

## Masturbation: Doorway to Slavery

This article is an attempt to help those who desire to overcome masturbation and to live free in the grace that is available in Jesus Christ. Masturbation can, indeed, be overcome and men and women can find real freedom from it, and live in the enjoyable obedience that Jesus purchased for all believers when He died on the cross.

There is an untruth floating around Christian circles that masturbation is not a sin and that it is acceptable under certain circumstances.

Some believe that masturbation is acceptable:

1. For single people
2. For married people who have to endure prolonged absences from their spouse
3. As a preventative to committing sexual crimes

One of the course members from The Way of Purity course here at Setting Captives Free recently sent us an article written by a pastor on the subject of masturbation. In his article, this pastor unhesitatingly recommended masturbation for people of all ages to "release stress for singles", to "relieve pressure when away from a spouse", and to "prevent sex crimes." He also gave instructions on how to teach masturbation to young children and blatantly stated that God gave masturbation to us as a way "to enjoy sex before marriage."

I wish this pastor could see some of the enrollments we receive here at Setting Captives Free from people who have become enslaved to gratifying their flesh by the act of masturbation--many without using pornography. They are slaves to their own lusts; unable to break free from this debilitating habit that has crippled their walk with the Lord. Because they are unable to stop this behavior, they are guilty and some feel ashamed and frustrated. Some who continue in this habit have difficulty interacting in social situations because they know they have a secret--a dark secret that they are slaves to self-sex. Moreover, I wish this pastor could watch as God sets these captives free from masturbation and read their emails stating how depression, paranoia, stress, etc. disappeared when God set them free from gratifying their flesh, and from sexual impurity of all types.

Some Christians believe that, because masturbation is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, God does not consider the presence or the absence of the activity important. But is this really accurate? Is God truly silent about masturbation? Is the absence of the word "masturbation" in Scripture God's way of giving His approval to men and women gratifying their flesh? Remember, the word "pornography" itself is not in the Bible (although the root word is), but there are biblical principles dealing with both pornography and masturbation. Neither is the word "smoking" in the Bible, nor are many specific words dealing with specific sins of the flesh. Yet we should not require the naming of every specific detail associated with every specific sin in order to recognize that we need to avoid them.

Although it is true that the Bible does not use the word "masturbation," Scripture has not left us in the dark about whether it is right or wrong. Masturbation is not a "gift of God" for single people and it is not a "preventative for sexual crimes." It is indulging the flesh, which leads to sin-slavery. Jesus' statement "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34) applies to any area of self-gratification.

Masturbation makes us begin to live according to the dictates of the flesh and to become slaves to the "misdeeds of the body." Scripture warns us about this kind of activity, "For if you live according to the flesh (by giving in to its desires), you will die" and tells us how to stop, "but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). In reality, masturbation is an expression of self-gratification and of sexual self-idolatry. It is deceiving and enslaving. Let us see these truths from Scripture:

"Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness" (Romans 6:19-20).

This verse teaches that offering leads to slavery. When we "offer the parts of our body" to sin, we become a slave to sin. Some say that masturbation "relieves the pressure" so that we can function normally apart from a spouse, or to keep us from committing worse sexual acts. Masturbation only "relieves the pressure" temporarily. The pressure will soon be back and masturbation will need to occur again, and again, and again. This is simply slavery to the flesh. But if we offer the parts of our body for righteousness, we will become slaves of righteousness. So, present your body a living sacrifice; offer the parts of your body to God and your slavery to Christ will produce freedom from self-gratification.

Another argument that some make in favor of masturbation is to say that it is much like eating food: if we indulge ourselves, we can become slaves, but what we need to do is learn to control our appetite, not stop eating. So, in the same way, we need to control masturbation and not become a slave to it, but it is not sin to masturbate anymore than it is sin to eat. But there is a major problem with this argument: eating is a biological necessity. If we don't eat, we die. Sex is not a biological necessity; rather it is a desire.

"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:5).

Masturbation fixes the mind on the desires of the flesh, and burns the image of nudity and sex into the mind. With each occurrence of masturbation, that image becomes clearer and more intense, and can become a tool of the devil to set up a thought-stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

Here is the real problem of masturbation: If you are masturbating, you are pleasing only yourself. Your actions are displeasing to God because you are "in the flesh" and a slave to lust. You are offering the members of your body in slavery to impurity and your mind is set on what the flesh desires.

There is a way to be free from slavery to the flesh, and we should not rationalize it as "acceptable under certain conditions" or we are helping to promote the slavery of those who believe us.

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:16-17).

Why is masturbation a sin? It is a sin because when we masturbate we "gratify the desires of the flesh," which we would not do if we were walking in and living by the Spirit. Let us make this point clear. If we are walking in the Spirit and living by faith, we will not gratify the lusts of the flesh.

"So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:22-23).

Masturbation is a sin because it does not come from faith. I cannot believe the promises of God to supply my every need (Phil. 4:19), to make a way out of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), to keep me from falling (Jude 24), and fall to self-gratification at the same time. Masturbation is not of faith, therefore it is sin.

The way to be free from it is to totally and completely reject it at all times. As we avoid situations that stir up impure thoughts, and as we immerse ourselves in God's Word, and if married, as we turn to our spouse to enjoy sexual intimacy, we walk away free from the prison of sin. As we "lock the door" to self-pleasing, and "bolt it shut", and post a "guard", we can be free from it, free indeed (John 8:36).

