



THE CITY GATES CHURCH

Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32 **When Sex Is God** **Part Three**

Summary: Pornography is a plague on God's good plan for sexuality.

We have spent the past two weeks making the case that God created sex and sexuality. He created the boy parts and the girl parts and He said this is what married couples are going to do. This how babies are going to be made. And so, I have stood here in front of everyone and said crazy stuff like, "You should have a God-exalting view of sex. You should be able to thank God and praise God for sex. He made it, and He makes good things."

Why in the world are we doing this? Why are we talking about sex and why are we talking about it on Sunday mornings at church?

The answer has two parts – first, we're going verse by verse, chapter by chapter, through the book of Romans and there we saw something intriguing. Romans makes the case that God reveals Himself to people – through Creation around us, the conscience within us, through the Holy Spirit, and through people who already know Him.

God wants to be known. The problem is, the default reaction of the human heart is to deny God, to suppress what can be known (Romans 1:18).

Fortunately, God puts up with this for a while as He persistently reaches out. But at some point, He stops trying to turn people around who don't want to turn, and He lets them go. He gives them over to their sin. And of all the sins that could represent someone ignoring God and suppressing the truth, Scripture highlights sexual sin. Look with me again at:

Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Homosexuality is highlighted here in Romans 1, but in other parts of Scripture we see all kinds of other sexual sins called out as well. And so, I figured, if we have to talk about one of them, let's just go ahead and talk about all of them.

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So, again, the first reason we're talking about all of this is because it came up in Scripture, and it's highlighted as the epitome of being given over to sin – in other words, it's a pretty big deal.

But the second reason we're talking about this on Sunday mornings is because everyone else is talking about it too. Conversations about Pride month and what it means to be LGBTQ+ and the transgender movement come up all the time. Not that long ago you didn't talk about such things in polite company. Well, those days are gone. This is the new reality. And we need talk about it because people outside the church and people inside the church are confused, full of questions, and falling into sin.

Meanwhile, God also talks about sex and sexuality, the question is: will we listen? Someone is going to determine what is right and what is wrong. Who will it be?

This is why we keep saying that sexuality is always a matter of authority before it's a matter of attraction. Everyone is attracted to something – the question is, whose authority are you under? Who gets to say whether what you're attracted to should be encouraged or condemned?

I've been arguing the answer should be God – the creator and designer of sex. That's why we spent two weeks looking at what God designed and intended and noticing that it was good. God has a good plan for your sexual activity.

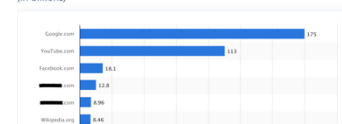
Now that we understand that, we can begin to explore the ways people go astray.

One of the most prominent pits today is pornography, it's a massive issue.

I took a look at the data from last fall, from September to November 2023, the latest information I could find. And here's what it showed for traffic on the Internet – among the top twenty most visited sites on the web, three were porn sites. One of which gets twice as much traffic as Instagram. Two of which beat ESPN.com and all three of them beat foxnews.com.¹

OK, that's just the United States. What about the world? In November 2023 – the top three most popular websites in the world were – no strangers here – Google, YouTube, and Facebook. Then, it's two porn sites. That's the list of the top five *most popular websites in the world!* Of the top fifteen most popular sites globally, four are porn sites collectively generating more than 30 billion monthly visits.²

Most popular websites worldwide as of November 2023
(in billions)



That's depressing, but I don't think it's shocking. People have always been drawn to sexual sin. The word pornography itself comes to us from ancient Greece. *Pornē* means

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1456422/most-visited-websites-total-visits-united-states/>

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1201880/most-visited-websites-worldwide/>

a prostitute and *graphe* means to write. So pornography “was originally defined as any work of art or literature depicting the life of prostitutes.”³ I share that so you know two things.

First, pornography, like all sexual sin, has been around for a long time. Justin Martyr was born in the year 100 and became an important figure in the early church. He identified four major challenges to discipleship for early Christians: sexual immorality, magic, wealth, and ethnic hatred. Two or three of those are still very real challenges for the church in America today – and magic isn't one of them.

We can go back even farther, the Tenth Commandment – says don't [covet your neighbor's wife \(Exodus 20:17\)](#). That's been around since Mt Sinai and, think about this, was specifically given to God's own people. In other words, even people who know God need to be told – keep your eyes and your desires to yourself.

