

IS PORNOGRAPHY BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE?

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Let's begin by acknowledging "is pornography biblical grounds for divorce?" is either a heart-wrenching or awkward question to ask. If you are reading this article, it is either because your world has been turned upside down by the issue or because you have been called on to help someone try to put their world back together. This is not light reading and you cannot read with a light heart.

Even before we begin to examine the subject, let's consider the large number of issues that domino from either answer: children's futures, attorneys, finances, embarrassment, dignity, trust, endless questions about motives, tip-of-the-iceberg fears about other sexual activity, the long road of restoration if we work on the marriage, how can I discern true repentance, "you said you would change before," and many other concerns. Neither answer is easy (marital restoration or divorce), or really even easier.

With that being said, it is wise to pause at this point in the article and pray. Pray for God to give you the ability to focus while reading (and not start having hypothetical conversations with your spouse or friend you are helping). Pray for the ability not to attack your spouse with what you read when it affirms your hurts/fears and for the ability not to attack what you read when it challenges you. Pray that this article would guide you to a wise, God-honoring decision in the midst of a situation where right answers will not result in easy paths or immediate confirmations of a good choice.

Rationale Behind the Question

For some this is "merely" (not with a negative connotation) an emotional question in the moment. It is an eloquent and sharp exclamation point at the end of "You hurt me." The purpose of asking the question is to reinforce the point that this is not "just pornography." In this case, the question will subside when the offending spouse shows the appropriate degree of fear/penance, or when another marital/family issue becomes more pressing than pornography.

For others, however, this question seeks a well thought out scripturally-based answer. They may want out (they're not sure), but most of all they want to honor Scripture in all of their actions. In this case, the question is not asked as a rhetorical device to illicit guilt or communicate the degree of one's pain, but to discern whether the Bible would give me freedom to pursue divorce.

Usually this person has studied their Bible well and has narrowed the discussion to two key texts: Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:27-30. The question of the first passage regards the original Greek language, and the second has to do with the proper application of Jesus' metaphor.

"And I [Jesus] say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality [Greek word: *pornea*], and marries another, commits adultery." Matt 19:9 (ESV)

The Greek word for unfaithfulness or sexual immorality is *pornea*; from which we get our English word "porn" or "pornography." So the question is raised, "Does Jesus make pornography a grounds for divorce in Matthew 19?" We will attempt to answer the question later. Our purpose here is to demonstrate that this is a legitimate question and not just an emotional outburst.

The legitimacy of this question is further strengthened by the way Jesus taught on lust in the Sermon on the Mount.

“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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” Matt 5:27-30 (ESV)

Jesus does draw a direct and strong correlation between lust (and all pornography does involve lust) and adultery. Jesus is not speaking as a spurned or bitter wife. Jesus is speaking as the One who came to “fulfill” the Law (Matt 5:17). Jesus came both to live out the law perfectly so that He could be our perfect sacrifice and to explain the full implication of the law so that we would not become loop-hole-seeking, cold-hearted defense attorneys (not to indict defense attorneys).

This passages force us to consider the question of pornography as a form of adultery that would provide biblical grounds for divorce seriously and not to dismiss it as the “merely emotional” words of a hurt spouse. Before we seek an “answer” there is value in pausing again for another reflection.

Pause to Address Hurt

It would be easier if this were merely an academic question; something on a theology or counseling exam. But that is not how you come to this article. You come to this article as either the offended spouse, offending spouse, or concerned helper. There is no “theory” or “theology” for you. It is reality. A choice will be made; not just a conclusion reached.

The following statements represent the hurts that are frequently associated with the offended spouse. The goal here is not to resolve each of these hurts or to say that you should feel everything listed, but simply to help you feel less alone (which causes the hurt to echo as well as increasing the duration and intensity of the pain). Hopefully, after reading this section you can affirm, “Yes, this article is speaking to my situation and grasps what is going on in my life/heart.”