When people tell me that "masturbation is not mentioned in the Bible", as if somehow by God's apparent "silence" on the issue He was approving it, I agree with them that the word itself is not mentioned in the Bible, and then try to help them to see that it should be mentioned if God approved of it. For instance, let's examine this passage:

1 Corinthians 7:8-9:

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

This is the place where God should mention the word "masturbation" or at least speak of self-gratification if, indeed, it were an option. It would have been easy for Paul to say, "It is better to masturbate than to burn with passion." No, there is no mention of the word "masturbation" or even any indication that self-sex is acceptable. The "burning" has only one biblical outlet, and that is with a partner in marriage. Any act of sexuality performed outside of marriage is a perversion, and to be avoided.

About Jesus Christ, God the Father says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And why? Because He lived a life of obedience unto death, even death on a cross. And we are unworthy to be called His disciples unless we daily take up the cross and follow Him. Taking up our cross means sacrificing our flesh, not gratifying it. It means dying to self, not living to please the flesh. Oh, how we need the teaching of the cross of Jesus Christ in these instances. The cross shows us One Whose flesh was crucified, not "controlled". The cross shows us that we are not to "relieve the pressure" but endure to the point of shedding blood. Stating that masturbation is acceptable "under certain circumstances" is a denial of the cross, for Christians are to follow Him Who died to His flesh.

The truth of the matter is that it is so much easier to totally crucify than to attempt to "control;" for every time we give in to the flesh, it stirs up impure thoughts and strengthens them, making it easier to give in again the next time, and the next. It truly is easier over time to totally deny and refuse self-gratification than it is to "cut back" or to somehow attempt to "control" our flesh. Scripture does not give us any command to "control" our flesh, but many times commands us to "deny" it, and to "crucify" it.

So, let us be practical on this subject. Many of us have children coming into puberty and we know they will masturbate. How do we converse with them on this topic?

First, let us instruct them about the cross. I tell my son that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and He requires us to lay down our lives also. He presented His body as an offering to the Father and we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, offer our bodies a living sacrifice. We talk about Jesus refusing to gratify His flesh when tempted by the devil, and that His flesh was nailed to a cross. In the same way we should count ourselves dead to sin. I talk plainly with him about the enslavement that masturbation will bring, if he were to offer the members of his body for sin. I tell him that the desires he has are given by God to experience pleasure in marriage and to procreate, not for selfish reasons. He understands that to follow Christ means that masturbation is not an option. It makes it so much easier for him, when the temptation comes, to not even consider it as a possibility, rather than try to decide if this is a time it must be "controlled" or if he can give in to the desire.

Finally, let me finish with a testimony we received here at Setting Captives Free. It is from a gentleman in his last week of The Way of Purity course, and he is now set free from slavery to masturbation. He writes this testimony:

"My problems began when our youth pastor told me that the Bible does not mention masturbation, therefore God must not condemn it. He told us that as long as we were masturbating with thoughts of our future spouse then we were not sinning. My masturbation began slowly--only using it once a week or so. I felt guilty, like I was giving in to sin rather than denying the flesh, but my pastor said it was a helpful tool, and that it even prevented sex crimes when used correctly. Gullible as I was, I believed him. I soon began discovering that offering the parts of my body to self-gratification did not permanently decrease desire or relieve pressure--quite the opposite--the more I masturbated, the more I engaged in it.

I honestly do not know what happened--one day I had just finished masturbating along side a farm road, for the 3rd time that day, when it dawned on me that I was a slave to masturbation. What started innocently, and with the full approval of a religious authority, trapped me into a vice that completely choked out all spiritual life in me.

Oh how I wish that pastor had preached the Word correctly, even if it would have made him less popular. I wish he had explained to me that unless I denied myself (not indulged myself) and took up my cross daily I would not be worthy to be His disciple. I wish he had told me about the principle of slavery--that we are slaves to whatever we offer ourselves to. I wish he had told me, plain and simple, that it is so much easier to totally and completely refuse masturbation--that it is not even an option for a Christian--than to attempt to 'control it' and 'only use it under certain circumstances.' If only he had not used that worn-out phrase 'the Bible doesn't mention it;' and instead taught the principles of Scripture.

I am not blaming my former pastor; my own deceptive heart loved hearing what he preached, and I am responsible for my own actions. I just wish I would have had a man of God who could have helped me learn to deny and crucify, rather than rationalize and justify."

Another enrollment in The Way of Purity Course came in as we were completing this article. This 17-year-old young man writes:

"Every time I get the urge, I can't resist masturbation. I have tried to fight it for many years, and, although I have had a few temporary victories, I never completely defeated it. I desire to live all of my life for Christ, and this can't be done until I defeat this fiend. I also want to remain pure for my future wife, and if I continue down this path, I know that wish will not become true."

Masturbation is a doorway to slavery! May God grant this young man freedom in Christ.

Yes, it is possible to be free of this debilitating and sinful habit. Through God's grace, we can resist the devil and the pull of our own flesh. We can come to Jesus Christ and receive His powerful assistance, and we can cease stealing the love that is due to our spouse and instead learn to turn to our spouse, as the Scriptures teach, so that we might honor and glorify God with our bodies. Those who are single can likewise turn from self-pleasing to Christ, and find in Him powerful help in time of need. Through the power of Christ we can defeat the powers of darkness that seek to make us slaves. There is freedom in Jesus, real freedom, lasting freedom.

May God give us each grace to choose to please the Lord by offering our bodies a living sacrifice, and turning to our spouse if married, rather than pleasing ourselves through masturbation.