The second reason I tell you the origins of the word pornography is because it helps us remember it's more than just pictures or videos. It also includes, and always has included, writing – things like novels which can be a source of stumbling for women in particular. In fact, if you look up the definition of pornography today, you're likely to find something like: “representation of sexual behaviour in books, pictures, statues, films, and other media that is intended to cause sexual excitement.”⁴

I want to really zoom in on the last part of that definition – that it is *intended* to arouse. So, you may think Oh, this thing I like isn't *really* pornography. I'm not one of 'those people' – I just really like this the story in this book and it happens to include a few sex scenes. Or, I just really like this show, it's good acting, there's amazing scenery, and yeah, there's some sex and nudity, but it's not *porn*. Or, these are just videos on YouTube, or an account on Instagram. They have clothes on. Or maybe, I just really like this song and the way it sounds I don't focus on the lyrics.

My friend, so help you God, does it cause you to be sexually excited? And don't you like the fact that it does? You may be able to tell yourself, or others, *it's not porn* – but does it have a pornographic effect on you? Is it “intended to cause sexual excitement?” Does it lead your heart to places God says you should not go?

Consider the words of Job, written more than three thousand years ago. He says:

Job 31:1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes;
Why then should I look upon a young woman?
2 For what is the allotment of God from above,
And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high?
3 Is it not destruction for the wicked,

³ Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica.

And disaster for the workers of iniquity?
4 Does He not see my ways,
And count all my steps?

Job says, if I give in to this attraction, if I give in to lust, God sees and knows and judges. Friends, God has an opinion about who and what you're attracted to. This is why our goal is sexuality submitted to Jesus. We say, God, You get to tell me how and when to use my sexuality and who and what I should be attracted to.

Friends, you are going to be attracted to someone or something. It's going to happen. Ideally, it's part of how you meet your spouse. But, there's a corrupted and corrupting side of attraction as well. A side that wants to pull you into things you have no purpose being part of. That's when you need to make a covenant like Job, you need shift your eyes and your attention away. You need to get away and tell yourself, that's not for me. If you give in to curiosity or desire, it can lead you to things you'll be ashamed of, things you'll regret, things that may destroy you and your capacity for relationships.

Your sexuality is a powerful, powerful thing. It should be a magnetic force at the center of your marriage propelling you toward your spouse. But it can also be a destructive energy that is representative of a life given over to suppressing the truth and pursuing the self.

The things that seem to excite you can actually destroy you. Let me show you how.

First, pornography **damages your relationship with God**. Pornography – in all it's forms, hard and soft, pictures, videos, and writing, is a distortion, a twisting of what God in his goodness designed and gave. It says to God, I know what You gave, and it's not enough – I want something else, or I want more. It tells God, You don't know what You're doing. You don't know what's best. I do. I like this. The person consuming pornography knows the truth. They know what is right. And the suppress it.

But not only does pornography damage your relationship with God, it destroys you in the process. Obviously, it damages you spiritually. It is impossible to give yourself to pornography, or any other sexual sin on Saturday, and then enjoy worship on Sunday – unless you repent.

Pornography also **destroys your relationships**. Pornography reduces your likelihood of finding satisfaction in your spouse. In a sense, pornography is like all marketing – it shows you what you want. And what you want is what you don't have. But pornography presents that to you as normal. As if, this is what you're missing out on. This is what other people are like. This is what other people do.

And then you look at your spouse and you're disappointed. Why aren't you like that?

We're talking about physical things right now, and that may apply more sharply to men, but the same thing can happen emotionally – you can still compare what you have and experience to what you see elsewhere and ask, why isn't my relationship or

experience like that? Why don't you say those kinds of things? Why don't we do those kinds of things? *Comparison is the thief of joy.* And when you stock your mind with images and ideas that don't involve your actual spouse, you're stacking the deck against them and simultaneously, against yourself making it harder and harder to enjoy who and what you have because you keep thinking about who or what you want.

And that's a dangerous place to be because left to itself your sexual appetite is never completely satisfied. So, left alone it begins to curve toward escalation. Like any addiction you require more or different to reach the old levels of excitement. Recent studies have shown that repeated use of pornography damages you neurologically. It actually rewires a man's brain. And unless God heals you with a instantaneous miracle, which is possible, it's going to take time to break that addiction and rewire your mind again to work the right way.