- **“It happened in my own home.”** This can sometimes feel like an affair in the couples own bed. The computer is used frequently by most everyone. “I am afraid if we don’t go to bed at the same time. I am reminded every time I get on-line.”
- **“So many things have become triggers for anger and sorrow.”** Whereas before suggestive television commercials were a nuisance and a commentary on the moral slide of our culture. Now they are a personal threat. Billboards, commercial mailings, and trips to the mall become a minefield of reminders.
- **“I wonder what is wrong with me and right about *those women*.”** It is incredibly hard not to personalize a sin like pornography when it is committed by a spouse. This question haunts, but there are no good answers, because it is rooted in false assumptions (but more will be said about that later).
- **“I feel more like a mother than a wife in the marriage now.”** Whenever one spouse must check up on the other for matters of basic personal responsibility or marital honor the nature of the relationship changes. You begin to feel less like a spouse (at least when this subject comes up) and more like a parent. That is uncomfortable and unhealthy in general. It is infuriating when it is questioned or challenged – “Now you’re going to make this about me, are you?”
- **“I feel like he was willing to gamble with our family.”** Pornography is more than just lust; it’s gambling. The thrill of masturbation was worth the chance of hurting one’s family; sometimes of losing one’s job. That is more than guilt talk. It is the reality of the choice.

- **“It’s not just the porn. It’s also all the lies.”** Pornography does not come without lies and cover up. This makes every word that is heard come under suspicion; adding to the pain of the wife and the sense of “what’s the point in talking” for the husband.
- **“If I chose to work on the marriage, am I condoning his actions.”** The more times that pornography has been an issue in a marriage the more this concern weighs on the offended spouse. “I forgave last time and it ‘didn’t work.’” The lack of guarantees, even when promises are being made, multiplies the sense of betrayal and uncertainty.
- **“Is this my fault? Did I not do something that caused him to do this?”** Responsibility comes with the benefit of control. “If I did something to cause this, then I can make sure I don’t do that again.” Responsibility in this case also comes with the after taste of fear of not doing “it” right enough, blame-shifting, and eventually resentment.
- **“It is hard to be comforted by the one I most want comfort from.”** This brings us back to feeling alone. Pornography is a matter generally kept private. But when it’s private, the only person you can talk to is your spouse. They feel awkward comforting you and often feel attacked by the repetitious conversation, and it is hard to cry in the arms of the one who hurt you.
- Other: (Write in your hurt) _____

Thinking About Matthew 19

What are we to make of the fact that when Jesus gave permission to divorce (but did not require or give guidelines for when this “permission” was best utilized) on the grounds of adultery that he used the word *pornea* in Matthew 19:9? Before we said this is a legitimate question. Now we must begin to answer it.

The primary concern in resolving this question is to understand the relevance of an English word deriving its history from a Greek word. For the moment, this will be a theological discussion. But hopefully it will not lose relevance or personal concern for your situation.

Often too much is made of the origin of a word. A common example is found in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV):

“Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful [Greek word: *ilaron*] giver.”

The fact that we get our English word “hilarious” from the Greek word *ilaron* does not mean God is disappointed when the offertory hymn does not have the effect of a stand up comedy routine. The modern connotation of “hilarious” does not tell us anything about what Paul had in mind as he was instructing the Corinthian church. Knowing the history of the word may help us remember or relate to the passage, but it does not influence the meaning of the passage.

Another example to illustrate this point can be found in Acts 1:8 (ESV).

“But you will receive power [Greek word: *dunamin*] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We get our English word “dynamite” from this Greek word *dunamin*. However, our modern English word does not change or impact Jesus message to His disciples before ascending into heaven. If we tried to say Jesus use of the word *dunamin* gave warrant for the use of explosive devices like dynamite in defending Christian causes, we would be radically misapplying the passage.

If you would like to consider this point of biblical interpretation further, you would find pages 33-35 of D.A. Carson’s book *Exegetical Fallacies* (1996; Baker Books). On these pages Dr. Carson discusses the “semantic anachronism” or, more simply put, the wrong use of a word’s history in interpreting the Bible.

With this said, Matthew 19 alone does not support viewing pornography as biblical grounds for divorce. However, the question still remains, “Does Matthew 5:27-30 require that we interpret Matthew 19:9 as giving biblical grounds for divorce? Does the connection Jesus draws between lust and adultery give permission when the modern usage of the “pornography” having its historical roots in the Greek word *pornea* does not?”

