

# “What’s Wrong with Masturbation, Anyway?”

What’s all the fuss about masturbation? It seems to me that Christians have decided it’s wrong and then go looking for Bible verses to back up their prejudice. The Bible doesn’t even mention it! It’s a legitimate way to get sexual release. Besides, I can’t stop it for any length of time, so it must be okay.

I asked Mike Cleveland, a friend in ministry at [Setting Captives Free](#), for his insight on this issue. As an overcomer in pornography and masturbation, Mike has what I believe is an excellent perspective on a biblical answer to this question. With a background in theology and practical ministry, plus the testimonies of thousands of people he has helped gain freedom from bondage to these sins, Mike is well-equipped to answer the question of why masturbation is wrong.

Be sure to read the powerful testimonies at the end. They also answer the question, “What’s wrong with masturbation?”

Sue Bohlin

Friend,

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:

- For single people
- For married people who have to endure prolonged absences from their spouse
- As a preventative to the commitment of sexual crimes

One of the course members from the Pure Freedom Course [note: a free, Christ-centered online course to help people overcome an addiction to pornography and masturbation at [www.settingcaptivesfree.com](http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com)] 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 from people who have become enslaved to gratifying their flesh by the act of masturbation—many without 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. They have “low self-esteem” and have difficulty interacting in social situations because they know they have a secret—a dark secret that they are slaves to fondling themselves, caressing themselves, and to orgasm. 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 masturbation and sexual impurity of all kinds.

Some Christians believe that because masturbation is not specifically mentioned in the Bible that 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 in masturbation? Remember, the word “pornography” itself is not in the Bible (though the root word is), but there are

biblical principles dealing with both pornography and masturbation.

Though it is true that the Bible does not use the word "masturbation," I do not believe that Scripture has left us in the dark about whether masturbation 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 (John 8:34). 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 a high expression of loving self 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. Masturbation only "relieves the pressure" temporarily. The pressure will soon be back and masturbation will need to occur again and again, and again. 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 complete freedom from masturbation.

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 slaves 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 a biological desire, not a necessity. Many people live their whole lives without ever having sex.

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 3:1-5).

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

Here is the real problem of masturbation, and let me say this clearly: 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.

"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 masturbate.

“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 14:23).

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 (Hebrews 10:13), to keep me from falling (Jude 24), and masturbate at the same time. Masturbation is not of faith therefore it is sin.

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 crucifying 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 of Jesus Christ. And the truth of the matter is that it is so much easier to totally crucify than to attempt to control.

Right here let me quote from an excellent book from Pure Life Ministries on the subject of masturbation called *Tearing Down The Walls Of Sexual Idolatry* by Steve Gallagher. This book is

highly recommended for its commitment to the truth of Scripture, rather than to worldly principles. In fact, Pure Life Ministries considers their ministry to be “an alternative to psychology.” They say, “Some of the leading Christian psychologists in the nation have said that masturbation is a normal function and unless carried on into marriage, usually proves to be harmless. I believe the reason that they have said this is to alleviate some of the guilt and condemnation associated with it. But you cannot condone something because it makes people feel guilty. It may be normal for fallen man, but that does not make it acceptable in the eyes of a holy God. Although masturbation is not specifically addressed in Scripture, the Bible gives us principles for leading a pure and holy life that clearly tells us that it is wrong.

- **Proper Sex**—The first and most obvious reason that masturbation is wrong is because it goes against God’s purpose for sex. Although our society has perverted sex to the extent that it has become a self-centered act, God created it to be a function of marriage. There is no room for sex outside of marriage! Worldly-minded teachers tell us though, that we have pent-up desires that must be ‘relieved.’ They say that God created us to need sex and would not expect us to go without it. What they do not realize is that sex is a desire that God gave us; not a need. People that have learned to walk in the Spirit have been overcoming these desires for thousands of years.

- **Feeding The Flesh**—Another reason why masturbation is wrong is because it is another form of self-gratification. Throughout Scripture, self-gratification is denounced.

- **Lustful Fantasy**—It is virtually impossible to masturbate without fantasizing. What would a person think about who is trying to achieve orgasm if not sex with some person? Paul admonishes us about our thinking when he says, ‘Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is

admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things’ (Philippians 4:8-9).

- **Doorway To Other Sin**—The last reason that masturbation is wrong is that it opens the door for the enemy to lead the person deeper into sin. . . .[S]in is never satisfied. It always demands more and more of the person. As God told Cain, ‘Sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it.’”

So, let us get 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 masturbation is not an option. It makes it so much easier on 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 can he give in to the desire.

