

Is Addiction to Pornography Fornication?

By Allen Dvorak

Abstract:

There are few “hot button” issues today that are “hotter” than this one. Some are teaching that addiction to pornography is fornication and the implications of this doctrine are far reaching. If it is true, addiction to pornography is grounds for divorce. If it is true, who defines “addiction” in this case and how does that differ from simple lust?

Introduction:

- I. In January of this year, a brother in Christ affirmed in a Facebook post that the repetitive use of pornography that is acted upon fits the meaning of “sexual immorality” as mentioned in Matthew 19:9.
 - A. That post engendered a firestorm of responses as others commented on the plague that pornography constitutes for our society, noting the damage that it does to families, marriages, and individuals.
 - B. Many of those comments weighed in on the meaning of “sexual immorality” in Matthew 19:9, illustrating a broad spectrum of supposed meanings for the word so translated.
- II. The scenario in which one spouse divorces the other, citing the use of pornography as scriptural cause (Matthew 19:9), is not hypothetical. Such divorces are occurring among God’s people with increasing frequency.
 - A. Preachers and elders are increasingly compelled to speak to the question of the scriptural validity of such divorces.
 - B. The challenge is exacerbated by the widespread use of pornography even among brethren.
- III. The confluence of the development of ubiquitous electronic communication with the opportunistic utilization of such technology by pornographers necessitates the focus of this study.
 - A. Pornography is not a new thing by any means, as excavations of ancient sites such as Pompeii have demonstrated. First Corinthians 10:13 (“No temptation...that is not common to man”) is just as true today as it was when Paul penned his letter.
 - B. Different venues of pornography made possible by electronic communication (online, virtual, interactive, etc.) have made it necessary to apply terms and principles of Scripture to situations/circumstances unknown to the first century world and that we could hardly have imagined ourselves even just a few decades ago.
 - C. At the same time, we must resist the temptation to lay aside the Word of God because “times are different.” The tempter uses the same wiles; he just dresses them up in different clothing.
 - D. The critical nature of this study results from the truth that fornication (“sexual immorality”; *porneia*) is the only scriptural cause for divorce.
 1. **Matthew 19:9 (KJV 1900)** ⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

2. **Matthew 19:9 (NKJV)** ⁹ 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.”
3. **Matthew 19:9 (ESV)** ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”
4. Marriages entered after an unscriptural divorce, whether the result of rebellion or a misunderstanding of the meaning of “sexual immorality” (*porneia*), result in adultery.
 - a. **Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)** ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
 - b. **Hebrews 13:4 (NKJV)** ⁴ Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
- E. To answer the question appearing in the title of this study this study will focus on the meaning of *porneia*, the Greek word appearing in the text of the “exception clause” of Matthew 19:9 and sometimes translated *fornication*.
- F. Some pertinent questions include:
 1. Does lust in the heart constitute *porneia*?
 2. Does the viewing of pornography constitute *porneia*?
 3. Is addiction to pornography included in the meaning of *porneia*?
 4. Does “online sexual activity” constitute *porneia*?
 5. Does “sexting” meet the definition of *porneia*?
 6. Does *porneia* necessitate some sexually stimulating physical contact, but not necessarily sexual relations (penile-vaginal intercourse)?
- IV. Purpose: Identify the sin of fornication (*porneia*) for the purpose of properly applying Matthew 19:9.

Body:

I. An Online Discussion

- A. An examination of the Facebook post previously mentioned, along with the many responses to that post, prompts several observations:
 1. There was a great deal of emotional pleading, i.e., appeals to the emotional trauma of the spouses of those using pornography to suggest that such activity must surely qualify as *porneia*.
 2. Some responses appeared to fall prey to the fallacy of the excluded middle. The fallacy explained goes like this: if the viewing of pornography is not a scriptural cause for divorce, then the only alternative for the spouse of one who is involved in pornography is to continue the marital relationship without any means of remediation.
 3. The desire to properly define the Greek word *porneia* was interpreted by some as manifesting:
 - a. A lack of concern for the emotional distress suffered by the spouses of those heavily involved in pornography use.

- b. The desire to excuse those who replace the sexual aspect of their marital relationship with the use of pornography.
 - c. The desire to protect users of pornography from the consequences of their sin (a failure to “hold them accountable”).
 - d. The quibbling over words to the exclusion of recognizing the seriousness of the problem of pornography.
4. The definition of “porneia” was generalized by some to the point that it would include virtually any kind of sexual activity apart from marital relations.
- a. The translation of *porneia* in many modern versions as “sexual immorality” or “immorality” tends to facilitate this generalization.
 - b. Although *porneia* certainly fits the description of “sexual immorality,” is the meaning of the word more specific?
- B. The initial post and the resulting comments clearly suggested the need for an objective study of the meaning of *porneia*, the Greek word translated *fornication* (KJV) or *sexual immorality* (NKJV; ESV; NIV).

II. The Words Involved

- A. Our English word *fornication* is essentially the transliteration of a Latin word.
1. “c. 1300, from Old French *fornicacion* ‘fornication, lewdness; prostitution; idolatry’ (12c.), from Late Latin *fornicationem* (nominative *fornicatio*), noun of action from past-participle stem of *fornicari* ‘to fornicate,’ from Latin *fornix* (genitive *fornicis*) ‘brothel’ (Juvenal, Horace), originally ‘arch, vaulted chamber, a vaulted opening, a covered way,’ probably an extension, based on appearance, from a source akin to *fornus* ‘brick oven of arched or domed shape’ (from PIE root *gwher- ‘to heat, warm’). Strictly, ‘voluntary sex between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman;’ extended in the Bible to adultery. The sense extension in Latin is perhaps because Roman prostitutes commonly solicited from under the arches of certain buildings.” (etymonline.com)
 2. “In Latin, the term *fornix* means arch or vault. In ancient Rome, prostitutes waited for their customers out of the rain under vaulted ceilings, and *fornix* became a euphemism for brothels, and the Latin verb *fornicare* referred to a man visiting a brothel. The first recorded use in English is in the *Cursor Mundi*, c. 1300; the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) records a figurative use as well: ‘The forsaking of God for idols.’” (Wikipedia.com; “fornication”)
 3. “The term *fornication* derives from the Latin *fornix*, which means archway; the vaulted arches of churches are called fornications. The term gained its sexual connotation because prostitutes in Rome often solicited business from the archways of buildings.” (encyclopedia.com; “fornication”)
 4. These etymologies are cited for the purpose of noting the historical connection of the word “fornication” with prostitution (via its Latin derivation).
 5. Although etymologies can give the “flavor” of a word, or some indication of its evolution, they do not always reflect current usage of a word (e.g., our English word “idiot”).
 - a. The meanings of some words in living languages will change over time.

