

WHEN YOU INDULGE IN PORNOGRAPHY, YOU PARTICIPATE IN SEX SLAVERY¹

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Pornography is to sex slavery what gasoline is to the engines of motor vehicles. Gas fuels engines. Pornography fuels sex slavery.
Sex slavery and pornography are not two disconnected issues. They are organically connected in the international market for sex.

WHAT IS SEX SLAVERY?

Most adults and teenagers know what *pornography* is. It is printed or virtual material that explicitly describes or displays sexual body parts or activity in order to stimulate erotic feelings.

But what exactly is *sex slavery*? A *slave* is a person who is the property of another person, and that owner forces the slave to obey them. A sex slave is a person who is the property of another person, and that owner forces the slave to obey them by performing sex acts, usually for money. Sex slavery is sex trafficking, which includes acquiring, transporting, and exploiting sex slaves.²

1. Thanks to friends who examined a draft of this essay and shared helpful feedback, especially Justin Holcomb, Becky McDonald, Laila Mickelwait, Jenni Naselli, Sarah Williams, and the twenty graduate students in my spring 2015 Biblical Ethics course at Bethlehem College & Seminary.

2. The “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children,” which the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 2000, defines sex trafficking with more nuance (<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html>). The following quotation occurs on pages 42–43 of the full text of the Convention and its Protocols (<http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCe-book-e.pdf>):

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse

Most prostituted women are sex slaves.³ Often a pimp physically and psychologically abuses prostituted women to coerce them to continue committing commercial sex acts. Sometimes people abduct children and adolescent women and force them into prostitution. Most women who enter prostitution have already been sexually abused. Prostituted women are often girls or adolescent women who are insecure and become emotionally traumatized and view themselves as worthless.⁴

When I was teaching on sex slavery recently in a course on Biblical Ethics, Michel, one of my students, shared a personal story with the class. (I'm sharing it here with his permission.) Michel is from Colombia, and he grew up in Miami. God saved Michel in 2005, and Michel stopped hanging out with some of his high school friends who regularly partied with alcohol and marijuana. Alex (not his real name) was one of those friends, and he moved back to Colombia and began making a lot of money. Alex hired some of Michel's other old friends to work for him. Michel didn't know how Alex was making so much money. Then in 2006 one of Michel's friends who was working for Alex died in a car accident. A few days after his funeral, Alex contacted Michel and asked Michel if he would like to start working for him and replace his friend who had just died. Alex promised Michel, "You will earn a lot of money and have fun." Michel asked what the job was. Alex replied, "It is a very simple job. You would just have to go to the airport when I call you and pick up girls that are traveling to Miami. When you pick them up, you can do whatever you want with them for the first day. Then I will give you the address where you have to take them, and some men will be waiting for them. After a few days, you just pick them up and take them to the airport again. That's it." (Michel, of course, refused.)

HOW DOES PORNOGRAPHY FUEL SEX SLAVERY?

Pornography fuels the demand for prostitution and thus for sex slavery. I haven't heard anyone argue this more clearly and compellingly than David Platt does in chapter 5 of *Counter Culture*.⁵

of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) "Child" shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

3. See Melissa Farley et al., "Prostitution in Five Countries: Violence and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Feminism & Psychology* 8, no. 4 (1998): 405–26. They conclude, "Across countries, 73 percent reported physical assault in prostitution, 62 percent reported having been raped since entering prostitution, 67 percent met criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD. On average, 92 percent stated that they wanted to leave prostitution" (405).
4. For one former prostituted woman's story, see Annie Lobert, *Fallen out of the Sex Industry and into the Arms of the Savior* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy, 2015). For more about sex trafficking, see (1) <https://exoduscry.com/resources/>, including the sobering documentary *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls*, directed, produced, written, and narrated by Benjamin Nolot, president and founder of Exodus Cry, (2) <https://warinternational.org/>, (3) *Jacob's Story*, a 14-minute mini-documentary by Unearthed, <http://unearthedpictures.org/updates/post/jacobs-story>, and (4) two short articles by Justin Holcomb: "Facing Up to Sex Trafficking," *9Marks Journal: Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches* (July–August 2012): 37–41; "Human Trafficking: Recommended Reading," January 11, 2012, <http://justinholcomb.com/2012/01/11/human-trafficking-recommended-reading/>.
5. David Platt, "A War on Women: The Gospel and Sex Slavery," in *Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Persecution, Abortion, Orphans, and*

