

# Pornography

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**Summary:** Christians should recognise and be on their guard against the many harms caused by pornography and advocate for an end to the porn industry.



## Key points - a clash of worldviews

### The world claims pornography is not immoral

- The world sees nothing wrong with pornography; it says that sexuality is a natural thing, and so it can be explored without (many) limits. Old conventions about what is and isn't acceptable are restrictive, and people should be able to pursue their own pleasure on their own terms.
- But in the Christian worldview, sex is a good gift from a loving Creator God. He has decided the boundaries for sex and they are clear: sex is for one man and one woman in the context of the covenant bond of marriage, a picture of the relationship between Jesus and His bride, the church. For the Christian, the sexual ethic is clear: fidelity within marriage, and chastity outside it.

### The world claims that watching pornography only affects yourself

- The world believes that living out your sexuality is seen as an innately positive thing, and watching pornography simply scratches an itch. If you want a sexual release, you can have it, and no one else is affected. It can occur in the privacy of your own room, with no one else involved.
- But in the Bible, sex is not a private act, and it is never about taking what you want; it is about giving all of yourself to your spouse. It involves sacred intimacy, oneness, commitment and deep love.
- A number of other people are impacted by the decision to watch pornography, most notably, a spouse. Pornography has been shown to be highly addictive; it can lead to women in particular feeling inadequate, and to people being pressured to perform acts they do not want to enact. Unsurprisingly, pornography use has been linked with marriage breakdown, loss of sexual desire and unsatisfactory sexual performance.

### The world claims that the pornography industry simply provides harmless entertainment

- The world believes that pornography is entertaining, and a recreational activity you can access on demand; the people on the screen are 'performers' and 'actors', and if young people do stumble across it online, this is a natural part of them exploring their sexuality.
- As Christians, we have a duty to speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable. Although the world might want to believe that the people on screen are unaffected, regularly, those on screen have been subject to coercion. There are no rules on the major pornography platforms which adequately ensure that those filmed have given consent and are not underage.
- Young people regularly come across pornography accidentally online, particularly on social media platforms. Many have had their attitudes towards sex shaped by it. A large percentage have seen violent pornographic acts (which are generally far more extreme than were commonly available twenty years ago), believing them to be normal and enjoyable, and have 'learnt' about sex through watching.

## Politics

- In 2015, CARE helped facilitate the first ever debate in parliament on the impact of pornography on adults as well as children. Since then, more Peers and MPs have been prepared to raise questions about this issue, although there is more work to do.
- In recent years, research by the Children's Commissioner for England has shone a spotlight on how widespread access to pornography is, and the impact it has upon young people's understanding of sex, relationships and consent. Children watch porn and then attempt to act out what they have seen.
- In 2023, after years of campaigning from CARE, the Online Safety Act received Royal Assent. Part of this law includes robust age verification on all online pornography content. The regulator responsible for enforcing this is Ofcom and sites that fail to comply face heavy fines.
- In 2023, the UK Government also launched the first ever independent review into the harms caused by pornography.
- No major website verifies the age of people depicted in adult content online, or whether the participants gave their consent to be recorded. This means that child sexual abuse is not restricted to the dark web, it is readily available on major websites.
- AI allows people to create images using text – a person can simply type into an app what they would like to see in a video. The text entered will be turned into a moving image by an AI bot. The Internet Watch Foundation found 11,108 AI text generated sexual images of children on the dark web. While it is illegal to make these images, the technology used to generate them is freely available, legal to download and not restricted in any way. The law has not kept up with technology.
- The porn industry is extremely wealthy and extremely powerful. The challenge of seeing pornography ended is a generational challenge, on a par with the ending of slavery.

## Glossary

**PORNOGRAPHY** - printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.

**PORN INDUSTRY** - a global movement worth around \$97 billion.

**PORNEIA** - a biblical word which is generally used for every kind of extramarital, unlawful or unnatural sexual act.

**EXTREME/HARDCORE PORNOGRAPHY** - a class of pornography which shows extreme sexual acts.

**AGE VERIFICATION** - technology that requires users to prove they are 18 or over in order to view the content.

**ONLINE SAFETY ACT** - flagship government legislation passed into law which places a new duty of care on social media companies to remove harmful and illegal content. Also includes effective age verification on online pornography.