- b. The translators of the King James Version used the English word *fornication* to translate the Greek word *porneia*.
 - c. Webster defines the word *fornication* according to its common modern usage.
 - 1) “Illicit sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person.” [*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 5th Edition*]
 - 2) “Consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other” [*10th Edition*]
 - 3) Webster’s definitions may suggest why more recent translations of the Scriptures have moved away from the word “fornication.”
- B. Although even the modern definition of *fornication* is suggestive for the meaning of *porneia*, rather than define the word *fornication*, the better strategy is to define the word in the Greek text that is behind the translation, i.e., *porneia*.
- 1. We will attempt to do that by noting lexical definitions and its usage in both the Old Testament (LXX) and New Testament.¹
 - 2. Words related to *porneia* (πορνεία) include:
 - a. *Porne* (πόρνη) - a prostitute or harlot.
 - b. *Porneuo* (πορνεύω) - the cognate verb meaning *commit fornication*
 - 3. The Greek noun translated *adultery* is a different word *moicheia* (μοιχεία).

III. Definitions and Translations

- A. A perusal of the lexical sources consulted in Appendix C suggests the following:
- 1. *Porneia* is often defined with the phrase *sexual intercourse* (e.g., Thayer, BDAG, Vine, Friberg, Moulton & Milligan).
 - 2. Another word that appears in multiple definitions of *porneia* is *prostitution* (or synonyms such as *whoredom* or *harlotry*), evidence that the etymology of the English word *fornication* brings the proper idea to the word *porneia*.
 - 3. Although *prostitution* brings a specific emphasis to *sexual intercourse*, some of the definitions given are, in fact, rather general (e.g., *unchastity* [BDAG & Liddell], *sexual immorality* [Swanson, Newman], *unfaithfulness* [Newman]), all of which, however, could also refer to sexual intercourse.
 - a. In the case of such general definitions, the context in which the word is used could narrow its meaning (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:12-20).
 - b. Such general definitions may be intended to include various circumstances of sexual intercourse or physical, sexual contact beyond the specific meaning of prostitution (e.g., sodomy [*cf.* Jude 7], bestiality, pedophilia).
 - 4. A couple of comments from these sources that deserve specific attention include:
 - a. “...*unfaithfulness and apostasy* (in relation to God) Hos 4,12” (Lust & Hauspie)

¹ The Hebrew equivalent of πορνεύω is *zana* (transliterated) - “commit fornication, be a harlot, play the harlot” TWOT, #563. The Hebrew root for nouns equivalent to πορνεία is z-n-t. Trying to determine the meaning of πορνεία by looking at its Hebrew equivalent(s) is similar to defining πορνεία by its English “equivalent,” *fornication*. The meaning behind the Hebrew root may be wider or narrower than the meaning of πορνεία and thus an additional element of uncertainty is introduced. For this reason, we consider Old Testament passages in the LXX where πορνεία or one of its forms is used.

- b. “Symbol. for *idolatry*, the forsaking of the true God to worship idols, (comp. πορνεύω, 2.) Rev. 2:21, al.” (Bloomfield)
 - 5. It must be remembered that dictionary definitions are the starting point for understanding the meanings of words. A word can sometimes have different shades of meaning depending upon the context in which it is used.
- B. Appendix A lists Matthew 19:9 as it appears in several English translations.
 - 1. The translations of *porneia* in those versions include:
 - a. “fornication” (ASV; KJV; DARBY; Wycliffe; D-R)
 - b. “sexual immorality” (ESV; NKJV; NIV; HCSB; ISV)
 - c. “whoredom” (John Wesley translation; Geneva; YLT)
 - d. “sexual relations with another man” (NCV)
 - e. “unchastity” (RSV; NRSV)
 - f. “immorality” (NET; NASB95)
 - g. “unfaithfulness” or “unfaithful” (God’s Word Translation; NLT)
 - h. “adultery” (The Message)
 - 2. Note that some of these translations are rather generic (e.g., *unchastity*; *unfaithfulness*; *immorality*, even *sexual immorality*).
 - a. For example: although “unfaithfulness” is often used in the common vernacular to indicate *sexual* unfaithfulness, a husband can be “unfaithful,” i.e., not fulfilling his responsibilities as a husband, to his wife in several ways other than sexual infidelity.
 - b. When *porneia* is used in a literal sense (it is sometimes used in a figurative sense to describe idolatry), it is connected to sexual unfaithfulness.
 - c. The challenge of translation, of course, is to ascribe meaning that is neither too broad nor too narrow. *Prostitution* is too narrow, but *sexual immorality* is a phrase that appears to be too broad (it would include the meaning of *porneia*, but also much which is not *porneia*).

IV. Defined by Context

- A. As previously noted, *porneia* is sometimes used in a figurative sense, particularly in the Old Testament, to indicate unfaithfulness to God, often by involvement in idolatry.²
 - 1. It is difficult to give a precise definition for *porneia* based solely on its figurative use in the Scriptures. Since the figurative use of words depends upon an understanding of their literal meaning(s), we typically need to begin with the literal and concrete meaning of a word before trying to understand its figurative use – not the other way around!
 - 2. When *porneia* is used in the Scriptures in a literal sense, it appears to describe sexual relations, often prostitution.

² Appendix B contains a listing of the appearances of *porneia* and its associated forms in the Old Testament and Old Testament apocrypha (references, not text).