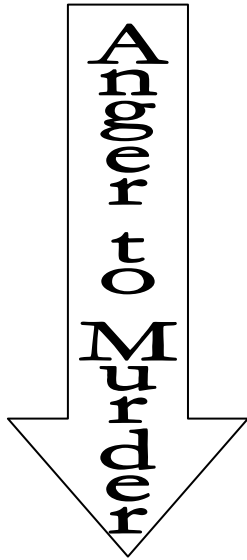
Thinking About Matthew 5

In trying to discern how to interpret the Matthew 5 passage on lust, it is important to notice that the passage is part of a series of topics Jesus was addressing with the same general formula: “You have heard that it was said [quote the Old Testament], but I say to you [teach the full meaning of the law as Jesus said he would in Matthew 5:17].” Jesus uses this formula to address anger (5:21-26), lust (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), keeping promises (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), and obligations towards one’s enemies (5:43-48).

There are two implications from this. First, whatever Jesus was teaching about lust and adultery would necessarily be consistent with what He taught on the other subjects. Second, whatever application we make regarding lust and adultery we should be able to make regarding the other subjects.

The goal of Jesus’ words in each case was to teach His listeners not to focus exclusively on outward behavior and the “letter of the law,” but to focus on the purity of heart that each law expects of God’s children. Jesus was not interested in moral loopholes. He wanted the undivided loyalty in His followers. As a wife, I think you can more than understand the difference right now. As soon as your husband says “technically” you cringe, scream, or cry.

With anger, Jesus was saying that the command “You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13)” is broken long before you place a knife to someone’s throat with malice-aforethought. Figure 1 is meant to represent the mindset behind Jesus’ teaching on anger.



1. Valuing Something More Than Someone
2. Aggressive Thoughts
3. Rude Words
4. Intimidating Actions
5. Mild Physical Force In A Moment of Rage
6. Mild Physical Force With Less Provocation
7. Infliction Of Major Non-Life Threatening Injuries
8. Killing Unintentionally In A Moment of Rage
9. Killing Intentionally

Figure 1: Sample Progression from Anger to Murder

While we may look at this diagram and quibble over the order of a few of the middle descriptions or want to add a more complete listing of anger's expression, we can see how every action emerges from the first thing on the list. When we value something more than a particular person we will sacrifice the dignity of that person in order to capture our heart's desire.

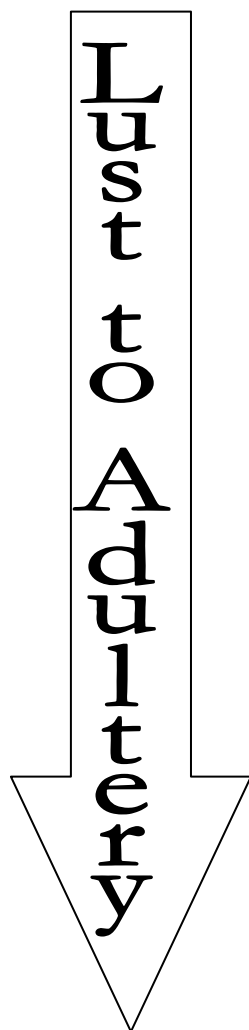
The questions that become relevant for this discussion are, "When do/should legal penalties become applicable?" and "When does/should the maximum legal penalty become relevant?" Jesus says, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:22 ESV)."

We do not take this passage to mean that life in prison or the death penalty is applicable for the parents who angrily scold their child with, "What in the world were you thinking when you tied your open paint set to the ceiling fan?" But Jesus is saying that is where murder begins – the momentary valuing one's living room suite more than one's child.

We also look at this progression and see that some penalty should be inflicted before an individual escalates to the point of murder. There are laws that prohibit "lesser" forms of violence than murder. Those laws come with sentences less than life in prison or execution.

Jesus' goal in teaching on anger, however, was not to justify an elaborate legal system. Jesus was calling on His followers to attack each sin at its root and to read the law not as a set of right actions but as a description of right values. If we learn not to value things more than people, we will avoid more than murder and experience more freedom/joy than avoiding an extended prison stay.

Now let us move to the subject of lust as Jesus addresses it in Matthew 5. Figure 2 seeks to develop the kind of progression Jesus was referring to, but is updated for modern lust outlets. This diagram will guide much of the discussion regarding the subject of pornography and divorce.



