

‘I’m Ashamed to Admit I Have a Problem With Masturbation’

“Was Jesus ever tempted sexually?”

This question was sheepishly and confidentially asked by a young man who took one of Christendom’s premier preachers aside at a conference. Ern Baxter—whose message “Thy Kingdom Come” is the best message I have heard in my 45 years as a Christian—often shared the story. He knew as we age we easily forget the raging hormones and intense sexual struggles of earlier years.

His answer?

“Young man, the Bible tells us Jesus in His humanity can ‘sympathize with our weaknesses as one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin’ ” (Heb. 4:15).

Hearing the answer, the young man breathed a sigh of relief, thanked Mr. Baxter and quietly exited the room.

When I was a young, single man someone gave me a tract with this title, “I Could Never Tell Anyone I Have a Problem With...” The cover depicted a dejected young man sitting with his head buried in his hand, staring at the ground, obviously in torment.

I thought it was significant that the title didn’t finish the sentence revealing the area of struggle. Solo sex is an uncomfortable topic that many people prefer to avoid.

In my library I have a more-than-500-page book by an internationally known Christian author on marriage and family life. The manual is a comprehensive reference book answering over 400 questions, yet to my knowledge there is not even one reference to the subject of this commentary.

I'm addressing it not to shock or be controversial or offend anyone but rather to help people wrestling with this challenging issue. Certainly our sex-saturated culture has a multitude of voices sharing their perspective. Doesn't it make sense to have sound, scriptural counsel amid all the ungodly advice bombarding us from every corner?

What follows will seem foolish and preposterous to pop-culture adherents, yet to those desiring to please God and live pure, it brings peace, joy and freedom.

Ephesians 5:3 calls us "God's holy people" and says "there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity ... for it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret" (v12).

If you don't think this really is much of a problem for scores of people in our society, I respectfully disagree. It's probably an overstatement when people say, "95 percent of people do it and the other 5 percent are liars," yet I'm persuaded multitudes are just not aware of the extent of this behavior and how it's being aggressively promoted in society today. Here are some examples:

- Pornography and erotic literature like *Fifty Shades of Grey* (soon to be released as a movie) is rampant and fueling out-of-control sexual desires. This book alone has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide!
- Sex education classes and the World Health Organization encourage masturbation, plus abortion and homosexuality, to children and teens worldwide.
- Artists on YouTube and throughout the music industry gyrate while grabbing their crotches and celebrate pleasuring oneself: "U and Ur Hand" by Pink; "Touch of my Hand" by Britney Spears; "I Touch Myself" by the Divinyls.
- Conan O'Brian made a cultural icon out of the regularly featured "Masturbating Bear."

- “Sex aid/toys” are now advertised on mainstream TV, in magazines and newspapers, and available for purchase at your corner drugstore.
- Life-sized “Love Dolls,” recreating the appearance and texture of human females and males, are advertised and pushed on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and were highlighted on CBS’s *2 Broke Girls* and HBO’s *Real Sex*.
- Certain novelty stores in family malls now sell the “Masturbating Man” windup toy.
- “Christian” ministers seeking popularity and packed facilities 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!”
- Talk show hosts and so-called experts on sexuality espouse their advice everywhere in our culture. Celebrating premarital sex and masturbation, most of them refer to their guru Alfred Kinsey and his “landmark” studies on sexual behavior. What they don’t tell you is that historian James Jones in his biography of Kinsey stated the pseudo-researcher was “a closeted homosexual and masochist who was obsessed with sex and driven by his own sexual demons.”

Here’s the Deal: Embracing a biblical worldview brings liberty and guilt-free sexuality.

1. There is both beauty and mystery in sex.

Many Christians are ashamed to discuss what God is not ashamed to create and call “very good” (Gen. 5:2). Satan seems to have engineered a conspiracy of silence on the subject of sex in many circles.

Jesus said, “The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it

to the full" (Jn. 10:10). This includes a rich and fulfilling sexual experience when aligned with God's unchanging standards.