Platt tells the story of a nine-year-old girl in northern Nepal named Maliha. A charming slave trader deceived Maliha's poverty-stricken single mother when he promised to help provide for their family by helping Maliha get a well-paying job in the city at the bottom of the Himalayan mountains. He promised to send the money she earned back to the mother and to bring Maliha back to visit her family at least once each year. The mother reluctantly agreed, but the man did not keep his word. Maliha's new job was to sit outside a restaurant in the city, where customers would see this beautiful girl.

A man would grab her by the hand, and she would quietly follow him into one of the booths. There, he would eat and drink and then either take Maliha upstairs to her room or stay right there in the booth and force her to do whatever he told her to do. After he was finished, she would go out and wait for another man, and then another man, and then another man. Sometimes, on a busy night, fifteen or twenty different customers would have their way with Maliha however they desired.

This was Maliha's life, and there was no way out. The man who first smiled at her back in her village months before had gone back to find other girls, and Maliha now worked for other men. They told her that if she tried to stop working at the restaurant, they would go back to the village and bring her little sister there to take her place. They assured her that her work was providing for her family back home. Little did she know that her mom never received another rupee. Meanwhile, for all her mom, little brother, and little sister knew, Maliha had completely forgotten about them when she got to the big city.

Even if Maliha could have escaped, where would she go? She had no clue where she was and no idea how to get home. She knew no one but the men who owned her. She had nothing to her name. The only thing she had was her shame...⁶

Platt next tells a story of a sixteen-year-old girl named Hannah. She lived in Birmingham, Alabama. Her boyfriend started treating her like a queen and convinced her to flee with him to Los Angeles so that she could be a model. Then he pressured her to pose nude for photo shoots. Then he pressured her to have sex with truckers. "Within a matter of months, Hannah's promising boyfriend had become her pimp."⁷

Platt then shows how pornography connects to sex trafficking:

Research continually demonstrates a clear link between sex trafficking and the production of pornography. Federal legislation has acknowledged this, participants in the production of pornography have confirmed this, and while exact figures are hard to pin down, one anti-trafficking center reports that at least a third of victims trafficked for sex are used in the production of pornography. Another study on the relationship between prostitution, pornography, and trafficking found that one half of nearly nine hundred prostitutes in nine different countries reported pornography being made of them while in prostitution.⁸ When we hear such research, we mustn't miss the con-

Pornography (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 105–27, 255–57.

6. *Ibid.*, 112.

7. *Ibid.*, 115.

8. Platt is referring to a 2007 study: In "interviews with 854 women in prostitution in 9 countries [Canada, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States, and Zambia] women and men in prostitution made it

nection. Men and women who indulge in pornography are creating the demand for more prostitutes, and in turn they are fueling the sex-trafficking industry.

Yet the cycle is even more vicious than that. For the more people watch pornography, the more they desire sexual fulfillment through prostitution. Such desire drives men (and women) to engage in physical prostitution or even virtual prostitution as “every home computer [becomes] a potential red light district.” Pornography thus feeds prostitution, again increasing the demand for sex trafficking.

Do we realize what we’re doing? Every time a man or woman views pornography online, we are contributing to a cycle of sex slavery from the privacy of our own computers. ...