1. **Objectifying A Person:** Reducing a person to a certain set of appealing features and measuring the person's value by how much they please you.
2. **Lingering Look:** Using the objectification above as a scoring system and savoring actual people.
3. **Entertaining Thoughts:** Allowing the scoring system to develop into a story in which you interact with someone in your imagination.
4. **Seeking "Soft" Porn:** Using television or catalogs to provide more "choice" but non-nude objects of lust and imagination.
5. **Seeking Full Porn:** Pursuing nude images and videos on the internet or other media forms and having the imagination expanded by professional "story tellers." The frequency, duration, and perversion of this activity can vary.
6. **Interaction With Real, Anonymous Person:** The other participant in the story becomes a real person with a real voice and a free will. This can be 1 (900) numbers, provocative chat rooms, strip club, or "sexting."
7. **Emotional Relationship with a Known Person Without Touch:** No longer is the other real person unknown. They have a real name, face, and history. They know your real name, face, and history.
8. **Emotional Affair With Touch, Without Sex:** This is probably the rarest item on the list, although it is frequently said to exist. This is a relationship with a real person with kissing, massage, and other non-intercourse affections.
9. **One Time Sexual Affair:** Now the intercourse barrier has been crossed, but (as in the case of a prostitute or drunken business trip fling) the relational connection may be low.
10. **Affair In Connected Relationship:** In terms of marital threat, the sexual affair is now secondary to the deepening "love" between the spouse and mistress. Sex is no longer a mere expression of passion, but also devotion.
11. **Affair As Pseudo-Spouse / Leaving:** No longer is the faithful spouse making the decision regarding divorce. The unfaithful spouse is the active party seeking the disavowment of the marriage to pursue the mistress.

Figure 2: Sample Progression from Lust to Adultery

To this point much of the discussion of Matthew 5 has been theoretical. I want to return now to a more practical tone. Find the point on the scale of Figure 2 that best fits your current marital situation. Recognize that if it is on the scale it is wrong. Nothing about what will be said in the rest of this article or in conversations with your spouse will change that. Just because something is "not an 11" does not make it less wrong. You have been sinned against in a very personal way.

Let us begin to walk down Figure 2. Ideally you want a spouse who sees the problem of numbers 1 through 4 and commits to fighting for your honor at the level of his imagination (Rom 8:13). That may be a hard thing for him to acknowledge at this point. It either sounds like "guilt talk" making him feel further from "good enough" or empty promises that wouldn't make things better even if they were said.

With that said, ask your spouse to read this article. Before anything can be decided about "where we go from here" (destination) the two of you have to figure where you are (starting point). When a couple does not know where they are or where they are going, this will necessarily create a great deal of defensiveness, mistrust, and conflict even without an emotionally powerful subject like pornography to navigate.

Chances are, if you are reading this article, you are at least at the number 5 and it is likely not the first time you have been here. In the closing section "Advice to Wives," we will examine what key questions you should ask and what

reasonable expectations you should have at this level of offense. But the question of repetition and stagnation should be addressed. The more times you come back to this place, the wider the circle of awareness should become. Sins like pornography fester in anonymity. If your spouse is uncooperative this may mean bringing the matter before your church leaders for formal church discipline.

If matters move beyond number 5, a significant change has happened. At number 6 the sin is becoming more public. Pornography is often a very private, insecure sin. Privacy and insecurity serve as a bit of a fence. When lust “goes public” it is more dangerous to the marriage.

Another major shift occurs at number 7. The unknown-to-known jump means that the mistress (who is now a person rather than an urge or an idealistic image) now also wants the immoral relationship. This means that ending the relationship will involve two simultaneous and sustained actions by two people whose judgment and will are impeded by sin’s influence (II Pet 1:8-9). First, your spouse must want to end the relationship and cut off all contact. Second, the mistress must quit seeking any form of contact.

A final major shift occurs when an individual has had affairs with multiple people; either multiple one-time affairs or in multiple sexual relationships. This demonstrates a much stronger disregard for the marriage and family. Since this article is about pornography and not affairs, the advice given here will focus on offenses between numbers 1 and 6. The information regarding levels 7 through 11 are given to illustrate the purpose and application of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5.