- B. The word *porneia* and its forms are found 25x in the New Testament. Its cognate verb is found 8x in the New Testament.
1. πορνεία (8x in 7 verses) - Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Revelation 19:2
 2. πορνείας (12x in 12 verses) - Matthew 5:32; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Revelation 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3
 3. πορνείαν (3x in 3 verses) - Acts 21:25; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Colossians 3:5
 4. πορνείαι (2x in 2 verses) - Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21
 5. πορνεύω (lemma; 8x in 7 verses) - 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:8; Revelation 2:14, 20; 17:2; 18:3, 9
- C. When *porneia* appears in “sin lists” it is difficult to determine meaning from context, other than the fact that it sometimes appears in the company of other sins which have sexual aspects. In such cases, it would appear that a distinction is being made between *porneia* and these other sins (as noted later in this outline).
- D. In some passages, it is abundantly clear that *porneia* refers to sexual intercourse. Some examples include:
1. **Genesis 38:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.” And Judah said, “Bring her out, and let her be burned.” [LXX: “immoral” - πορνεύω; “immorality” - πορνεία]
 2. **Ezekiel 16:15, 22, 24, 25, 31, 33, 34, 36, 39, 41**
 - a. Although this passage uses *porneia* and its forms in a figurative sense, the passage clearly gives the sense of the word *porneia* with its references to prostitution.
 3. **Sirach 23:22–23 (NRSV)** ²² So it is with a woman who leaves her husband and presents him with an heir by another man. ²³ For first of all, she has disobeyed the law of the Most High; second, she has committed an offense against her husband; and third, through her fornication she has committed adultery and brought forth children by another man.
 4. **John 8:41 (ESV)** ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”
 5. **1 Corinthians 6:12–20 (ESV)** ¹² “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

- a. “Joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her”
 - b. “The two will become one flesh”
- E. We need to be careful that we do not narrow the general meaning of *porneia* to its meaning in a particular context.
1. For example, the use of the word in Genesis 38:24 refers to prostitution, but concluding that the word *only* means prostitution is a mistake; prostitution is only one “type” of sexual intercourse included in the meaning of the word.
 2. For example, the assumption that the Jews in John 8:41 are taking a jab at Jesus with their affirmation that they were “not born of sexual immorality” is suggested by some as indicating that *porneia* is given the very specific meaning of “adultery during the betrothal period” (Philip Leineweber). There is some uncertainty as to whether this is the specific meaning in this passage and it is certain that the word is not confined to this meaning in general.
 3. I believe that the narrowing of the definition of *porneia* in such instances is unwarranted. The meaning of “sexual intercourse” satisfies the context.
- F. In several NT passages, *porneia* is listed in the company of other words which would describe lust, lascivious behavior, etc.
1. **Galatians 5:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [*akatharsia, aselgeia*]
 2. **2 Corinthians 12:21 (ESV)** ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. [*akatharsia, aselgeia*]
 3. **Colossians 3:5 (ESV)** ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [*akatharsia, pathos, epithumia*]
 4. **Romans 13:13 (ESV)** ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [*aselgeia*]
 - a. Also note the relationship between the words in each word-pair: drunkenness leads to orgies; sensuality leads to sexual immorality; jealousy leads to quarreling.
 - b. We are not dealing with synonyms, but rather cause and effect.
 5. **Ephesians 5:3–5 (ESV)** ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [v. 3 - *akatharsia* (impurity); v. 5 – *akathartos* (impure)]
- G. It doesn’t appear that Paul was being repetitive in the above passages (i.e., equating *porneia* with *akatharsia* and *aselgeia*), but rather he described two different kinds of behavior (note in particular Romans 13:13).

H. Other examples include:

1. **Revelation 14:8 (ESV)** ⁸ Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” [*thumos* (passion)]
 - a. Although passion and sexual immorality are related, they do not seem to be synonyms in this verse.
 - b. The same observation could be made about the passage below:
 - 1) **Revelation 18:3 (ESV)** ³ For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”
 - 2) **Revelation 17:4 (ESV)** ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. [*akathartos*]
 - 1) There is certainly some relationship between “impurity” and “sexual immorality,” but that doesn’t necessarily mean that all impurity is *porneia*.
 - 2) All thumbs are fingers, but not all fingers are thumbs! *Porneia* can be identified as impurity, but not all impurity is to be identified as *porneia*.

I. Note, however, the inclusion of adultery in Matthew 15:19, along with *porneia*.

1. **Matthew 15:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.
2. Although adultery would be included in the meaning of *porneia*, adultery is a specific kind of fornication (consider the different connotations in fornication and adultery).

J. It doesn’t appear that “looking at a woman,” either in person or via digital means would qualify as *porneia*.

1. **Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)** ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
2. A distinction is made between the overt act of adultery and looking at a woman with lustful intent. The second is “adultery in the heart.”
3. Why did Jesus qualify “adultery” with the phrase “in the heart”?
 - a. Why include the phrase “in his heart” if Jesus meant to equate lust with adultery?
 - b. Jesus was not equating the two (lust & adultery), but pointing to the cause of adultery to emphasize the importance of controlling our thoughts as well as our actions.
4. If lusting after a woman is not literal adultery (the overt act), then is viewing pornography literal fornication?

V. Observations³

- A. There seems to be increasing consensus among those who study the effects of pornography on the individual user that pornography has the potential to be addictive, that neurochemicals produced during sexual stimulation caused by pornography use create the strong desire for repetitive use.
1. In the Facebook post previously cited, a distinction was made between simply viewing pornography and an addiction to pornography.
 - a. Furthermore, acting on one's lust was suggested as the decision point for identifying *porneia*.
 - b. The online discussion over time moved from viewing pornography to specific sexual acts committed by two people via the Internet, virtual reality or even in the same room (with or without physical contact).
 2. If addiction to pornography fits the meaning of *porneia* and thus constitutes a scriptural cause for divorce, it is imperative that we be able to clearly define the point at which a person is addicted.
 3. What standard will be used to qualify pornography use as addictive? Daily use? Weekly use? Who will set that standard, since Scripture does not appear to make a distinction between lust and "addictive" lust?
 4. Even those who write about pornography addiction acknowledge the lack of "formal classification" (quotations from <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/porn-addiction>; I recommend reading this article in its entirety):
 - a. "A 2019 study suggests that the prevalence of these disorders may be about 3–6%. However, the rates have been difficult to determine due to a lack of formal classification."
 - b. "Porn addiction remains a controversial issue, with some research suggesting that it is not a real condition at all."
 - c. "The diagnosis of pornography addiction is controversial, and not all therapists will acknowledge it. Moreover, researchers have presented various different models of the signs."
 5. Some comments in the Facebook post quantified an addiction to pornography as being when such use is repetitive and no repentance is manifested.
- B. The etymology of the word *pornography* (writings of prostitutes) suggests to some the association of pornography with *porneia*.
1. We have already shown that fornication has connections, historically speaking, to prostitution.
 2. However, *porneia* has more specific connections to sexual intercourse than just visual materials that are sexually stimulating.
- C. The questions answered:
1. Does lust in the heart constitute *porneia*?
 - a. *Porneia* is distinguished from lust, although lust is a precursor to *porneia*.