**PORNHUB** - one of the world's most popular porn sites.

**ONLY FANS** - an internet content subscription service used primarily by people in prostitution and those who produce pornography.

**DEEPFAKING** - a video or sound recording that replaces someone's face or voice with that of someone else, in a way that appears real, particularly used in pornography to create content of people performing sexual acts they haven't actually done.

**ETHICAL PORN** - pornography that has been shot in such a way as to be supposedly 'ethical', including depicting only consensual acts, and with an emphasis on the wellbeing of those featuring in the video. Needless to say, it is still wrong for a Christian to view such content.

## Key Bible Passages

**GENESIS 1:26-28:** *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."*

**GENESIS 2:24:** *"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."*

**EXODUS 20:14:** *"You shall not commit adultery."*

**SONG OF SONGS 4:1-3:** *"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate."*

**MATTHEW 5:27-28:** *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

**JOHN 8:34, 36:** *"Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'"*

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:12:** *"I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything."*

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:15-20:** *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.'" But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."*

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:13:** *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*

**GALATIANS 5:1:** *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."*

**EPHESIANS 5:31-33:** *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*

**1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-4:** *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable."*

**JAMES 1:13-15:** "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

**1 JOHN 1:9:** "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

## For Further Research

[care.org.uk/cause/pornography](https://care.org.uk/cause/pornography)

[covenanteyes.com](https://covenanteyes.com)

<https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/pornography/all>

[fightthenewdrug.org](https://fightthenewdrug.org)

[nakedtruthproject.com](https://nakedtruthproject.com)

[sherecovery.com](https://sherecovery.com)

Children's Commissioner: 'A lot of it is actually just abuse': Young people and pornography, 2023

Tim Chester: Captured by a better vision, 1994

Tim Chester: You can change, 2008

Jonathan Grant: Divine sex, 2015

Glynn Harrison: A better story, 2017

Heath Lambert: Finally Free, 2013

Vaughan Roberts: The Porn Problem, 2018

Harry Schaumburg: Undefined, 2009

Helen Thorne: Purity is possible, 2014

## Quotes

"As a woman, I think porn is a disgrace. I used to watch a lot of porn, to be honest. I started watching it when I was like 11. I think it really destroyed my brain and I feel incredibly devastated that I was exposed to so much porn...The first few times I, you know, had sex, I was not saying no to things that were not good. It was because I thought that's what I was supposed to be attracted to...I'm so angry that porn is so loved, and I'm so angry at myself for thinking that it was OK." **Billie Eilish**

"Here is what young women tell me on college campuses when the subject comes up: They can't compete, and they know it. For how can a real woman—with pores and her own breasts and even sexual needs of her own (let alone with speech that goes beyond "More, more, you big stud!")—possibly compete with a cybervision of perfection, downloadable and extinguishable at will, who comes, so to speak, utterly submissive and tailored to the consumer's least specification?" **Naomi Wolf**

"Any violation of a woman's body can become sex for men: this is the essential truth of pornography." **Andrea Dworkin**

"We are a guinea-pig generation for an experiment in mass debasement that few of us would have ever consented to, and whose full nefarious impact may not be known for years. How many families will suffer? How many marriages will implode? How many talented men will scrap their most important relationships and careers for a brief onanistic thrill? How many children will propel, warp-speed, into the dark side of adult sexuality by forced exposure to their fathers' profanations?" **Pamela Anderson**

"Porn is the starting point for young people when it comes to sex." **Girl aged 20, cited in 'A lot of it is actually abuse - Young people and pornography' from the Children's Commissioner in 2023**

"Porn trains the mind to regard sex as a spectator sport, to be enjoyed alone and in front of a screen. It removes love and mutuality from sex, turning human beings - as Terry Crews has put it - into body parts." **Louise Perry**

"However much I tried it, the will power of "just don't look at it" never worked. I could go for a few days, and then the hole left just had to be filled. But then God made me realise that my choice was not simply between sinning or not. It was between desiring Jesus, who would satisfy, or desiring something else which wouldn't. The struggle didn't become easy then, but it did become winnable, because I realised I had to choose, not to walk away from something, but towards someone." **Julian Hardyman**