Sexual pleasure is of divine origin, a gift from Almighty God, and enjoyed to the fullest when aligned with the will of God in covenant marriage.

According to Scripture, the wisest human being was King Solomon who wrote over 1,000 songs. His greatest song was the "Song of Songs" describing in poetic terms an amorous relationship between a pure maiden and her shepherd lover. It is a celebration of marital intimacy that includes:

- Erotic dialogue throughout.
- Enjoyment of her breasts (7:7-8).
- Intoxicating kissing (1:2).
- Manual stimulation (2:6).
- Sensual description of a lover (7:1-9).
- Extensive use of highly sensuous and suggestive imagery involving the mouth, touch and perfumed aromas..

2. While God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17), He commands us: "Do not arouse or awaken love" (Sol. 8:4) before the proper time.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... a time to embrace and a time to refrain... He has made everything beautiful in its time." (Eccl. 3:1-5).

My beautiful, 33-year-old daughter, Melanie, recently came to the place where God confirmed for her and her Christian sweetheart that they are moving toward marriage. Keeping herself pure for these many years has not been easy but long ago she made a quality decision to do things God's way.

Scripture always speaks approvingly of sexual pleasure as long

as it is confined to married partners. God categorically and without exception prohibits premarital and extramarital activity.

“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” (1Thess. 4:2-4, Phillips).

A fire is warm and wonderful in a fireplace under control, but if that same fire is set loose it can burn down a house. Likewise, water is refreshing in the tap under control, but that same water rushing through a broken dam on a rampage can devastate an area and destroy human life. The difference? Control.

Our Creator’s brilliant plan is for single men and women to develop the fruit of self-control (Gal 5:23) prior to marriage by drawing on His grace and cooperating with His plan for sexual purity.

Do you know the number one reason marriages break up? Sexual problems? Financial problems? Emotional problems? No. The primary reason is simply a lack of self-control! If a person can’t control himself, he or she is 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. Prov. 25:28 reminds us, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

In marriage one must often forego sexual activity because of sickness, pregnancy or travel. Our daughter-in-law is currently expecting her third child, so she and our son find themselves in this season. Self-controlled individuals who cultivate this character quality before marriage reap the dividends in marriage!

Obviously, another way that self-control is developed is by overcoming inevitable temptations of masturbation.

3. Christians are not to be mastered by anything—that includes masturbation!

Scripture cautions us about individuals “appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature” promising “freedom” but bringing people into sexual bondage because “a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him” (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

We are to declare decisively and victoriously by faith: “I will not be mastered by anything!” (1 Cor. 6:12).

Jesus told us, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Jn. 8:34); yet right before this statement He encouraged us to continue in His word to “know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:32).

One lie regarding masturbation is expressed by comedian Jerry Seinfeld. “We all have to do it. It’s part of our lifestyle, like shaving.”

Another falsehood believed by the masses is: “I’m trapped. I can’t stop. I’ll never break free. God hates me, and I know He’ll punish me. I’ve done this too much, and there’s no way that God could ever forgive me.”

Another lie: “There’s nothing sinful or harmful about masturbation. It’s just a natural way to relieve sexual tension and pleasure oneself.”

Still another lie: “Habitual masturbation is akin to the unforgivable sin. Plus it causes deafness, blindness, epilepsy, acne, brain damage, sterility and impotence. In women it damages childbearing capability.”

All of the above are biblically and/or scientifically false. Some of these myths led parents to severely beat their

children if caught in the act, and others told their children that God would strike them dead like Onan (Gen. 38:8-10) for playing with themselves. [Note: For centuries people mistakenly thought the “sin of Onan” was masturbation. This narcissistic man whose older brother died without fathering any children, was covenantally responsible to produce offspring but didn’t want a child to get any inheritance before he did. So he practiced “coitus interruptus” and God put him to death for his callous selfishness.]

Because pastors and parents were misinformed and confused about what they perceived to be this “wicked vice,” they magnified this act above all others, shamed offenders and even purchased chastity belts, aluminum mitts or handcuffs to lock their children down at bedtime!