³ Appendix D has some comments from various sources on the meaning of *porneia*.
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- b. In the initial post on Facebook, it was stated that lustful thoughts and simply viewing pornography is not *porneia*. I believe that is accurate.
2. Does the viewing of pornography constitute *porneia*?
 - a. The use of pornography meets the definition of “impurity,” “uncleanness,” and “sensuality.” As such, it is a sin.
 - b. The use of pornography, even its use for self-gratification, does not meet the definition of *porneia*.
3. Is addiction to pornography included in the meaning of *porneia*?
 - a. Although I believe that pornography can develop such a hold on an individual that s/he can be described as addicted, “pornography addiction” is a nebulous term without consensus as to its defining characteristics.
 - b. “Once again, if lust is not the same thing as adultery, how does lusting over and over again somehow become adultery? Does hating over and over again become murder?” (comment in the previously mentioned Facebook thread)
 - c. Even the repetitive, compulsive (?) use of pornography, despite it being sinful, does not meet the meaning of *porneia*.
4. Does “online sexual activity” constitute *porneia*?
 - a. Online sexual activity may involve two persons who are in real-time communication with each other, but have no actual physical contact with each other. In those instances in Scripture in which context makes the meaning of *porneia* clear, it involves at least some physical contact, if not actual coitus.
 - b. In some of the comments in the Facebook post there was the equating of the self-gratifying independent behavior of two people as they lust after each other with actual sexual intercourse between two people. The critical difference is that the first situation doesn’t involve physical contact between the two people.
5. Does “sexting” meet the definition of *porneia*?
 - a. Sexting between two people who do not have sexual rights to one another certainly qualifies as sinful behavior, being described by such words as lasciviousness, sensuality, lewdness, uncleanness, etc.
 - b. Albeit sinful, sexting does not meet the definition of *porneia* because there is no physical or bodily contact between persons.
6. Does *porneia* necessitate some sexually stimulating physical contact, but not necessarily sexual relations (penile-vaginal intercourse)?
 - a. *Porneia* is frequently associated with prostitution which involves physical contact, but not necessarily intercourse.
 - b. In contexts where the meaning of *porneia* is clear, physical contact is present.

Conclusion:

- I. Whether properly identified as *porneia* or not, the use of pornography is condemned in Scripture as impurity, uncleanness and sensuality. The Scriptures clearly teach that sexual lust is sinful, requiring repentance and its accompanying fruits on the part of the sinner in order to be forgiven.

- II. Adultery in the heart (sexual lust) does not constitute *porneia*/fornication, nor is it a scriptural cause for divorce.
- III. The use of pornography, while sinful, does not meet the definition of *porneia* and is thus not a scriptural cause for divorcing one's spouse.
 - A. **Galatians 6:7–8 (ESV)** ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
 - B. Neither men or women can “game the system” by engaging in pornography use, but stopping short of *porneia* in order to avoid being divorced by a spouse.
- IV. When context provides a precise meaning for *porneia*, it involves either actual sexual intercourse or implicitly suggests physical and sexual contact between two people.

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Appendix A

The meaning of *porneia* in Matthew 19:9 according to various translations:

Unchastity, unfaithful(ness), immorality, sexual immorality, fornication, whoredom, sexual relations with another man

Matthew 19:9 (ESV) And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (ASV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery.

Matthew 19:9 (KJV 1900) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Matthew 19:9 (NET) Now I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NASB95) “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NIV) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NKJV) 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 19:9 (NLT) And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful.”

Matthew 19:9 (RSV) And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NRSV) And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NRSV) And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (LEB) Now I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except on the basis of sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (HCSB) And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (NCV) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery. The only reason for a man to divorce his wife is if his wife has sexual relations with another man.”

Matthew 19:9 (GW) I can guarantee that whoever divorces his wife for any reason other than her unfaithfulness is committing adultery if he marries another woman.”

Matthew 19:9 (ISV) I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (GNB) I tell you, then, that any man who divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, commits adultery if he marries some other woman.”

Matthew 19:9 (The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language) I’m holding you to the original plan, and holding you liable for adultery if you divorce your faithful wife and then marry someone else. I make an exception in cases where the spouse has committed adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (DARBY) But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery; and he who marries one put away commits adultery.

Matthew 19:9 (YLT) ‘And I say to you, that, whoever may put away his wife, if not for whoredom, and may marry another, doth commit adultery; and he who did marry her that hath been put away, doth commit adultery.’

Matthew 19:9 (LSB) “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (TPT) “But I say to you, whoever leaves his wife for any reason other than immorality, then takes another wife is living in adultery. And whoever takes a divorced woman in marriage is also living in adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 (GB) I say therefore unto you, that whosoever shal put away his wife, except *it be* for whoredome, and marie another, committeth adulterie: and whosoever marieth her which is divorced, doeth commit adulterie.

Matthew 19:9 (Wycliffe) Trewly I seie to 3ou, that who euer leeueth his wif, no but for fornicacioun, and weddith an other, doth a vowtrie; and he that weddith the forsaken *wife*, doth a vowtrie.

Matthew 19:9 (D-R) And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.

