

What Does the Bible Really Say About the Sexual Sin Most People Struggle With?

One often wonders why the Bible doesn't directly address masturbation. It is the cause of so much guilt and speculation in the body of Christ. And so, we are left to cobble together biblical principles to come up with some idea of whether or not it is sinful, just as we do with subjects like gambling, smoking, etc.

Biblical Principles

Let's begin with an important biblical principle taught by our Lord—that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:27-28). A person who practices masturbation without imagining sex with someone is rare indeed, if he or she exists at all. On that basis, the practice is tantamount to engaging in adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior or any number of other sexual practices that the mind can imagine—even idolatry, as revealed in Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5 and Ezekiel 23:49. In a certain sense, it could be said that masturbation is a form of mental pornography, which we all know to be sinful.

We also know sin by the witness of the Holy Spirit within, provided we haven't quenched that witness through ongoing rebellion (1 Thess. 5:19; see also Eph. 4:30). And who doesn't live with guilt over the practice of masturbation—even those who have convinced themselves that it isn't sinful?

Additionally, the Bible teaches that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit—a sacred temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:16) and that it is a member of Christ Himself (1 Cor. 6:15-20). If we are warned against uniting "Christ in us" to a prostitute, why would we want to unite Him to the immoral thoughts and images

in our minds? (1 Cor. 6:15-17)

The Bible also teaches that sexual immorality is a sin against our own bodies (1 Cor. 6:18c). Additionally, 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that sinful desires war against our souls (1 Pet. 2:11). In that sense, by engaging in masturbation with its accompanying immoral fantasies, we are actually warring against ourselves. And war is hell, as anyone in bondage to this behavior can attest.

Finally, a very important biblical principle that is often overlooked in our search to discover if masturbation is sinful is found in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 2 Peter 2:19-20 and Romans 6:14-23: that whatever masters us (other than the Holy Spirit) is harmful to us. In short, "a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

The Principle of Chastity

(1 Pet. 3:2, Rev. 14:4, 2 Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:27, Job 31:1, 1 Thess. 4:3-4)

Throughout the history of the church, serious believers have been guided by the biblical concept of chastity. Chastity is the idea that we are to live our lives by the principles of purity and sexual self-control, whether mentally or physically. It is a form of respect for self and others, which empowers the saving of healthy sexual expression for the covenant of marriage. It is the living out of the divine purpose and beauty of human sexuality, which is to prefigure and embody the marriage between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32).

The Principle of Grace

It should be noted that we are not referring to the innocent exploration of the body that goes on among children and adolescents. In fact, a harsh approach in such cases can create a fixation or obsession in the mind of the child. Even

worse, if the child doesn't respect his or her parents, it can create an avenue for rebellion that is safely cloaked in secrecy. Curiosity, guilt and feelings of condemnation are also at play in such scenarios.

We must remember the biblical principle, that it is God's grace and love that teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions (Titus 2:11-14, Rom. 2:4; 5:17, 2 Cor. 5:14). After all, it is His grace that saved us from not only the penalty of sin, but the power of sin as well.

This provision of grace is also available to the adult believer who continues to practice masturbation in spite of valiant attempts to stop. I'll never forget when the Lord made this clear to me. After some success, marred by repeated failures, I was remonstrating against myself one night, when the Lord clearly spoke to my spirit, saying, "You are much harder on yourself than I would ever be!" It was a moment of applied grace that enabled me to stop crucifying myself at every failure and take a fresh approach to finding freedom. That approach involved a focus on developing intimacy with God rather than a fixation on my failures.

The Way of Escape

It is important that we discover the root sin issues so that we can repent of them. (Such revelation comes during intimate moments with God). If we are unaware or unwilling to let go of one or more of these strongholds, we will inevitably remain bound because Satan will continue to have ground in us (John 14:30). Much of the transformation process, therefore, involves discovering where Satan's ground is and removing it with the tools that God has provided. In other words, we need to discover and confess the right things.

What then are some of the root sin issues that should be confessed?