4. Simple and straightforward truths about the subject

The same goes for entertaining illicit sexual fantasies in the mind that lead to instant gratification. Therefore, aware that the “heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked...” (Jer. 17:9), let’s be brutally honest: Is masturbation a holy and honorable way to glorify God, cultivate self-control and avoid sexual uncleanness?

- The term “masturbation” is derived from two Latin words: “manus”-hand and “turbatio”-agitation. Experimentation and stimulation like this often occurs in childhood. Allow me a slight bit of sanctified comic relief here by injecting that this is not the meaning behind Eccl. 9:10. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”
- The term does not appear anywhere in the Bible, neither does it make any direct statement about masturbation. Because the Bible does not explicitly condone or condemn masturbation, we must look to biblical principles for guidance and avoid dogmatic pronouncements on the

subject. Some believe it is always a sin; others see it as wrong because it's less than God's ideal, but there may be some exceptions; there are those who view it in a neutral way as a matter of individual conscience; and, as referenced earlier, some see it as a "gift from God."

- Previously we clarified the Genesis 38:8–10 account of Onan. Other Old Testament references are Lev. 15:16-17; Deut. 23:10-11 and Lev. 22:4, which could be the result of this activity or a nocturnal emission (natural, nighttime release of fluid while sleeping). Here God gave directions not because anything was sinful or "dirty" but for hygiene and emphasizing self-control. Similar guidance was given for women during their monthly cycle.
- In the New Testament we find a passage similar to the one previously mentioned (1 Thess. 4:3-5), also underscoring self-control (1 Cor. 7:1-5) plus emphasizing the marriage relationship as a practical solution and safeguard for struggling singles who "burn with passion" (v9). In our society overwhelmingly saying "Indulge yourself," God tells us "Control yourself!"
- As holy/set-apart disciples of Jesus Christ told to "set before my eyes no unclean thing" (Ps. 101:3) [I have this passage on a card affixed to our television] and to never "look lustfully upon a woman" (Matt. 5:28), obviously we're to avoid sexually explicit images that fuel passions often leading to masturbation. Pornography is actually material to be read or seen with one hand, that is, as an accompaniment to solo sex.

The same goes for entertaining illicit sexual fantasies in the mind that lead to instant gratification. Therefore, aware that the "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked..." (Jer. 17:9), let's be brutally honest: Is masturbation a holy and honorable way to glorify God, cultivate self-control and avoid sexual uncleanness?

- For individuals in unique circumstances and seasons of life, we must ask God for wisdom in righteously dealing with legitimate sexual desire, e.g., widows or widowers reflecting on memories of their deceased spouse; living with an incapacitated mate; a husband or wife away for extended periods of time in military service, imprisonment or lengthy business/ministry trips.
- Finally, for those who ask the inevitable question, “What if I feel helpless or too often slip?” Remember we defeat temptation from a position of victory not one of trying to achieve it! Jesus Christ came to provide us not only forgiveness of sin but liberation from its power! We have the ability to sin but no longer the obligation.

Like Job, make a “covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1); “Flee evil”—don’t flirt with it. If you allow Satan to get his foot in the door, he’ll come in and try to destroy your whole house! Spend consistent time in the Word of God (“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word” ()); grow in character and self-control through godly accountability with other like-minded Christians of the same sex; and, affirm by faith your liberation from sin’s compulsive power.

As a young man, I put on my hallway mirror a scriptural statement to confess regularly. It’s from Romans 6:6–7 that I personalized to build my faith and walk as an overcomer. Little by little, my mind was renewed to believe this fact: “I don’t have to serve sin today. I have been set free!”

If you’re tired of being Satan’s Pinocchio with him pulling the strings and manipulating you to walk in defeat, condemnation and uncleanness, then repent of any passivity and reject the lie that this temptation is too difficult to defeat. No Christian should ever be ashamed to admit they have a problem with masturbation. There’s hope and victory in Jesus!

Claim forgiveness from our holy, yet merciful Father. Don't plan to fall but if you do, immediately arise to repent and continue your journey to glorify God. There is hope and victory in Jesus!

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

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