ESV - English Standard Version

ASV - American Standard Version

KJV 1900 - King James Version

NET - New English Translation

NASB95 - New American Standard Bible (1995 Edition)

NIV - New International Version

NKJV - New King James Version

NLT - New Living Translation

RSV - Revised Standard Version

NRSV - New Revised Standard Version

LEB - Lexham English Bible

HCSB - Holman Christian Standard Bible

NCV - New Century Version

GW - God’s Word Translation

ISV - International Standard Version, New Testament

GNB - Good News Translation

DARBY - 1890 Darby Bible

YLT - Young’s Literal Translation

LSB - Legacy Standard Bible

TPT - The Passion Translation

GB - The Geneva Bible

D-R - Douay-Rheims Bible

Appendix B

Occurrence of πορνεία and its related/cognate forms in the Old Testament (LXX)

Πόρνοι - 3x in 3 verses

3rd Kingdoms 3:16; 20:19; 22:38

Πόρνας - 1x

Prov. 29:3

πορνεία - 13x in 13 verses

Is. 47:10; Jer. 2:20; 3:9; Ezek. 16:25, 33, 34, 36; 23:17, 29; 43:7; Nahum 3:4 [Sirach 23:23; 26:9]

πορνεῖαι - 1x

4th Kingdoms 9:22

Πορνείαν - 20x in 18 verses

Num. 14:33; Is. 57:9; Ezek. 16:15, 22, 25; 23:7, 8, 11, 14, 18, 19, 27, 35; 43:9; Hosea 2:2; 4:11; 6:11 [Tobit 8:7]

Πορνείας - 1x in 1 verse

Jer. 3:2

Πορνείας - 14x in 12 verses

Gen. 38:24; Jer. 13:27; Ezek. 16:41; 23:29; Hosea 1:2; 2:4; 4:12; Micah 1:7; Nahum 3:3 [Tobit 4:12; Wisdom of Solomon 14:12; Sirach 41:17]

πορνεῖον - 2x in 2 verses

Ezek. 16:31, 39

Πορνεύοντες - 1x

Hosea 4:18

πορνεῦσαι - 1x

Jer. 3:7

Πορνεύσει - 1x

Amos 7:17

Πορνεύων - 1x

Deut. 23:17

πορνικὸν - 2x in 2 verses

Prov. 7:10; Ezek. 16:24

πόρνη - 10x in 9 verses

Gen 34:31; 38:21; Deut. 23:17; 3rd Kingdoms 12:24b; Is. 1:21; 23:16; Ezek. 16:31, 35; Nahum 3:4

Πόρνην - 9x in 9 verses

Gen. 38:15, 22; Lev. 21:7, 14; Joshua 6:17, 23, 25; Judges 16:1; Ezek. 23:44

Πόρνης - 12x in 12 verses

Deut. 23:2, 18; Joshua 2:1; Judges 11:1; Prov. 5:3; 6:26; Is. 23:15; 57:3; Jer. 3:3; Ezek. 16:30; 23:43; Hosea 4:14

Πορνίας - 1x

Hosea 5:4

Πορνοκόπος - 1x

Prov. 23:21

Πόρνος - 1x

Sirach 23:16

πορνῶν - 2x in 2 verses

Jer. 5:7; Hosea 4:14

πόρνῳ - 1x

Sirach 23:17

Appendix C

Definitions of πορνεία from lexical resources

“prop. of illicit sexual intercourse in general” [Thayer 532]

“to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution—‘to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution.’” [Louw-Nida 88:271]

“illicit sexual intercourse...in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 it stands for, or includes adultery; it is distinguished from it in 15:19 and Mark 7:21;” [*fornication* - Vine 465]

“*prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse*” [BDAG 693]

“generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse *fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution*” [Friberg]

“*fornication, prostitution, Demosthenes*” (Liddell)

πορνεία, rare in class Gk., “fornication,” “licentiousness.” (Kittel)

“*prostitution,...*; of a man,... *fornication, unchastity,...*; metaph., *idolatry*, (Liddell)

“Πορνεία..., which is rare in classical Greek... originally meant “prostitution,” “fornication,” but came to be applied to unlawful sexual intercourse generally. It was a wider term than μοιχεία, embracing the idea of “barter,” “traffic” in sexual vice, though in the OT there was a tendency to assimilate in some respects the two terms:” (Moulton & Milligan)

“sexual immorality, sexual sin of a general kind, that includes many different behaviors (Mt 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mk 7:21; Jn 8:41; Ac 15:20; 1Co 6:18; 7:2; 2Co 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; 1Th 4:3)” (Swanson)

“*sexual immorality; unfaithfulness* (Mt. 5:32; 19:9)” (Newman)

“πορνεία - Gn 38,24; Nm 14,33; 2 Kgs 9,22; Is 47,10; 57,9 *whoredom, fornication* Gn 38,24; *sexual urges* Tob 8,7; *unfaithfulness and apostasy* (in relation to God) Hos 4,12” (Lust & Hauspie)

“Πορνεία, ας, ή, (πορνεύω,) prop. *harlotry*; also *fornication*; any commerce of the sexes out of marriage, as oft. in Class. In N. T. 1) prop. and gener. Matt. 15:19, μοιχεία, πορνεία. Rom. 1:29, and oft.; John 8:41, ήμεϊς εκ πορν. ου γεγενν. ‘we are not born of fornication,’ we are not spurious children, born of a concubine, but are the true descendants of Abraham; see, however, my note: spec. of whoredom with a married woman, *adultery*, Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Ecclus. 23:23; see my note; of *incest*, or incestuous marriage, 1 Cor. 5:1. Probably also in reference to marriages within the degrees prohibited by the Mosaic law, and gener. to all such intercourse as that law interdicted, Acts 15:20; 21:25. 2) from the Hebr. Symbol. for *idolatry*, the forsaking of the true God to worship idols, (comp. πορνεύω, 2.) Rev. 2:21, al.” (Bloomfield)

Appendix D

Comments on the meaning of πορνεία from various resources (note that I have removed footnotes from within the comments)

“The word-group can describe various extra-marital sexual modes of behaviour insofar as they deviate from accepted social and religious norms (e.g. homosexuality, promiscuity, paedophilia, and especially prostitution)... In the Pauline writings the word-group *porne* denotes any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse.” [H. Reisser, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, I, 497-500]