No matter how many red Xs we write on our hands to end slavery, as long as these same hands are clicking on pornographic websites and scrolling through sexual pictures and videos, we are frauds to the core.⁹

Platt is not the only one making this connection. For example, one of the more academic arguments is in a journal that Johns Hopkins University produces. The article is titled “The Slave and the Porn Star: Sexual Trafficking and Pornography,”¹⁰ and it “argues that there are a number of links between pornography and sex trafficking and that curbing pornography can reduce sex trafficking.”¹¹

The growing evidence is horrific. More and more women who escape the bondage of sex slavery—which often includes being forced to pose nude for photographs and to endure sex acts for films, all while pretending to enjoy it—are testifying that pornography fuels sex slavery.¹² Not only are many of the women in pornographic pictures and films themselves sex slaves, but pimps regularly use pornography to instruct children and young women how to perform for customers.¹³

You can’t indulge in pornography without being part of that culture, without fueling prostitution and sex slavery.¹⁴ Pornography is part of the law of supply and demand for prostitution and sex slavery.

clear that pornography is integral to prostitution. In 9 countries, almost half (49 percent) told us that pornography was made of them while they were in prostitution” (Melissa Farley, “Renting an Organ for Ten Minutes’: What Tricks Tell Us about Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking,” in *Pornography: Driving the Demand in International Sex Trafficking*, ed. David E. Guinn and Julie DiCaro [Los Angeles: Captive Daughters Media, 2007], 145).

9. Platt, *Counter Culture*, 120–22.

10. Robert W. Peters, Laura J. Lederer, and Shane Kelly, “The Slave and the Porn Star: Sexual Trafficking and Pornography,” *The Protection Project Journal of Human Rights and Civil Society* 5 (2012): 1–21, available at <http://rescuefreedom.org/parallax/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/slave-and-the-porn-star.pdf>.

11. *Ibid.*, 1.

12. E.g., see <http://stoptraffickingdemand.com/>. See also Jefferson Bethke’s short video *Porn: Human Trafficking at Your Finger Tips* and other resources at <http://rescuefreedom.org/get-involved/refusetoclick/>. One organization puts it this way (<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/renaissancemaletenthings4fin.pdf>): “Don’t consume pornography. Pornography manipulates male sexuality, popularizes unhealthy attitudes towards sex and sexuality, and eroticizes violence against women. Pornography leads men and boys to believe that certain sexual acts are normal, when in fact sexual acts that are non-consensual, offensive and coupled with violent intent result in the pain, suffering, and humiliation of women and children. In addition, a disproportionate amount of mainstream pornography sexualizes younger women with such titles as ‘teens,’ ‘barely 18,’ ‘cheerleaders,’ etc. Targeting younger women socializes men to develop appetites for younger and younger women and creates a ‘pedophile-like culture’ among men. Victims of human trafficking have also been forced into pornography. Men can stop the voyeurism of sex and sex acts that fuel human trafficking by refusing to consume pornography and encourage others to do the same.”

13. Peters, Lederer, and Kelly, “The Slave and the Porn Star,” 9n47.

14. On the connection between sex slavery and profit motives, see Niklas Jakobsson and Andreas Kotsadam, “The Law and Economics of International Sex Slavery: Prostitution Laws and Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation,” *European Journal of*

It fuels the demand for sex slavery. Justin Holcomb explains how:

The primary way porn fuels the sex trade is by building the demand. The sex trade consists of supply and demand. The supply consists of women and children who are either forced into exploitation at home or lured away from their homes with promises of jobs, travel, and a better life. The average age of girls who enter into street prostitution is between 12 and 14 years old, and even younger in some developing countries. Traffickers coerce women and children to enter the commercial sex industry through a variety of recruitment techniques in strip clubs, street-based prostitution, and escort services. Thousands of children and women are victimized in this way every year.

The trafficking industry would not exist without demand. According to researcher Andrea Bertone, the demand consists of men who feed a “patriarchal world system” that preys on women and children.¹⁵

Plant this deeply and firmly in your conscience: *since pornography fuels sex slavery, indulging in pornography to any degree is participating in sex slavery.* This is the case even if the porn star you lustfully look at is profiting financially from that pornography. The point is that any and all pornography is part of the worldwide system that fuels prostitution and thus fuels sex slavery.

