

Does Romans 5:17 Apply to Seduction of Sexual Sin, Including Masturbation?

This weekend, I spent time with a former NFL running back from Alabama whose wife and four children were killed years ago in a tragic car accident one mile from their home. He and one daughter survived the crash brought about by a man who was drunk.

My friend is now an ordained minister, but in reflecting back on his devastating experience, it once seemed impossible that he could break through to gain victory and live the abundant life Jesus promised His obedient followers.

When we face overwhelming experiences and besetting sins that seem to have a stranglehold on our lives, it can seem at the time as though we'll never break through to the overcoming life. Yet if we align with His will, draw upon His grace daily and continue to persevere in faith, we can lay hold of His promise to "reign" (Rom.5:17) in any situation.

Does this apply to the seductions of sexual sin? Specifically, what about unmarried, single Christians and the temptation to masturbation? For those who have walked this path, it can be an agonizing and guilt-producing experience, crippling one's relationship with God.

For the committed Christian, there is hope. There is also the authoritative promise of the Bible enabling us to face this area with unwavering confidence: "No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Recently, some of us read an insightful and compassionate article by a self-described “doctor-doctor” attempting to bring relief to individuals ensnared by this agonizing addiction. She said the following as her “bottom line” on the topic: “Periodic release of sexual tension through masturbation may be OK for the single person ... Compulsive masturbation is a sin; periodic release of sexual tension when you don’t have a spouse is not.”

While I commend the Christian doctor, mother and grandmother for her deeply sensitive approach to helping people struggling in this area (and in the area of pornography), allow me the opportunity to offer a different view with additional Scriptures and thoughts that can bring liberation to multitudes struggling in this area.

Ministering to young people for over four decades plus experiencing similar struggles in my own journey, I offer five guidelines underscoring biblical commands and insights to hopefully sharpen our focus. May they also fortify us so we avoid becoming shackled in a habit pattern weighing down multitudes of sincere Christians. I also encourage everyone to watch the 4-minute video on the topic, “Masturbation” and read chapter 14 in the companion book, *Bullseye*.

Five Transformative Truths

1. Guard against justifying sinful, enslaving behavior.

All of us need to be careful we don’t yield to rationalization in difficult areas of the Christian life. Scripture teaches that “The heart is more deceitful than all things and desperately wicked; who then can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Due to our fallen nature, all of us have the proclivity to find ingenious excuses for unrighteous behavior.

How many times have I engaged in conversations with professing Christians who find amazingly clever ways to justify indulging

in casual sex, smoking marijuana, consenting to an abortion, sexting, living together ("Ours are special circumstances that God understands"), speeding, sexual fantasizing, off-color joking, frequenting "adult entertainment" establishments, a gay/homosexual lifestyle and, yes, masturbation.

2. Resist enticing encouragement from the culture to disregard or compromise biblical standards.

In our sex-saturated culture, we hear from a multitude of voices, all sharing their perspective. Liberal Christian ministers seeking popularity proclaim, "Masturbation is actually a gift of God" (exact quote). Charlie Shedd, in his best-selling book of advice for teens, *The Stork is Dead*, said masturbation is "the wise provision of a very wise Creator ... He knew we'd need it!"

Today, sex-education classes, advice columnists and even the World Health Organization encourage masturbation, plus abortion and homosexuality, to children and teens worldwide. Doesn't it make sense to have sound, biblical counsel amidst all the questionable advice bombarding us from every corner?

A biblical worldview on sexuality seems foolish to pop-culture proponents, yet to those desiring to please God and live holy it brings peace, joy and freedom. Ephesians 5:3 calls us "saints" (holy people) and calls us to jettison any "sexual immorality, or any impurity" (v. 3) and adds, "For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (v. 12).

3. Keep uppermost that Scripture celebrates sexual pleasure as long as it is confined to married partners.

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven ... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain ... He has made everything beautiful in its appropriate time." (Eccl. 3:1,5 and 11a).

God “richly gives us all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17) but instructs us, “Do not stir up or awaken love” before the proper time (Song 8:4).

4. Remember our Creator’s brilliant plan for single men and women is to develop the fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23) prior to marriage to prepare us for success in marriage.

“You will remember the instructions we gave you in the name of the Lord Jesus. God’s plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality. Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect” (1 Thess. 4:2-4, PHILLIPS).

What is the primary reason marriages break up? Sexual problems? Financial problems? Emotional problems? No, the No. 1 reason is simply a lack of self-control.

Those who can’t control themselves are vulnerable to multitudes of problems. Sexual problems break in. If a person can’t control himself, financial problems crash in. It’s the same with anger problems, alcohol abuse., dishonoring marriage vows and flirtation with the opposite sex.

Prov. 25:28 reminds us, “He who has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls.”

In marriage, partners must often forgo sexual activity because of sickness, pregnancy or travel. Self-controlled individuals who cultivate this character quality before marriage reap the dividends in marriage. I say this from the perspective of more than 40 years of a wonderful covenant marriage in Christ.

5. Affirm the fact that Jesus came not only to forgive our sins but to free us from sin’s power (Rom.6:6-7).

Scores of Christians suffer addiction to sexual sin and needless condemnation because they’ve never been taught this unbelievable, biblical reality. Like slaves who were ignorant

of the Emancipation Proclamation or believed it simply was too good to be true, followers of Jesus can remain ensnared by besetting sins until they grasp this life-changing truth.

Christians are not to be mastered by anything, and that includes masturbation. Scripture cautions us about individuals who “entice by the lusts of the flesh” promising “freedom” but keeping people in sexual bondage because “by that which a man is overcome, to this he is enslaved” (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

Jesus told us if we “remain in [His] word ... You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free ... Therefore if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed!” (John 8:31b-32, 36).

Let’s be brutally honest: Is masturbation a holy and honorable way to glorify God, cultivate self-control and avoid sexual uncleanness?

Reject the Lies and Rise to Victory

It’s a lie when we believe, as comedian Jerry Seinfeld says, “We all have to do it. It’s part of our lifestyle, like shaving.”

It’s a lie when someone teaches, “There’s nothing sinful or harmful about pornography or masturbation. It’s just a natural way to relieve sexual tension and pleasure oneself.”

It’s also a lie to tell ourselves, “I’m trapped. I can’t stop. I’ll never break free. God can’t love me. I’ve done this too much and there’s no way He’ll forgive me or set me free from this, the unforgivable sin.”

Here’s the deal. If you’re tired of being Satan’s puppet, with him pulling the strings and manipulating you to walk in defeat, condemnation and uncleanness, then reject these lies, repent of any unbelief and passivity regarding this temptation being too difficult to overcome. Shout it out: “I

can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me” (Phil.4:13).

Like Job, make a “covenant with my eyes” (Job 31:1a). “Flee youthful desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim.2:22). Spend consistent time in the Word of God (“How shall a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word” (Ps. 119:9).

Don’t plan to fall, but if you do, immediately arise to repent, receive forgiveness and continue your journey to live holy and glorify God. There is hope and victory in Jesus Christ our Lord. {eoa}