexander Scott, "How Pornography Changes Attitudes," In Tom Minnery, ed., *Pornography: a Human Tragedy*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) p. 117.

¹¹ James Dobson, "Enough is Enough," In Tom Minnery, ed., *Pornography: a Human Tragedy*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) pp. 39-43.

¹² C. Everett Koop, "Pornography and Public Health," In Tom Minnery, ed., *Pornography: a Human Tragedy*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) pp. 107-108.

¹³ "The Victims Speak," In Tom Minnery, ed., *Pornography: a Human Tragedy*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) p. 165.