After examining the Matthew 5 passage, I do not believe there is evidence for biblical grounds for divorce until there has been sexual intercourse with another lover. However, if your spouse repetitively engages in numbers 6, 7, or 8 and is not willing to submit to accountability, the authority of the church, or counseling, then an intervention or purposeful separation may be viable options. These steps should be made in consultation with a trusted pastor or Christian counselor.

However, in concluding that pornography does not provide biblical grounds for divorce, that is not meant to minimize the sin or hurt. In the following two sections advice is provided for both the wife and husband for a marriage between numbers 3 through 6.

5 Pieces of Advice to Wives

1. Realize you have been sinned against, so pain, anger, and confusion are not wrong. If you start to look at the statistics on the prevalence of pornography and as you get tired of dealing with the subject, you will likely wonder if you are just over-reacting. Just because something is common does not make it less wrong or less painful. You should not stop/camp out in your pain, but neither should you feel guilty for it.

You may have over-reacted at times in what you said or who you said it to. This wrong does not erase the wrong done to you. Neither does the wrong done to you erase your need to repent. Resist allowing conversation to degenerate into a guilt competition. The purpose of your repentance is not to let you husband off the hook, but to return the focus to the primary matter of marital restoration – his sexual sin.

2. Realize that pornography is not primarily about you. This is hard for many women to accept. Lust is not usually against anyone (vindictively); it’s just for pleasure (unbridled hedonism). Even as you accept that you have faults in the marriage, these faults did not cause your spouse’s sin. Later in the restoration process, these faults may cause you and your spouse to consider some marriage enrichment, but marriage enrichment is not pornography prevention.

It is tempting to believe that you caused your husband's sin. If this were true, it would give you some control over preventing him from sinning this way again. Many books on marriage that speak of "needs" and "love tanks" might lead you to believe that your husband only sinned because his needs were not met. This is simply untrue and contrary to Scripture. We sin because we are sinners.

Consider the analogy of appetite. Bad cooking does not cause hunger any more than good cooking eliminates hunger. Sin is an appetite of the fallen human condition. Whether the food is good or bad, hunger will return. Even with a perfect spouse temptation will come at opportune times. Where and how we choose to eat (handle our temptation) is the moral responsibility of each person.

If you personalize the sin of your husband, two things will happen. First, you will magnify the pain of this time period by considering pornography not only a betrayal but also a personal insult. Second, you will grow to resent everything you do to bless the marriage from this point forward because it will carry the pressure of not pushing your husband back into sin. It will feel like the blame-shifting has merged with every effort of marital enrichment you do.

3. Forgiveness does not mean naivety or the removal of any expectations. Too often we view forgiveness as just being nice and pretending nothing happened. *Forgiveness removes the punishment of sin not the responsibility to pursue holiness.* As you seek to wisely forgive your husband, below is a list of questions that it is recommended that you ask your husband. Your purpose in asking these questions is not to be his counselor or his conscience, but to help you piece together the history of your marriage (something you lost when this surprise disrupted your life) and survey the severity of his struggle with pornography.

- When did you first look at pornography?
- What forms of pornography have you looked at (magazine, video, internet)?
- In the last year what is the longest period of time you have gone without viewing pornography?
- Have you ever viewed live pornography (massage parlor, strip show, prostitute, affair)?
- Are there any particular fetishes that you have developed in your viewing of pornography?
- Have you ever sought accountability to help you stop? If so, who? How long did it last?
- How have you lied to me and covered your tracks in order to prevent me from learning of your habit?
- Do you have pornography hidden any where?
- Have you ever been confronted about pornography at work and has your job ever been in danger?
- Have you subscribed to any pornographic websites and do you have a secret credit card you use for these purchases?
- Do you have a secret e-mail account at which you receive pornographic mail?
- Have you ever interacted with a live person on the phone, in chat, or by webcam?
- Have you ever put your real name and contact information in a personals website?

These questions may be hard to ask and hard to listen to the answers. You need to be prepared to ask them. In order to know the types of steps that need to be made to restore the marriage, these things need to be known. In order to not be naïve, you must "know the facts."

If your husband is defensive or refuses to answer these questions, that is reason to doubt his repentance. That is not to say that he is not sorry for his actions, but repentance involves the commitment to change and the willingness to take the steps necessary to ensure that change happens (Jesus used graphic hyperbole to make this point clear in Matthew 5). More will be said on your husband's need to be transparent in numbers 2-4 under "Advice to Husbands."

