
Should a Woman Marry a Man Who Has a Problem with Pornography?

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This question is an urgent one given the importance of marriage, and the pervasive problem that pornography is in our culture. Many women have been concerned about this problem, and many more are sure to follow in their footsteps. I want to respond to this question in three ways: with a short answer, with a long answer, and by posing a more helpful consideration.

First, the short answer. There is a clear and concise response for a woman wondering whether she should marry a man after discovering he struggles with pornography: no. She should not do it. Marriage is too important and too exclusive to enter into it with a man who is cultivating desires for women beyond the one to whom he is married. The same is true for those approaching marriage. You need to be in a relationship with a man who is cultivating exclusive desires for you. That's the short answer.

Next, the long answer. The long answer still responds with, "No. You should not marry a man who has an active problem with pornography." I want, however, to elaborate on "no" by explaining why it is wrong to marry such a man. This is what Proverbs 6:32–33 says:

He who commits adultery lacks sense;
he who does it destroys himself.
He will get wounds and dishonor,
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

This passage in Proverbs 6 does not mention the word pornography. Neither does any other verse in the Bible. When you let Jesus explain, however, that adultery is about desiring a woman to whom you are not married (Matt 5:27–28) then you see that modern men who ogle air-brushed women are serial adulterers. When you grasp that fact you understand that this passage in Proverbs is an incredible condemnation of the man you want to marry who has a problem with porn. He is a man who lacks sense. He destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor. His disgrace will not be wiped away. How could you consider marrying into a situation like this?

I have talked with many women who try to make an argument for pursuing marriage with their boyfriend who has an ongoing porn struggle. They often point out that there are tons of good things about him, and that his porn problem is only one slice of his life. I have no doubt that is true. Very few of us are defined entirely by our vices and exclusively devoid of virtue. Beyond this fact, many of these women express great confidence in the power of Christ to change men and set them free from this problem. That is certainly true, as well. As true as those realities are, you will say "I do" to the man who shows up on your wedding day, not the man you hope he will become afterwards. I'm sure your boyfriend has many wonderful things about him! I know Jesus can change him! The greater part of wisdom, however, is to wait and allow Jesus to do some of that work before you marry.

Some women get nervous because they are convinced that *this man* is the man they need to marry and *right now* is the time to do it. You need to allow the wisdom of Proverbs to cut through that confusion. If you marry the man that Proverbs warns against then you are signing up to share in the promised destruction, dishonor, and disgrace that is coming to him. I could write a book full of stories of women who married immoral men and would love to trade all of their current struggles for decades of singleness. I promise you that the ache of singleness does not compare to the anguish of being married to an adulterer. This doesn't mean that you must marry a man who is perfect, or that you cannot marry a man who has struggled with porn *in his past*. It does mean that you should only marry a man who is currently winning the battle, and has a track record of change.

Finally, I would like to pose what may be a more helpful consideration. It is important for a woman to avoid marriage to a man who has a problem with pornography. But making that decision requires that she is aware there is a problem. The reality is that it would be much better for a woman to marry a man who looks at porn and is being honest about it, than a man who is looking at porn and lying about it. That means the truly urgent matter for women concerns how they discover whether the man they are considering for marriage is struggling with pornography.

There are all kinds of ways that a young woman can get a handle on her boyfriend's commitment to purity. If I had time I would love to explain several indicators of sexual holiness including the degree to which he is pursuing purity in his relationship with you. Other indicators include his Christian maturity and spiritual leadership, especially the kinds of relationships he cultivates with others in his church. When it comes to the specific issue of his involvement with pornography, however, you will need to talk with him about it.

How you bring this up is very important. I encourage women that they should avoid an attitude of suspicion about the men in their life. Pornography is a problem of epidemic proportions that many men fight against. That doesn't mean, however,

that it is necessarily a problem for the man you are considering for marriage. Love demands that we believe the best of others until we have a reason to believe otherwise (1 Cor 13:7). Believing the best of your boyfriend means that you will not accuse him, but instead move towards him with loving care, concerned for how he is protecting himself from the availability of porn. As a young woman considering marriage to a man who is a believer it is completely appropriate that you would ask caring questions about what he is doing to defend himself against such a considerable threat.

You should ask your boyfriend or fiancé who is in his life that is helping him with issues of lust and pornography. You should ask him what technology he uses to monitor and block pornography on his phone, computer, and tablet devices. If he does not have a person who is doing this, and if he is not protecting his equipment then you should request that he begin to do it. If you know that your man is taking measures to protect himself against pornography then that should be very affirming for you. You do not have to be his accountability partner or examine his Internet history to be able to trust others who are doing this. A man who refuses to do these things has told you all you need to know about his commitment to purity.

In the pornographic culture in which we live, fewer and fewer women will find it possible to find a young man who has not had at least some exposure to pornography. In such a world women who are looking for a man who has never viewed pornography or who does not consider it a temptation will be disappointed. This reality does not mean, however, that godly women should settle for a man with an ongoing porn struggle. Instead what she should look for is a guy who is honest about a struggle, is seeking to get ahead of the problem with various kinds of accountability, has a track record of victory, and is passionate about growing in purity by getting very close to the Christ who alone can forgive and cleanse former sins.