“*Porneia* is here used as a quite general word for unlawful and immoral sexual intercourse and relationships.” [Barclay 24]

As with the Latin word from which the English word *fornication* comes, the Greek word is connected to prostitution in its etymology, a fact which “sheds a significant flood of light on the attitude of mind behind it.” [Barclay 24]

“Unchastity, sexual immorality. The word ‘fornication’ is used in the Scriptures to mean several different things. Its general meaning refers to every kind of illegal sexual intercourse, that is, any intercourse except that between a husband and wife. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:1 (KJV) the word is used twice to refer to a sin which was being tolerated by the church: a man apparently was living with his stepmother as though with a wife. In a list of terrible sins in Romans 1:29, the apostle Paul included fornication, apparently intending the term to mean all acts of sexual immorality (KJV). In 1 Corinthians the context suggests that Paul used the word in reference to all sorts of illicit sexual activity (vv 13, 18 KJV). In 1 Corinthians 7:2 (KJV) Paul used the plural Greek word for ‘fornications’ to imply the various ways in which the sin may manifest itself. He thus gave a reason why people in Corinth, should marry and live together properly. One of the sins included in the word’s general sense is adultery. ‘Fornication’ also has a more limited sense of immoral sexual activity between unmarried people. Such a meaning is implied in those biblical lists where both fornication and adultery come together. Jesus’ list of the defiling sins that proceed out of a person’s heart includes ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ (Mt 15:19; Mk 7:21). Paul’s list of those sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God also contains both fornicators and adulterers (1 Cor 6:9 KJV). ‘Fornication’ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 (KJV, ‘unchastity’ RSV) is usually taken by biblical students today to refer specifically to adultery. The conclusion has to do with interpretation rather than translation. Conservative scholars disagree whether Jesus’ exceptive phrase relative to divorce has to do with fornication in a general or limited sense. He might have meant adultery alone, or he might have been including it generally with other sexual sins. He also could have used the term in a more limited sense of unlawful premarital sex.” (*Baker Encyclopedia* 815)

“Fornication: any type of illicit sexual activity. Included in the realm of sexual misconduct in the OT are seduction, rape, sodomy, bestiality, certain forms of incest, prostitution (male or female), and homosexual relations (cf. Lev. 18; 19:20-22, 29; 20:10-21). The specific sin of adultery, related to marriage, was considered more serious than the others, however, so that a special set of laws governed it. In the NT, almost any form of sexual misconduct (that is, sexual activity outside the marriage relationship) could be designated as fornication or ‘immorality’ (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9; 2 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 13:4; Jude 7).” (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary* 319)

“In general, illicit sexual intercourse (Heb. *zānā*), a sin violating the spirit of the Seventh Commandment (Exod. 20:14), which was meant to protect the integrity of the family. Fornication (Gk. *porneia*) can be linked with adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) or distinguished from it (15:19 = Mark 7:21). Committing fornication is noted and rebuked (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:8; Jude 7). Paul advised monogamous marriage ‘because of cases of sexual immorality’ (1 Cor. 7:2). Metaphorically, fornication can

describe the corruption of God's people with pagan idolatry (e.g., Jer. 2:20–36; Ezek. 16:15–43; Rev. 2:14, 20–22; 17:1–18; 18:2–9).” (*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* 469)

“Christianity opposed fornication in every form, not only overt acts but even lustful thoughts.” (*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. 1, p. 418)

FORNICATION Various acts of sexual immorality, especially being a harlot or whore. **Old Testament** Normally women are the subject of the Hebrew verb *zanah*, but in Num. 25:1 “people began to play the harlot” (NASB). The clearest example is that of Tamar sitting on the roadway to entice Judah (Gen. 38:12–30). Such action was subject to criminal prosecution bringing the death penalty (Gen. 38:24; cp. Lev. 21:9; Deut. 22:21). Fornication meant being unfaithful to a marriage commitment (Judg. 19:2). Israel’s neighbors practiced a fertility religion in which prostitution was part of the worship. This led naturally to describing worship of other gods as prostitution (Exod. 34:15–16; Judg. 8:27, 33; Hos. 4:13). This concept is central for Hosea’s preaching based on his experience with his unfaithful wife Gomer. Ezekiel also used this concept (Ezek. 16; 23) and extended it to include political treaties with foreign enemies (Ezek. 16:26, 28; 23:5). **New Testament** The NT also condemns prostitution. Here again prostitution played a central role in worship in places like Corinth and Athens. Greek philosophers could even distinguish the roles of prostitutes for pleasure, slave mistresses to give daily care to the master’s body, and wives to produce legitimate children. Some Stoic philosophers reacted against such practices and condemned sex outside marriage. Many women used the situation to take slave lovers for themselves or become lesbians. Jesus went against Jewish tradition and forgave prostitutes and opened the way for them to enter God’s kingdom through faith (Matt. 21:31–32; cp. Heb. 11:31; James 2:25), though He still regarded fornication as evil (Mark 7:21). Paul extended the use of the Greek term for fornication to cover all sinful sexual activity. He dealt with the problem particularly in writing the Corinthians who faced a society permeated with sexual religion and the sexual sins of a seaport. A believer must decide to be part of Christ’s body or a prostitute’s body (1 Cor. 6:12–20). The believer must flee sexual immorality and cleave to Christ, honoring Him with the physical body. Fornication is thus a result of sinful human nature (Gal. 5:19) and unsuitable for God’s holy people (Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3). The book of Revelation also says much about fornication, condemning those guilty to eternal punishment (Rev. 2:21–22). Revelation, as well as the prophets, extends the meaning of fornication to include political and religious unfaithfulness (Rev. 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2). As a whole, the NT uses *porneia*, most often translated “fornication,” in at least four ways: voluntary sexual intercourse of an unmarried person with someone of the opposite sex (1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Thess. 4:3); as a synonym for adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9); harlotry and prostitution (Rev. 2:14, 20); various forms of unchastity (John 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 5:1). (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 597)

