

Is Masturbation a Sin?

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Let me say first that there is no Bible verse that says masturbation is a SIN. Therefore we are left with the need to draw from biblical principles and think through whether or not that activity is best, and does it violate any biblical principles. The Roman Catholic Church tried to make a case for it being sin by using the story in the Old Testament where a man named Onan 'spilled his seed on the ground' instead of having sex with his brother's wife and God killed him (The O.T. law said if a man died and had no son his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for him to keep the family going). Clearly the man was killed for violating a clear command they had back then. This is a weak argument to use in reference to the question of whether or not masturbation is a sin.

I don't have a huge problem with Dobson and others who allow some license for this with the understanding that it is most certainly SIN to fantasize about other women (that is adultery! or for a single young man it is fornication) and it is sin to use pornography for the same reason. Sex in the mind outside the bounds of God's directives is still sin... and it leads to acting out sins in the flesh. It really does matter what we think. 2 Cor. 10:5 tells us "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Rom. 12:2 "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Eph. 4:22-24 "That you put off the old man with its deceitful lusts and put on the new man created in righteousness by the renewing of your mind." So... where does that leave us?

I think several principles can guide us in this area:

1. Sex and our sexuality were not created by God primarily for our own pleasure but as a wonderful gift that is to be given to our life partner... this gift bonds us together in a special and intimate way. It is something God meant for us to experience in relationship to another human being... not primarily as a wonderful rush to experience by yourself. When we use it that way we have twisted something wonderful and there are some dangers that then enter in. Here's some Scripture for using sex to give pleasure to your mate: **I Cor. 7:3** "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his body, but the wife does." Our bodies and our sexuality are not our own to selfishly use for our own pleasure. They were given to be enjoyed in the context of a loving marriage relationship. In fact, God says regarding sexual relations between husband and wife, "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time... then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you..." **I Cor. 7:5**. Masturbation deprives your spouse of something they are supposed to get from you, and you then leave them open to temptation from Satan. We are also supposed to find our sexual satisfaction in our spouse...not other people or things. **Prov. 5:18-20** "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth... may her breasts satisfy you at all times, may you be captivated by her love..." Masturbation leads you to find satisfaction somewhere other than your spouse... and can often lead your affections away so that you're captivated by something or someone other than her.

2. Another principle that would bear on this issue is the **sin of selfishness**. We are all prone to selfishness by nature and this activity seems to fan that flame. It also tends to isolate us. We withdraw and focus on ourselves. How do I want it? What would be good for me? What really turns me on? All of this thinking breeds an attitude that is contrary to biblical love. Biblical love is giving for the needs of another expecting nothing in return. Love is giving not getting. The activity of autoeroticism by nature is a 'getting' activity rather than a giving activity. And it doesn't cause us to bond with others. We begin to think we don't need another human relationship in that area. Yet this gift was intended to be some of the 'glue' that would knit us to another person rather than ourselves. The activity in question runs counter to that and feeds selfish isolationism. **I Cor. 13:5** says "love does not seek its own". This activity most definitely seeks it's own. **I Cor. 10:24** "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." **Rom. 15:2-3** "Each of us should please his neighbor (your spouse is your closest neighbor) for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself." **Phil. 2:3-4** "Let nothing be done from selfish ambition... let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

3. Another danger is that it can be used as **an escape or a refuge other than God**. Any of the good things that God has given us (food, drink, sex, work) can become sinful if used as a place of refuge instead of turning to God. I think masturbation often gets used in that way especially with young people. It's quick, easy and gives fast gratification. That in itself should send off some danger signals... because habits may be forming so they will want to run there when things don't go their way or they're feeling down or bored or whatever and just want a rush. The area of sexuality is very much like food, drink, and drugs. Something good that God gave, but can, like everything, be abused and lead us into bondage. God is to be our refuge... not sex or anything else. So there's the danger of allowing this to get rooted in your life as an idol... a false god. **Psa. 73:25** "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." **Psa. 32:7** "You are my hiding place" **Psa. 16:11** "In Your presence is fullness of joy" **Psa. 119:114** "You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in your word." **Psa. 91:2** "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.'" Masturbation can easily and insidiously become a substitute for a relationship with God and others.

4. Another concern is that it runs contrary to the **virtue of self-control** that we are commanded to be developing as Christians. This is such a strong area. Fighting in this area is an excellent opportunity to trust God and ask for His grace rather than feed the desires of the flesh. And I know it is hard. It can still be a struggle for a married person. Even when avoiding wrong (adulterous) thoughts while indulging, it still seems like you're not using self control and you're taking something away from your spouse just because you didn't say 'No' to the flesh and wait until you could be with your mate. In all honesty, sometimes you don't want the 'hassle' of having to 'perform' or make it good for someone else and you just want quick relief. And that's back to the issue of selfishness. When this area is allowed to run free in our life, even as a married person there is the danger then of comparison. In some ways, without working on it together and without communicating how can your spouse satisfy you as well as you do yourself? You know exactly where you want it and how you want it. So, if you allow this to be a

regular practice you may actually find sexual relations with your spouse less satisfying and more frustrating because you've grown accustomed to doing it yourself. It can turn the bedroom into a selfish spot where you are wishing and thinking about how and what you wish they would do...like you do for yourself. Once again your focus becomes, 'What do I want?' and 'What's best for me?', rather than, 'How can I really please my spouse?'

There's plenty of Scripture that shows our need to exercise self-control:

Prov. 25:28 "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control" Lack of self-control in the sexual area will certainly begin to bleed over into other areas, because it is a matter of saying "No" to the flesh... ruling the flesh. You are choosing not to be dominated and ruled by your passions.

I Thes. 4:3-6 "It is God's will that you be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God..."

2 Tim. 1:7 "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

5. This whole area seems to be **a flame that just can't ever get enough**. If you open the door and allow free reign in this area it seems that you need more and more to get the same level of satisfaction you did before. You will feel the need to move on to other things (pornography, fantasy, kinkiness) in order to get the same level of rush and excitement you did when you first experimented in this area. Rather than satisfying... its seems to only stir a thirst for more... and leaves one feeling very empty, and if you are a Christian... guilty on top of that. Because in your heart of hearts you're not really sure it is biblically acceptable anyway. **Jer. 2:13** "But my people have committed two great sins; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living water and have dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." This whole area is often a broken cistern that cannot hold water. It leaks. To stay satisfied it demands more... more of the same and then variety... something new. You end up in a state of perpetual agitation and very little satisfaction.

6. Finally, it seems to bring **guilt and distraction** with it that **hinders our walk with God**.

I Peter 2:11 "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires / lusts which war against your soul." Very often when this area of physical lust is stirred up it wars against the spiritual side... and is not usually a time when we are hungry for God and really growing. This activity tends to draws us away and hinder our walk. We feel dirty and think we can't draw near to God.

Rom. 13:14 "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Often this activity causes us to spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about it... leading up to it... what we'll do next time, etc.

Rom. 8:8 "those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

Conclusion: Based on Scriptural principles of biblical love and self-control, as well as the foundation of God's original design for sexual pleasure to be shared between husband and wife, it seems prudent to personally resist the temptation to masturbate, and it's seems important for us to teach our children the dangers of giving over to this temptation.