4. Do not try to be your spouse's primary accountability partner. Asking the questions above is not the same thing as being an accountability partner. An accountability partner is an on-going relationship for the specific purpose

of rooting out sin and pursuing holiness. Often because of the privacy desired and embarrassment associated with pornography a couple is tempted to ask the wife to be the accountability partner. After all, “she already knows.”

This is a bad dual relationship. The husband is more likely to lie to his wife so as “not to hurt her further” and, thereby, believe his deceit is somewhat noble. The wife lives in fear and carries the burden of always having to ask. Eventually she either takes on a “moral mother” role or believes she should quit asking in the name of forgiveness. Neither is good for the marriage or rooting out the sin of lust. Another evidence (and fair expectation) of your husband’s repentance is his willing pursuit of someone with whom he is willing to maintain a long-term accountability relationship.

5. Allow your insecurities and struggle to forgive to point you to Christ. This moment is bigger than you are. When you feel like you do not have the strength, patience, grace, courage, or will to get through all that will be required of you, you are exactly right. Here the words of Paul in II Corinthians 1:8-9 and identify with him:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

You are in the same place (as a sufferer) with your struggle to forgive and work on the marriage as your husband (as a sinner) is with his struggle to overcome lust – completely dependant upon Christ.

Do not think that this means God orchestrated these events to teach you something new. That is another form of blame-shifting for sin. Rather view the growth you will experience (personally, in marriage, and spiritually) as part of the redemption God will do in the midst of the pain.

Each time that you are tempted to lash out to protect your broken heart, remember there is One who has promised to never leave you and to walk through the darkest places with you (Psalm 23:4). When you are tempted to think that you just cannot do this anymore, remember that His strength is made perfect in your weakness (II Cor 12:9). As you are tempted to think you are alone in this betrayal remember that Jesus was also betrayed by a kiss (Luke 22:47-48). Turning to Christ does not make the suffering less intense, but it does make it less alone and less dependant upon you.

5 Pieces of Advice to Husbands

1. Do not let relief of shame turn the emotional tables on your wife. It is very common for husbands to turn the emotional tables on their wife after a pornography habit is found out. This can happen in two ways. First, the husband feels relief because he no longer has to carry the burden of his secret life. The burden is passed to the wife who had no idea and is now in shock. The legitimate hope that you feel now that the secret is out should lead you to be prompt in following through on the third piece of advice below. In the mean time, do not be so self-centered that you let your relief minimize the burden you have passed to your wife.

Second, the husband can feel intense shame for his actions or feel that beating himself up for his “stupid” choices is a sign of more genuine or deeper repentance. The wife is placed in a position to either join in the bashing by agreeing with his wallowing or to rescue the husband by comforting him. Neither is good for the marriage. You need to speak in a way that takes full responsibility for your actions and conveys a willingness to take the steps necessary to overcome this sin. However, this should not cause you to lose sight of the fact that your wife is hurting.

2. Do not get angry or insistent on a time table of forgiveness. Forgiveness takes time and you do not get to hold the stop watch. If the first piece of advice was about not turning the emotional tables on your wife, the second piece of advice is about not turning the moral tables on your wife. Do not say any version of, “I said I was sorry and

now the Bible says you have to forgive or you are the one sinning not me.” For you to take the moral high ground in the days or weeks after hurting your wife is wrong and an abuse of Scripture. You will be severely damaging your ability to be the Christian leader of your home if you use God in this way for a short-term advantage.

It is important here to differentiate between forgiveness and restoration. Forgiveness is the willingness to relinquish a debt or cancel a punishment on the basis of grace not merit. Restoration is the process of repairing something to its original condition or better. Restraining from using your sin against you in an argument, taking verbal digs when she is insecure, and only talking to mutually trusted agreed upon friends (see #3 below) are parts of forgiveness. Learning to trust, wanting to see the fruit of repentance, warming up to more natural expressions of affection, and regaining a moral respect are parts of restoration.