"We need to be captured by a better vision. The whole point about pornography is that it is less, it is a distortion of something, and we need to get a picture again of what more means. The problem with many accountability approaches to pornography is that we end up thinking that we need to do less of something, that we need to think less about sex...But we really need to think about sex better, in the sense of having a truly biblical understanding of what sex is." **Glynn Harrison**

"Porn does not show us the joy of human love and commitment; the deep nurturing satisfaction of two people made one flesh; the fulfilment and fruitfulness of two lives lived together to the glory of God; and the nurture of a family. Porn is the equivalent of burning a priceless Stradivarius violin for a few moments of warmth, and missing out on a lifetime of beautiful, glorious music. And by setting the bar, and our expectations, so low, it impoverishes and demeans us all. This is not freedom; it's slavery." **Vaughan Roberts**

"There is no dignity when the human dimension is eliminated from the person. In short, the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little." **Pope John Paul II**

"If sex is a good gift from God designed to bring us joy and bring Him glory, then it's no wonder Satan wants to distort that gift so that we only experience shame and loneliness. In pornography, the "one-flesh union" of a man and a woman becomes the "no-flesh" aloneness of a man or woman before the flickering images of a screen, or in the pages of a novel." **Russell D. Moore**

"For me the real evil of masturbation would be that it takes an appetite which, in lawful use, leads the individual out of himself to complete (and correct) his own personality in that of another (and finally in children and even grandchildren) and turns it back; sends the man back into the prison of himself, there to keep a harem of imaginary brides.

And this harem, once admitted, works against his ever getting out and really uniting with a real woman. For the harem is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is always adored, always the perfect lover; no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end, they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself." **CS Lewis**

## Key Stats

- **Consumption of pornography**
  - There are more than 4.2 million adult websites, making up 12% of all websites. Around 25% of search engine requests are pornography-related.
  - In 2020, the world's four largest pornography sites received nearly 11 billion visitors every month, greater than the visitors to Amazon, Zoom, LinkedIn, Netflix and Ebay combined.
  - The UK has the second highest incidence of internet pornography searches in the world. In 2015/16, pornography was accessed 1.4 million times by UK children every month. Ofcom estimate that 29% of UK adults access online pornography each month (approximately 13.8 million), of which 73% (10.1 million) were men.
  - A global study suggests that nearly 100 million adults worldwide may be addicted to pornography. Around 60,000 UK adults actively sought out help online for porn addiction in 2022, of whom 40% were women.
  - Polling by Premier Christianity found that 30% of church leaders access porn on the Internet more than once a month, and 42% of Christian men say they have a 'porn addiction'. 75% of Christian men view pornography on a monthly or less regular basis. 90% of Christians believe the Church does not adequately support those who struggle with pornography use.
- **Children and pornography**
  - The average age at which children first see pornography is 13. By age 9, 10% had seen pornography, rising to 27% by age 11.
  - X (formerly known as Twitter) is the online platform where young people are most likely to have seen pornography: 41% of young people have seen it here, and 13% of Twitter content is estimated to be pornographic. 33% have seen it on Instagram, and 32% on Snapchat.
  - 38% of 16-21-year olds said they had accidentally come across pornography online. 22% of 16-21-year olds say that all or almost all the pornography they have seen online has been accidental.
  - 51% of 16-21 year old girls have been sent explicit photos of someone they know in real life; this statistic is only 33% for boys.
- **Content of pornography**
  - 45% of Pornhub scenes included at least one act of aggression. 97% of these acts were committed against women.
  - Young people are often exposed to violent pornography, depicting degrading or painful sex acts: 79% have seen violent pornography before age 18. 36% of young people have actively sought violent content out.
  - 7 in 10 UK adults support the appointment of a Pornography Commission to ensure that illegal or violent porn is removed from websites and social media. 8 in 10 people said directors of companies that own porn sites should be held responsible for illegal material on their platforms and face fines or jail, and 3 in 4 supported this for social media company directors.
  - A ban on AI tools that allows users to digitally undress women and children is supported by almost 8 in 10 Brits.
- **Harms of pornography**
  - Pornography shapes the expectations and behaviour of those who watch it. 72% of young people agreed with the statement that 'Viewing online pornography affects young people's expectations around sex and relationships'. Just 4% disagreed. The most frequent word used to describe this amongst young people, when surveyed, was 'unrealistic'.
  - 47% of young people stated that girls 'expect' sex to involve violent behaviour such

as slapping and choking, and 42% suggested that girls 'enjoy' such behaviour. 47% of people between the ages of 18 and 21 have experienced a violent sex act, with this being more than 50% more common among frequent users of pornography.