Indulging in pornography has both direct and indirect effects: (1) Indulging in pornography contributes to sex slavery *directly* by increasing the demand for pornography and thus increasing the demand for human trafficking for the sake of producing pornography. (2) Indulging in pornography contributes to sex slavery *indirectly* even when a person does not visit prostitutes himself. By contributing to the demand for pornography, he is helping grow the scope and scale of an industry that is responsible for increasing the demand of others to use prostitutes, and thus he is contributing to the increasing supply of prostitutes. So even a man who does not personally transition from indulging in pornography to prostitutes is still fueling the industry through which others will.¹⁶

HOW SHOULD MEN FEEL ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY?

What does it mean to be a man? It’s hard to improve how John Piper defines mature masculinity: “At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect

Law and Economics 35 (2013): 87–107.

15. Justin Holcomb, “Isn’t Porn Harmless,” May 5, 2012, <http://justinholcomb.com/2012/03/05/isnt-porn-harmless/>. Holcomb is referring to this article: Andrea Marie Bertone, “Sexual Trafficking in Women: International Political Economy and the Politics of Sex,” *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (1999): 4–22.

16. Thanks to Leo Novakovskiy for helping me shape this paragraph. Ben Reaoch puts it this way (“What Christians Do about Modern-Day Slavery,” *Desiring God*, February 16, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-christians-do-about-modern-day-slavery>.):

Then there are the forces of supply and demand, and the way that pornography creates more and more demand for the commercial sex industry. Pornography is like the gateway drug. People get addicted, and then they want something more. Pornography fuels prostitution (heightening the demand for prostitutes), and a higher demand for prostitutes means more lucrative opportunities for pimps, which means more women and children exploited by them for these purposes. So if you’re looking at porn, even if you’re not paying for it, you’re showing the advertisers and producers of pornography and all those involved in the sex business that demand is high, which then motivates them to shame and exploit even more people.

Think about that the next time you’re tempted to click on that website. Your momentary “pleasure” is contributing to the absolute devastation of women and girls and boys around the world.

women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships."¹⁷ Men *protect* women. A man honors a woman when he protects her. "Women and children are put into the lifeboats first, not because the men are necessarily better swimmers, but because of a deep sense of honorable fitness. It belongs to masculinity to accept danger to protect women. . . . A mature man senses instinctively that as a man he is called to take the lead in guarding the woman he is with."¹⁸

I do not struggle with whether I should be violently aggressive toward women or children. I am not tempted to punch them or throw them or do any kind of harm to them. Every instinct in me tells me to protect them. This is a value that my parents instilled in me, that my church leaders instilled in me, that God through the Bible has instilled in me, and that most fundamentally God instilled in me as a man. Harming a woman or child is unconscionable. And looking at pornography belongs in that same category because pornography harms women. Why is it that men do not think about pornography from the vantage point of manhood?

My target audience is men—young men, middle-aged men, older men, all of you.¹⁹ Can you hear the story about the nine-year-old Maliha and not feel both pity for Maliha and righteous anger towards those who oppress her? There are millions of stories that are variations on Maliha's life as a sex slave. When you hear how adults are enslaving girls and young women—raping them, masturbating in their bodies—does that not make you feel sick to your stomach? Do you not feel outraged against people who victimize children and young women? *That* is exactly how you should feel about pornography. Pornography should be as vomit-inducing to you as an evil man raping a nine-year-old girl. Pornography should be as revolting and disgusting to you as a group of evil men gang-raping a helpless woman. "If you saw a woman being gang raped in a back alley, would you stop and masturbate?"²⁰ That's essentially what men are doing when they indulge in pornography.

This is not the only reason or even the most compelling that a person should not indulge in pornography. You might think that indulging in pornography alone on your computer doesn't hurt anybody, but it hurts both you and others. Tim Chester lists twelve reasons to give up pornography:²¹