You must remember you do not deserve forgiveness. That is an act of love and obedience she gives to God of which you are only the beneficiary. If you forget this, your sense of entitlement will shipwreck your repentance (which is just as continuous as her forgiveness). You must also expect that restoration will take longer than forgiveness. If you mistake the two, you will wrongly criticize your wife for not forgiving and she will grow discouraged and say, “I just can’t do it; maybe divorce is the best/only option” because you have mislabeled a marathon as a sprint.

3. Be pro-active in seeking accountability for you and support for your wife. One of the most important ways that you can protect your wife at this time and fan the flame of relief/hope you feel (if that is the case) is by seeking out an accountability partner who is not your wife. This person should be someone that the two of you mutually trust.

The reason for seeking out this person is not so that your wife *will not* ask you questions. If your wife asks you questions, you should answer them honestly and without defensiveness. The reason for seeking this person is so that you wife will not *have to* ask you questions. Unless you have an accountability partner your wife will know that unless she asks you questions, no one else will. That is a fearful position to put her in.

As you decide who to ask, considering the following points about a good accountability relationship:

- You need to be able to meet in person weekly or at least every other week.
- You should be comfortable calling them and with them calling you.
- They need to have an active walk with the Lord and participation in a local church.
- This person needs to have the courage to speak about sin and ask direct questions.
- They need to demonstrate wisdom in decision making and relationship. If your wife has requests of you that you are uncomfortable with, you should talk with this person about them. Ask your wife to write her request to make sure you present it fairly.
- It is helpful if they are willing to allow you to hold them accountable for some things as well. One-sided accountability relationships tend to be very short-lived.
- As the relationship develops it needs to address more than pornography. You are asking this person to walk with you on a journey to be a better Christian, husband, and father; not merely to be porn-free.
- You should start by answering the questions listed in “Advice to Wives” number three with your accountability partner.
- Another important step for your accountability and your wife’s trust is to install accountability software on computers to which you have unsupervised access. A free version can be found at www.xxxchurch.com or, if you have multiple users on the same computer, www.covenanteyes.com has a more elaborate program. Either way, these programs will send a regular e-mail report of your internet usage to your accountability partner.

4. Realize you will likely need to be more real than you have ever been. One of the common descriptions of pornography is that it is “intimacy without vulnerability.” Often those who look at pornography are uncomfortable

being open in a relationship with a real person. Pornography provides the pleasure of pseudo-closeness without any of the risks of rejection. Pornography is also often used as a form of stress relief or a way to escape from life for a little while.

In any case, if you are going to honor your marriage you must learn to share with your wife what you hid with sin. It is not enough to not sin. Unless you learn to be healthily vulnerable and authentic it will only be a matter of time before you find another outlet to find “pleasure/relief without vulnerability.” It may not be porn. It could be fishing, video games, alcohol, television, or any number of things. Regardless of what you replace the pseudo-closeness with, unless it is the openness Scripture calls for a husband and wife to share, it will deteriorate the marriage. For practical guidance on this consider the articles “Vulnerability by the Beatitudes” or “Not Again Sin” found under “Articles” at www.bradhambrick.com. These would be good resources to study with your accountability partner.

5. Allow your sin and folly to point you to your need for Christ. You have to admit that you will not overcome this struggle in the way you should in your own strength. Many parts of this article have probably discouraged you greatly. That is because this article has focused on what is necessary without consideration of your family history, social position, personality, or relational weaknesses. The question is not, “What can/can’t you do?” The question is, “Who will you surrender to –self or Christ?” That is the ultimate question before everyone of us (Luke 9:23-26).

This article was written primarily for your wife. Not to take her side, but to give her guidance. You are reading it to understand better the hurts and challenges in her life at this time. For that reason, guiding you through the challenges in front of you has not been addressed as thoroughly. An excellent resource for you to study (personally and with your accountability partner) to guide you is Joshua Harris’ book *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)*.

Closing Thoughts

There is hope and it is worth it. It has been the goal of this article to walk you through the question “Is pornography biblical grounds for divorce?” Hopefully you have had the chance to study and reflect on the key passage where God’s Word addresses the subject.

Beyond answering the question, efforts have been made to guide you in regards to “what’s next.” This is not a journey you should take alone (as individuals or as a couple). I would advise consulting with the person who gave you this article or with a trusted pastor, elder, or Christian counselor as you seek to take the journey through restoration to the marriage that God intended.