Jesus does allow for an exception, *except for fornication*. This repeats the position he took up in the Sermon on the Mount (see the discussion on 5:31–32). As we saw in the earlier passage, *fornication* strictly means sexual relations between unmarried people. But the term was used more widely than that and came to signify irregular sexual unions of all kinds (*NIV* reads, “except for marital unfaithfulness”; *GNB* has, “even though she has not been unfaithful”). In this passage it will signify adultery because it refers to the actions of married people. We have seen that sexual relations mark a close and peculiar intimacy. When a married person engages in this action, Jesus says, then “hardness of heart” has come into the picture again and, the marriage having been irreparably destroyed, divorce is permissible. (Morris, L., *The Gospel according to Matthew* 483–484)

What then does the evidence lead us to conclude concerning the meaning of the word *porneia* or fornication in the light of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9? The conclusion is that the only grounds for divorce which would allow the innocent party to remarry is *porneia*, which is the overt act of sexual immorality, including adultery, sexual perversion, incest, homosexuality or whatever may fall within the realm of sexual immorality. (Lusk, M. W., III, “Fornication”—Its Meaning. In T. B. Warren (Ed.), *Your Marriage Can Be Great!: Including Forty Chapters Dealing Directly or Indirectly with the Crucial Problem of Divorce and Remarriage* 109)

“Marital unfaithfulness” here translates *porneia*, a broader term for sexual sin of all kinds. Many have therefore attempted to distinguish it from adultery in this text on the grounds that Jesus would otherwise not differ from Shammai and because Matthew did not use one of the regular words for adultery (e.g., *moicheia*) as he did in translating Jesus’ words in vv. 27–28. Other alternatives have therefore become popular—most notably that Jesus was referring to the discovery of premarital unfaithfulness or prohibiting certain marriages among close relatives that would have been defined as incestuous. Others argue that “except” means *except for a consideration of*, so that Jesus is not ruling one way or the other on divorce for adultery. Many scholars attribute Matthew’s exception clause to a later redactional change. D. A. Carson gives a good, brief survey of the various exegetical options here and an excellent defense of the NIV rendering. Objections to that rendering overlook the point that Jewish law *required* divorce in the case of adultery (*m. Yebam.* 2:8; *m. Sota* 5:1), whereas Christianity never does. Even with the exception, Jesus is stricter than Shammai. Jesus never commands divorce but only permits it if all attempts at reconciliation have failed because he recognizes that the adultery has already undermined one of the most fundamental elements of a marriage—sexual exclusivity. *Porneia* (rather than *moicheia*) is used probably because it was the term more commonly used to describe female rather than male infidelity. (Blomberg, C. *Matthew*, Vol. 22, 110–112)

Several objections are in order. On the basis of our understanding of Deut 24:1 and the meaning of *porneia*, we conclude that *porneia* and *'erwat dābār* are not equivalent. Thus, the preteritive view is in trouble. As noted, some understand *porneia* as a reference to marriage to pagan idolaters, but most think it refers to serious sexual sin. The major views on its meaning are: 1) illicit sexual relations during the betrothal period; 2) incestuous marriages; 3) adultery; 4) various forms of sexual impropriety including adultery, homosexuality and bestiality. We think it important to note that if *porneia* in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 refers either to sexual sin or to marriage to pagan idolaters, it does not refer to what we have argued is the best understanding of *'erwat dābār* in Deut 24:1. Thus, if the exception clause in Matt 19:9 is Jesus’ way of refusing to comment on *porneia*, it cannot be seen as an unwillingness to comment on Deut 24:1 and *'erwat dābār*, since *porneia* should not be identified with *'erwat dābār*.

The same point can be made in a different way. If *porneia* is equivalent to *'erwat dābār*, we might expect the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) of Deut 24:1 to render *'erwat dābār* as *porneia*, but it does not. *'erwat dābār* in Deut 24:1 is rendered in the Septuagint as *aschēmon pragma* (“something unseemly”). While this is not absolute proof that *porneia* in Matt 19:9 cannot possibly refer to *'erwat dābār*, it cannot be ignored either. If the Septuagint had used *porneia*, that would have helped tie together *porneia* and *'erwat dābār*. (Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. *Ethics for a Brave new world* 325–326)

Betrothal and Incest Views

Both of these views depend on a very narrow meaning of *porneia*, so we must ask what it actually means. We doubt that the word refers only to adultery. The more usual word for adultery is *moicheia*, and in 15:19 Matthew distinguishes *porneia* from *moicheia*. In fact, in Matthew *porneia* only occurs three times (5:32; 15:19; and 19:9). Two of the three are the cases in question, and the third (15:19) clearly distinguishes *moicheia* from *porneia*. Moreover, *porneuō* (the verb) never appears in Matthew, but *moichaō* (5:32; 19:9) and *moicheuō* (5:27, 28; 19:18) do occur and clearly refer to adultery. Matthean usage focuses on *moicheia* and its verbal forms for adultery, not *porneia* and *porneuō*.

Does *porneia*, then, mean only sex within the betrothal period or incest? As to the former view, some claim that premarital sex while engaged is the most usual meaning of *porneia*. In addition, the law had a specific punishment for an unfaithful betrothed wife (Deut 22:20–21). Nonetheless, several items militate against this view. For example, even if premarital sex is the most common meaning of *porneia*, it is not the only possible meaning. In addition to Matthean uses, the word also appears in Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3; Rev 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9. It is dubious that all of these (especially all of the Corinthians, Acts and Revelation references) refer to premarital sex, and even more disputable that they all refer to premarital sex during an engagement period. Neither biblical use generally nor Matthean use in particular suggest that premarital sex is the only or even the most natural meaning for *porneia*.

Second, appeal to Deuteronomy 22 about premarital sex during the betrothal period actually seals the case against this meaning in Matthew 19. In Matthew 19, Deuteronomy 24 is under discussion, but Deuteronomy 24 does not address sex during the betrothal period. Nor need it do so, since that topic was already addressed two chapters earlier in Deuteronomy 22.

Finally, nothing in Matthew 19 suggests that Jesus speaks of sex during the betrothal period. When that is the topic, Matthew is quite capable of making it clear (cf. Matt 1:18). He could have done the same in Matthew 19 but did not. We conclude that the exception clause does not relate to illicit sex during the betrothal period.