If you let it, your sexual appetite will **dehumanize you** reducing you to nothing more than your interests and impulses and reducing other people to nothing more than their shape and appearance and ability to satisfy your infinite appetite.

As with any addict, you trade your freedom for another hit of satisfaction and you go from being curious about something to being controlled it, to ultimately being chained to it.

And for some, the path becomes darker and deeper, more twisted as it pursues something new and fresh. Your appetite trains you, ultimately, to desire what is evil and unlawful. No one starts with the most hard-core or depraved elements of pornography you work your way there with slowly expanding boundaries.

We will talk about this again in a couple of weeks, but I have had several conversations with men who told me the thing that brought them to finally seek help is when they realized they were now looking at homosexual pornography, or in one man's case, seeking a homosexual experience – even though they would never, in their lives have identified as homosexual. They just found themselves there at the latest stage on their journey while chasing something to satisfy. This finally seemed like something they should click on.

Last year I listened to a podcast with Jason Portnoy, one of the original founders at Paypal along with men like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk. He then became the first CFO at Palantir. He was a Silicon Valley unicorn with skyrocketing wealth and a growing addiction to pornography that led him into self-destructive behaviors. He began by looking at pictures then moved on to videos and then using Craigslist to find hookups and escort services.

I'll share more of his story next week when we look at how people can change and how we can help them change. But for now, listen to this – and keep in mind, this man does not love Jesus. In the interview he said:

What I do think is very bad is porn in any amount at any time. I think that zero is the right amount. I think it is toxic. I think it is hurting our young men...I think it is hurting young women. I think it's just bad, just all around.⁵

Or consider this. Some of you may know the US Olympic team was rocked with scandal a few years ago when it came out that Larry Nasser, the team doctor, had been sexually abusing the girls. Investigations revealed he had molested more than 250 athletes. During his trial, one of them, Rachel Denhollander, a Christian, took the stand and told him:

You have become a man ruled by selfish and perverted desires, a man defined by his daily choices repeatedly to feed that selfishness and perversion. You chose to pursue your wickedness no matter what it cost others and the opposite of what you have done is for me to choose to love sacrificially, no matter what it costs me.⁶

I want you to see two things there – the ability to forgive, at great personal cost by someone who has received the love of Christ. But also, what Rachel says – you have become this – by your daily choices to feed selfishness.

No one starts at this level of wickedness. But the trail can lead you there. If you know that, why would you get on it?

This an obvious place to transition to our next point – pornography damages your relationship with God, destroys you, and destroys others.

I want to start talking about others in a strange place, and that is, by talking about you, because if this is your struggle, you need to know – one way your sin hurts others is that *they lose you*. You're not as engaged with your spouse. Maybe you grow detached from your kids. You could wind up walking yourself right into a divorce and then literally costing your kids their parent and eventually getting half the time you would otherwise have with your grandkids. But in the moment, you're not thinking about that.

So you need to know – no matter how long you've been doing this or how long it takes you to completely knock it off – you were designed for relationships – with God and with others. That is where you belong. You're supposed to be making the lives of others better, and they're supposed to do the same for you. It can happen. It will happen, if you submit your sexuality to Jesus instead of allowing it to rule over you.

Pornography destroys people you've never met because someone has to make what you're consuming. And no healthy human being grows up saying I want to make raunchy porn for the internet. Can you stand before God and make the argument, it's

⁵ <https://tim.blog/2022/06/16/jason-portnoy-transcript/>

⁶ Quoted in Dyck, *Your Future Self Will Thank You*, 30.

okay because she likes doing this? Is doing it cultivating anything beautiful in her heart, anything that Jesus will commend when she stands before Him?

Pornography in all its forms, including what you're reading on Kindle destroys others because it changes how you view other people and what you want from them. It promotes the view that other people exist to serve you and your desires, and then you get frustrated because the real world doesn't line up with fantasy.

Pornography puts competitors in your mind for intimacy with your spouse and that's not fair. It might not come out exactly this way, but sexual sin of all kinds tells the other person I don't care about you, I just want what I want. It says the same thing to God, I don't care about you, I want what I want.

