



Is Viewing Pornography Grounds for Divorce?

by Rose Colón

My friend and I sat down to lunch at a local restaurant the other day. Shortly after giving the waitress our order, my friend looked at me and said, “You remember, Linda and Charles, don’t you?” “Yes,” I replied excitedly, “How are they doing?” When my friend’s eyes dropped to the table and the silence lengthened, I knew it wasn’t going to be the good news I hoped for. “Well,” my friend began, “Linda called me ...”

My friend proceeded to update me on the situation with Charles and Linda. It was an all too familiar story. Linda had become concerned and did a little investigating. She found evidence that Charles had been looking at pornography on his laptop—again. She confronted him; he denied it; the evidence was produced, and now Charles and Linda are separated.

Linda feels she’s been down this road countless times before. I knew from past conversations we’ve had that she would undoubtedly be wrestling now with whether to seek a divorce from her 16-year marriage to Charles. This is the same question I face over and over in counseling hurting wives like Linda. “Can I divorce because of my husband’s obsession with pornography?”

What these women really mean is, “Does the Bible permit me to divorce for pornography?”

Like many of the questions that arise in counseling, there aren’t simple black-and-white, yes-or-no answers. In order to deal with divorce from a biblical viewpoint, one of the first things we must do is take a closer look at God’s view of marriage.

In Genesis 2:24, we read God’s original design for marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall *become one flesh*.” Clearly, marriage was to be permanent. And Jesus affirms this when the Pharisees questioned Him concerning divorce: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Perhaps it’s simply the prevalence of divorce that has led us to lose sight of the permanency God intended for the marriage covenant. The most recent statistics tell us that 50% of first marriages end in divorce, and 80% of second marriages end in divorce.

Yet in Malachi 2:16, we hear the heart of the Creator, “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce.” I believe the reason God hates divorce is because marriage was meant to be a blood covenantal relationship (Malachi 2:13-14), meaning it was to be for life (Matthew 19:6;

Mark 10:8). Marriage was also to be a representation of Christ and His commitment to the Church (Ephesians 5:25-32; II Corinthians 11:2, 3).

Then why is the divorce rate among Christians just as high as for the unsaved? How can that be?

For the past 16 years, as I have counseled at Pure Life Ministries, I have seen firsthand the devastating effects of sexual sin on families and upon the marriage covenant. It has been heartbreaking to watch God's original design for marriage destroyed by the same lie of the serpent that came to Eve in the Garden. The lie that "there is something better outside of God's original plan and design" has been passed down from generation to generation; and this lie is truly straight from the pit of hell.

Some may ask, "What about the rest of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees? After pronouncing the permanency of marriage, Matthew's Gospel records a further exchange:

"They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.' " (Matthew 19:7-9)

When one reads these words, it certainly appears that Jesus is saying divorce is permissible on the grounds of sexual immorality. In Matthew 5:27-28 Jesus also says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Does that mean if my husband is committing acts of sexual immorality, including viewing pornography, that I have a ticket out of my marriage?

Given the biblical insights into the intended permanency of marriage, I feel it is my first obligation as a biblical counselor to encourage perseverance and offer hope to any wife who's dealing with her husband's sexual sin. Even if the Bible offers a way out, that doesn't make divorce the best option for every person in every circumstance.

When Jesus condoned divorce for reasons of sexual immorality, I believe He was referring to those who were in ongoing, unrepentant fornication with another person. Furthermore, He said Moses only permitted divorce due to the hardness of our hearts, but reiterated that from the beginning it was not so.

Therefore, if a spouse is truly repentant (see Psalm 51), meaning he or she is willing to take full responsibility for the sins committed, if he is willing to humble himself by submitting to his spiritual leaders and get the help that he needs, there is absolutely no reason why this couple should file for a divorce—especially if they are both professing Christians. Isn't the whole message of the gospel is a message of love, forgiveness and reconciliation?

We see this quite plainly in the account of the woman caught in adultery—caught in the very act—by the Pharisees (John 8:3-12). This woman was in sin and she was deserving of the consequences of her sin, which according to the Levitical law meant being stoned to death

(Leviticus 18). However, Jesus told the Pharisees, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

What always amazes me about the words of Jesus is that they cut to the heart and expose the darkness of our own evil heart that is so prone to condemn another’s sin.

The beauty of this story is that none of her accusers were able to cast any stones at her. Jesus lovingly asks, “‘Woman where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ And she said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’ Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” What a picture of the loving and forgiving heart of God! If there is true genuine repentance, no matter what the sexual sin is, the power of the Cross is greater.

But what if the spouse is unrepentant and unwilling to change?

We have seen countless situations in which husbands have been involved in homosexuality, prostitution, self-gratification, pornography or habitual affairs for years. The wives of virtually all of these men felt they had biblical grounds for divorcing their spouse when his sin was exposed. However, many have seen God miraculously and suddenly grant the gift of repentance to their spouse. These “re-born” marriages are living testimonies of the power of the Cross—a power greater than any sexual sin known to mankind! I’m thoroughly convinced that no marriage is beyond God’s ability to restore.

Many biblical scholars have concluded that the Scriptures do support divorce in a situation when a spouse is in unrepentant sexual sin, including pornography. However, others say this conclusion is not at all clear. Regardless, I would still encourage you to make sure this is how God is leading you, and also to remember that He really does *hate* divorce.

You must also consider that God is full of mercy and is able to make all things new. God will not give up on your spouse. He is preparing the way for his (or her) repentance. The truth is, you will please Him much more if you hang onto the hope He promises in His Word. You will please Him much more by remaining steadfast in prayer and being a vessel of mercy in your spouse’s life.

I will be the first to acknowledge, this is hard to do. Living as a true Christian IS hard, even impossible, without the grace of God. But the rewards are eternal. Whether your spouse ever responds or not, you will be blessed by choosing this path. You will find a much greater intimacy with your eternal Husband, Jesus Christ.

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