Is *porneia* incest? That seems to be the meaning in 1 Cor 5:1, and many think it is the meaning in Acts 15:29 (cf. also Acts 21:25). In addition, some claim there is evidence from first-century Palestine (the Damascus Document from Qumran) that *porneia* means incest. All of this evidence shows that *porneia* was commonly understood as incest in the time of Jesus and Matthew.

Several responses are in order. As to Qumran and biblical usage generally, suffice it to say that cases where *porneia* means incest show that it *can* mean incest in Matt 19:9, but they do not prove it does. NT usage of *porneia* shows that it sometimes has other meanings. Thus, while *porneia* can mean incest, it can have a broader meaning. A decision about its meaning in Matt 19:9 must be made on the context of Matthew 19, not solely on the possible meanings for *porneia*, since there are various possibilities. In Matthew 19 itself, there is no explicit reference to incest. If one argues that *porneia* must refer to something in Jewish law, then why single out this item from the Holiness Code in Leviticus 18? That code mentions a series of sins. Why choose this one alone? If the answer is that biblical usage favors incest, we reply that it is not clear that incest is the predominant biblical meaning for *porneia*, and we note that the objection returns us to a discussion of possible meanings, not the specific meaning of *porneia* in Matthew 19.

How, then, should one understand *porneia* in Matthew 19? Because it is not equivalent to *'erwat dābār*, and because nothing in Matthew 19 helps us identify some specific sexual sin, we think it best to understand *porneia* in 19:9 as a general term referring to sexual impurities of various kinds. Could that include incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and the like? We think so, and also hold that many NT uses of *porneia* use it in this general sense (cf. especially Pauline usage). (Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. *Ethics for a Brave new world* 328–329)

Grounds For Divorce

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord told His disciples that “whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality” commits sin (Matthew 5:32). The word translated as “sexual immorality” in the New King James Version of Matthew 5:32 is the Greek word *porneia*. Without exception, the King James Translation uses the word “fornication” every time the Greek word *porneia* is found.

Since sexual immorality is the only Scriptural reason for one to put away his spouse and marry another, we need to be extremely careful in defining the word.

Arthur L. Farstad was the Executive Editor of the New King James Version of the Bible. He explained why the NKJV translated the word *porneia* as “fornication” in some passages and as “sexual immorality” in others. “Five times in the New Testament the word *whoremonger* occurs, each time in lists of gross sins. The Greek word is *pornos*, which is also translated *fornicator* five times in the KJV. Where this term is used in a *general* sense in the NKJV, it is translated *sexually immoral*. Where it occurs next to other specific sexual sins, like adultery or homosexuality, the more precise English word for illicit sex between unmarried people—*fornication*—is used. The NKJV uses *fornicator(s)* six times and the abstract noun *fornication(s)* sixteen times, all but once in New Testament texts. Because sexual sin is rampant in modern society, it seems relevant to retain the Biblical terms rather than to conform to softened secular usages. ‘Premarital sex,’ ‘extramarital sex,’ and ‘gay sex’ are morally anemic substitutes for plain ‘fornication,’ ‘adultery,’ and ‘sodomy.’ ” (*The New King James Version In The Great Tradition*, pp. 86–87).

F. Wilbur Gingrich defines *porneia* as “*unchastity Prostitution, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse*” (*Shorter Lexicon*).

John Groves defines *porneia* as “*fornication, adultery, incest, whoredom, all kinds of lewdness*” (*A Greek and English Dictionary*).

A. T. Robertson, when commenting on Matthew 5:32, made the following comments: “*Saving for the cause of fornication (parektos logou porneias)*. An unusual phrase that means ‘except for a matter of unchastity.’ ‘Except on the ground of unchastity’ (Weymouth), ‘except unfaithfulness’ (Goodspeed), and is equivalent to *me epi porneiai* in Matthew 19:9.” (*Word Pictures In The New Testament*).

Ralph Earle, when commenting on Matthew 5:32 wrote, “**Fornication**. The Greek word is *porneia*, which occurs 26 times in the NT and is always (in KJV) translated ‘fornication.’ It sometimes has this meaning in distinction from *moicheia*, which regularly means ‘adultery’ but occurs only twice in the NT (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). On the other hand, Abbott-Smith notes that here and in 19:9 it equals *moicheia* (p. 373). Arndt and Gingrich give this definition of *porneia*: ‘*prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse*’ (p. 699). Today ‘fornication’ means ‘sexual intercourse

between a man and woman not married to each other' (*American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 517). According to this, it is not an accurate translation here; the meaning is more accurately 'marital unfaithfulness' as in the NIV." (*Word Meanings in the New Testament*).

Are all forms of "unchastity" and "lewdness" to be considered grounds for divorce and remarriage? Where do we draw the line?

Dean Alford stated the problem: "Only that *porneia*, which *itself breaks marriage*, can be a ground for dissolving it. The question, whether demonstrated approaches to *porneia*, short of the act itself, are to be regarded as having the same power, must be dealt with cautiously, but at the same time with full remembrance that our Lord does not confine the guilt of such sins to the outward act only: see ch. 5:28." (*Alford's Greek Testament*).

Would a man lusting after a woman be grounds for a Scriptural divorce? I have met some who so teach. Or, would one have to do more than merely lust? What about a man who takes the next step and purchases a pornographic magazine? One woman tried to convince me that since her husband had purchased a copy of *Playboy* he had been guilty of "sexual immorality" and she therefore had the right to divorce him and marry another. What about the man who flirts with a woman, but no physical contact is made?

Would heavy petting with another man's wife be grounds for divorce? I believe it would. It seems to me from the definitions we have looked at that another party has to be involved and that physical contact has to be made.

In Matthew 5:32 Jesus said, "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This adultery "in the heart" is not the same as physical adultery and not grounds for divorce—no more than a man who is angry with his brother would be subject to capital punishment (see Matthew 5:22). (Padfield, D. A. *Grounds For Divorce. Christianity Magazine*, 13 (3/4), 42; this is the complete article).