This is why Jesus was so severe when He dealt with sexual sin. Think of what He said in the famous Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Jesus is being emphatic here. He's exaggerating to make a point. So, let's not miss it. Jesus wants us to take desire and sexual sin seriously *in all their forms*.

Remember last week – what happens when you play with fire? If you keep the fire of intimacy within the fireplace of marriage, all is well. If you move the fire into another part of the house, the whole thing burns down.



So where do we go from here? Well, next week we'll talk about steps we can take to resist pornography and other temptations in a sex-soaked world. We'll also talk about how to respond when it's not your problem, but it's someone you know and love. We'll give a full Sunday to that.

This morning I want to return our attention to two of the general principles I highlighted when we started this series. The first is that distinctions matter.



If what we've been talking about this morning is stirring some things up in you, it is vitally important to get right what you're feeling. There is a difference between conviction and condemnation. Condemnation comes from the flesh and the enemy and drives us away from God. Conviction comes from the Holy Spirit and drives toward Jesus through repentance. It's OK to 'feel bad' if it leads you to change, it's not OK if it keeps you in sin and away from God.

It is also essential for you to understand the difference between temptation and sin. Jesus was tempted, but never sinned. You will be tempted sexually. But will you sin? Not if you resist the temptation. One does not have to automatically lead to the other. And just because you've been tempted doesn't mean you have sinned.

You have to know this, because some of you are trying to fight the good fight, you're trying to keep away from sin. But you're tempted, and the enemy tries to make you feel condemned. You're down on yourself and defeated but Jesus is cheering you on. You have been tempted, but you have not sinned.

And that brings us to the second general principle: you can change. I want to acknowledge that some people are discouraged. You wonder what's going to help? Why will it be different this time? Are you just permanently stuck and broken? And the answer, based on God's own testimony, is no! It doesn't matter how long you have been exposed to this sin - Christ sets the captive free. Your change might look like a miracle, or it might look like a mud-run a long, challenging route filled with obstacles and set-backs. But listen to me: just because it's hard doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.

Difficulty and struggle produce strength. And God wants you to be strong. For yourself and for others. The same gospel that saves your soul will set you free from this sin. Listen to the promise of Scripture, one of my personal favorites:

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

You can change. You can win. God wants to help. Change is possible. Victory over sin, is possible, in Jesus' name.

I wonder if you've noticed, every week we keep returning to this promise:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Friends, you need to know: Jesus doesn't love you because you're good; He loves you because He's good. He wants to heal you, help you, and make you the man or woman He designed you to be – in every area of life. Invite Him in and talk to Him about your mess or talk with Him about how to avoid falling into one in this world of temptations. Either way, submit your sexuality to Jesus and glorify the God who made us and who made sex.

Let's pray.



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Romans 1:18-32 **When Sex Is God** **Part Three**

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Summary: Pornography is a plague on God's good plan for sexuality.

- **Understanding God's Design:** How can recognizing that God created sex and sexuality help shift our view of it from something shameful to something good and purposeful? How does this perspective affect your approach to sexual temptation and sin?
- **Impact of Pornography:** Discuss the ways in which pornography can damage one's relationship with God. What are some practical steps you can take to avoid or overcome the temptation to view pornography?
- **Effects on Relationships:** The sermon highlights that pornography can negatively affect relationships with others. How have you seen pornography impact relationships in your life or in the lives of those around you? How can one rebuild trust and intimacy after such damage?
- **Personal Covenant with Eyes:** Job made a covenant with his eyes to avoid looking at women with lust. How can this principle be applied in today's digital age where images and media are ubiquitous? What specific actions can you take to uphold this covenant?
- **Difference Between Temptation and Sin:** How can understanding the difference between temptation and sin affect your self-perception and spiritual growth? Share an example of a time when distinguishing between these two helped you in your walk with Christ.
- **Role of Conviction vs. Condemnation:** The sermon distinguishes between conviction (which leads us to repentance) and condemnation (which drives us away from God). How can you differentiate between the two in your own life? How can you ensure that conviction leads you toward positive change rather than discouragement?
- **Hope and Change:** Reflect on the promise from 1 Corinthians 10:13 about God providing a way of escape from temptation. How does this promise offer hope and encouragement for someone struggling with sexual sin? What are some practical ways to rely on God's help in overcoming these challenges?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

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