1. Porn wrecks your view of sex.
2. Porn wrecks your view of women.
3. Porn wrecks women's view of themselves.

17. John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 36.

18. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

19. My original audience for this research was seminarians. I normally teach New Testament and theology, but I also get to teach a graduate-level class called Biblical Ethics. The issues we address throughout the course include lying, abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, contraception, homosexuality, same-sex attraction, divorce and remarriage, genetic engineering, ethnicity, war, the secular state, the environment, and sex slavery and pornography. I feel compelled to address pornography and sex slavery because in this course I am training men in my seminary who are planning to spend their lives ministering God's word as church leaders. That means that they will likely be spending a significant portion of their time shepherding people who are enslaved to pornography. So they need to analyze this particular sin with serpentine shrewdness. But even more personally, I assume that Satan and his demons see a bright red bulls-eye on these men. They have already grown up in a culture where pornography is ubiquitous, and it isn't going to get easier. Many of them have scars from fighting the sin of pornography, and all of us—"us" includes seminary professors and pastors, too—must vigilantly fight this sin and never let up our guard. So I am always intensely interested in thinking through how to mortify lusts that want to indulge in pornography. My main argument in this essay is one more weapon to fight this sin.

20. Toby J. Sumpter, "The Porn War," *Having Two Legs*, April 30, 2013, <http://www.tobyjsumpter.com/the-porn-war/>.

21. Tim Chester, "Looking beyond the Frame," in *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 15–35, 148–49.

4. The porn industry abuses women.
5. Porn is a sin against your wife. ... If you're not yet married, *porn is a sin against your future wife*.
6. Porn wrecks families.
7. Porn is enslaving.
8. Porn erodes your character.
9. Porn wastes your time, energy, and money.
10. Porn weakens your relationship with God.
11. Porn weakens your service.
12. God's wrath is against people who use porn.

Perhaps the most compelling is that last one: the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But others have written more comprehensively on this subject, and I don't intend to retread that ground here.²³ My focus here is what Chester lists as reason #4: "The porn industry abuses women." It abuses women and children in many ways,²⁴ and my focus here is that it abuses women and children by fueling prostitution and sex slavery. Real men should never indulge in pornography because that makes them complicit in sex slavery. This is about honor. This is about protecting vulnerable women and children. This is about being a man. This is about manhood.

I recently read the Wingfeather Saga to my daughter Kara. It's a four-book adventure series by Andrew Peterson, and the main characters are three siblings: Janner is the oldest, and he has a younger brother and sister, Tink and Leeli. A motif that runs through the series is that Janner is responsible to *protect* his siblings. At key points in the story he sacrifices himself for the good of his siblings (and others) in response to a refrain that rings in his head: *protect, protect, protect!* It's beautiful. It's budding manhood. That's what God designed men to do for women and children. Protect, protect, protect! That's a God-given manly instinct. Cowards suppress it. Fools ignore it. Honorable men follow it.²⁵

When you indulge in pornography, you participate in sex slavery. Pornography should make men feel not pleasure but disgust and outrage. If you are an honorable man, you will protect women and children by not indulging in pornography. Protect, protect, protect!

22. See especially John Piper, "Faith in Future Grace vs. Lust," in *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 329–38.

23. The two overall most helpful resources I'm aware of are Piper's article "Future Grace vs. Lust" (see previous note) and Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). Other helpful resources include Randy Alcorn, *The Purity Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003); Alcorn, *Sexual Temptation: Establishing Guardrails and Winning the Battle*, 3rd ed. (Sandy, OR: Eternal Perspectives Ministry, 2011); Joshua Harris, *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003); David Powlison, "Breaking Pornography Addiction," October 15, 2009, <http://www.ccef.org/breaking-pornography-addiction-part-1>; John Freeman, *Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014). See also C. S. Lewis, "Sexual Morality," in *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 94–103.

24. For other ways, see Mary Eberstadt and Mary Anne Layden, *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Statement of Findings and Recommendations* (Princeton: The Witherspoon Institute, 2010), 23–36. See also Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

25. The gospel of Jesus the Messiah is stronger than the pull towards pornography. God can change any kind of sinful heart so that a man no longer loves his lust but abhors it, no longer hates God but loves him. God can rescue men from indulging in pornography, making them truly masculine men who protect women and children and do not abuse them. We could say so much more here (cf. the resources in note 23 above), but I am footnoting this comment because my argument in this essay is more of a natural-law argument than a Bible-argument or gospel-centered argument. I am arguing, "Does not nature itself teach you ... ?!"