- 66% of girls believe that 'viewing online pornography affects children and young people's body image'.
- Research shows neurological similarities between substance addiction and compulsive pornography consumption. A number of studies suggest a link between pornography and sexual performance of the consumer, including erectile dysfunction.
- According to cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, pornography was the 3rd-most common form of sex trafficking, after escort services and illicit massage businesses. One report found that of 854 women in prostitution, across 9 countries, 49% were forced to make pornography while being enslaved in sex trafficking. Other websites like Pornhub host user-generated pornographic content without verifying the age or consent of those involved.

## Stories

**An anonymous porn user** describes how they found help with their addiction:

"My first struggle was admitting I had a problem. After admitting this, I was able to shift my focus to getting help. This is often the hardest step for a man. Once I sought help and began my journey, I had many setbacks. Many times, I did not want to get up and try again. I wanted to stay in the mire of sin because it was the easy thing to do. I lost heart many times. I continued to pray and beg God's mercy for my sins. After a fall, I would go to confession and resolve to try again. Eventually, I was led through my rough journey to victory.

I have experienced many victories, even in my bumpy journey. I began to see women in a whole new light. I befriended girls my age and enjoyed going to dances more and socializing with them. The feeling of shame or awkwardness I so often felt when being around women melted away. I prayed more and even found God's calling for me in my life. I was able to focus on my studies better and found myself acting kinder to family and friends. Through liberation, I have been able to have a more intimate relationship with God and my family and friends."

**Vanessa Belmond** was a 'performer' in pornographic videos for around eight years, and filmed about 100 scenes. When she was in contact with 'fans', they thought that she really enjoyed her career. The truth was very different. She regularly performed sexual acts she didn't want to do in order to stay in work, and she could not afford to turn the work down.

She writes, "The porn performers I knew did it because they craved attention they never received growing up. They did it because they felt like they had no other options. They did it because they thought it would make them famous, and that maybe they could "cross over" into legitimate movies. They did it because they had been sexually abused as children or teens, so when they became adults, having sex for money seemed like a natural progression."

She is now an outspoken campaigner against the pornography industry.

## Pastoral Issues

- **For those who are struggling with pornography**
  - The statistics are clear that there will be many people within your church (and not just men) who are struggling, or have previously struggled, with pornography.
  - Encourage them to confide in a trusted friend, and if they are married, to be open with their spouse. Remind them that they are not alone in this struggle, and that they have the Holy Spirit inside them working to transform into the likeness of Jesus.
  - It is important that all of us reflect on the weight of our sin; but many will already feel ashamed of what they are doing. Encourage them that when we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful, and there is no sin too great that it cannot be covered by his blood. As Christians, we are united with Christ, and can live free from shame or accusation.
  - Encourage them to fight in their battle with pornography, and to take wise steps to guard their hearts; they might want to sign up with an accountability site, such as Covenant Eyes.
  - Above all, help them to turn their eyes to Jesus; we do not just battle sin by turning away from something, but by turning towards someone. The more someone sees how wonderful Jesus is, the more they will be able to consider all things 'rubbish' by comparison.
- **For spouses**
  - Recognise that this may be a deeply painful subject for spouses, as watching pornography can feel like a rejection.
  - Encourage them to listen well, and to walk through this together with their spouse, rather than running away from it. This may involve them being able to listen well, so their spouse feels able to speak openly with them.
  - Suggest they approach a trusted friend who they can confide in, rather than going through this alone.
- **For parents**
  - Parents should be aware that - particularly given the widespread usage of smartphones - pornography affects children today from a surprisingly young age. Children as young as 8 have been affected, sometimes by accident.
  - Encourage parents to maintain an open dialogue with their children around sexuality, and in particular, to paint a positive, Christian vision of what sex should involve. It may be wise to cultivate an atmosphere of (appropriate levels) of confession, so that the practice of owning up to mistakes is normalised.
  - Parents may wish to install software on computers to prevent accessing certain kinds of website, or to delay use of smartphones or social media.