1. Unbelief: the doubt that God is really good. When I

commit any sin, I am in that moment doubting that God is really there for me, that He cares and therefore, that He is good. I am re-enacting the first sin committed in the Garden of Eden, when Eve became convinced that God was keeping something from her that was good.

Many people only “believe” on an intellectual level rather than a heart level and miss seeing the manifestation of God’s promises. Try pondering, meditating and believing in your heart Scriptures such as 2 Peter 1:3-11, Psalm 16:7-8, Romans 8:5-14 and Galatians 5:16.

The truth is, God has something better than the coping mechanism of masturbation –even for the single person. He has something higher, something that will bring completion and satisfaction to one’s sexual self. Understanding this truth is very effective in being persuaded to forsake sin.

2. Idolatry: Ephesians 5:3-5 and Colossians 3:5 clearly teach that sexual immorality is a form of idolatry. As with the worship of any god, masturbation has its own fetish objects and rituals—times, places, triggers, ritual objects and ritual patterns that draw the person into an almost trance-like progression toward the peak experience and denouement. Confessing such ritual worship and removing and renouncing its various components is key to seeing its power broken.

Additionally, masturbation often becomes a source of life and peace, especially for those who have lived through great pain. In a sense, it becomes a substitute god. Should the Spirit come to offer freedom, many will recoil in terror at the realization that they are being asked to live without something that has been a primary source of peace in their lives—something that has kept them from falling apart. The behavior becomes so entrenched in their sense of being that life without it becomes unimaginable. In essence, they have yet to seek and find healing for their traumas, which is a

necessary part of developing trust in God.

3. Rebellion: Sometimes we simply refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit or pretend not to hear Him. The self-care of masturbation often cloaks anger and distrust of God, who never seemed to be there when we needed Him. Often in childhood, when God doesn't rescue us or change us upon demand, we judge Him in our hearts and develop a root of anger that must be removed through confession and repentance. That means, we acknowledge our rebellion and make concerted choices to love Him and to believe that given the need for free will (as the foundation for genuine love), God operates with complete love and integrity.
4. Love of Sin: This one is often buried under mounds of rationalization. We pretend that we need to practice the sin; we deserve to practice it; that it's the least God can do to allow it considering what we've gone through. But the truth is, we love it more than we love God. In order to change this, we need to discover how to love God more.

Greater love for God comes as a fruit of taking the time to know Him intimately. A lifestyle of worship is important. The demonic realm cannot stand that.

Meditating on the cross is also a major key. As we gain a deeper appreciation for our Lord's suffering, we become more willing to jettison the "things that have charmed us most" (as the old hymn says). When tempted, we only need ask ourselves, "Whom do I love right now: the sin that is tempting me, or the one who loves me so deeply that He died on the cross for me?" Put that way, the choice becomes far easier to make.

5. Self-deception: It is a humbling thing to realize that over the years, we've become masters at deceiving ourselves into believing we want freedom from something

that we will not give up. Like an onion, we lay down layer upon layer of self-deception, saying the right religious words and thinking the right religious thoughts, while still refusing to forsake the sin that lingers in our hearts. We need to acknowledge before God the ongoing impurity in our motivations, the depravity in our hearts and our need for Him to give us the true heartfelt desire to be holy and pure. As it says in Jude 24, Psalm 37:23-24 and Psalm 55:22, it is God who keeps us from falling, as long as we really want Him to.

6. Performance-Righteousness: Most of us, even those who know better, continually fall into this trap. Though we talk of “grace alone” and being able to do “nothing without Christ” (see John 15:5), our fallen nature continuously seduces our minds into believing we must earn God’s love and acceptance and that we must develop our own righteousness. Over and over again, we try to make ourselves holy and pure rather than suffering the humiliation of the flesh and truly becoming dependent on God for the power to live the kingdom life that He won for us on the cross.

There are so many more potential strongholds behind a bondage to masturbation and other sins that it is impossible to list them all. That is why pursuing intimacy and revelation from God and then doing what He says is, in essence, the way of escape. God then takes you the rest of the way by the whisperings and enabling of His Holy Spirit.

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