Finally, let me finish with a testimony we received awhile back. It is from a gentleman in his last week of the Pure Freedom 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 masturbation did not permanently decrease desire or relieve pressure—quite the opposite—the more I masturbated the more I enjoyed it and 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 third 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 him; 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 Freedom Course came in right as we were finishing 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.

May God give us all grace to choose to please the Lord by offering our bodies a living sacrifice rather than pleasing ourselves through masturbation.

Grace,

Mike Cleveland

[www.settingcaptivesfree.com](http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com)

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## **“Help! My Husband’s Addicted to Porn!”**

I am in a dilemma. I have been married for nineteen years. We have two beautiful children and what I thought was a ‘picture perfect’ marriage. Although I would have liked to make love more often, my husband never seemed interested – so I assumed he had a low level of sexual desire.

Recently I discovered to my horror that my husband has been masturbating to hard-core pornography. When I approached him about it, he was very angry at first, saying that “All

husbands have secrets from their wives", but then he was extremely sorry and promised that he would never touch himself again. He also stated his undying love for me and the family arrangement and I truly believed and forgave him. I was and still am deeply hurt because I also discovered that he has been doing this habitually almost every day for the duration of our marriage, waiting for me to leave the house before he "indulges." We had a good discussion where he broke down and cried and said that life was not worth living without me in it. I slowly tried to pick up the pieces and began to think that, because he was coming to me for sex more regularly, that things had changed for the better. A few days ago, while doing the laundry, I discovered a semen stain on his underwear.

I approached my husband but he profusely denied it, saying that it was a "urine dribble stain." I certainly know the difference! He then became extremely angry, stating that I was dredging up the past. He called me awful names for being so possessive. He also squeezed my arm so hard that it had bruises on it (something that has happened before). Once again, he eventually broke down crying saying that he loved me and that he felt like crashing his car into a tree. Please help me, because, other than all of this he IS a good man. He gives me flowers and gifts all the time, he constantly tells me that I am beautiful and he says "I love you" every single day. He shows great attentiveness when we do make love and I truly enjoy being with him; he is a hard worker, a positive thinker and an emotional being who can show great depths of compassion and humility. He has done so much for so many people, including me and our children – but I am having trouble dealing with this "other side." It is killing me to think that he chooses to masturbate as soon as I leave the house – after having spent the entire day together. I am frightened of his blackmailing me to stay – because I honestly think that he WOULD kill himself if I left him. Other than this, our sex life together (when it happens) is wonderful and we spend a lot of quality time together as a family.

**He will not attend counselling sessions, as he is in denial as to how hurt and shattered I am. I feel my whole married life has been based on betrayal. I now do not trust or respect my husband anymore and although I will always love him from the depths of my heart, I no longer find that I am in love with him. Please help me.**

Bless your heart! I am so sorry for the horrible pain you're in!

I asked our good friend Henry Rogers, author of *The Silent War: Ministering to Those Trapped in the Deception of Pornography*, for help in answering your question. Here's his answer:

*I'm convinced this man has been a habitual masturbator (is that a word?) since childhood. I suspect he battled with guilt during his teen years and yet the guilt gets stronger after marriage. The reason is simple. It's after men are married that they finally realize how selfish masturbation is. Sex between a husband and a wife is giving yourself completely to your spouse. Masturbation is giving nothing. What a contrast between the two which causes feelings of guilt.*

*Married men involved in habitual masturbation feel guilty because they have wives, yet at times they prefer masturbation. Masturbation can take a man into a fantasy world where he can be with anyone he wants and do anything he wants. It's selfish because the sex act that God designed for the husband and wife is taking place in the mind. Eyes can be closed to enjoy his imagination or they can be opened to enjoy pornography. Either way, it needs no one else...and it's selfish. And yes, masturbation is an addiction, too. Many men have told me they thought they would stop after marriage. Sadly, addictions don't stop at the altar.*

*A wife hates it when she finds out about her husband's*

*masturbation because she knows that her husband is enjoying a sexual release alone. The oneness is absent. She feels unwanted, unneeded...and unloved. And it hurts. When pornography is involved the pain is worse because a wife cannot compete with the women in porn. How does she compete with the fantasy who is ready any time of the day and willing to do anything he wants?*

*I want this wife to know that she is not alone. There are many other wives who know the pain she is experiencing. The good news is that she can help. Here's how:*

*1. Pray for him daily...that he would flee from this temptation. He's done it for over 20 years, and unless God, by His grace, frees him from it, he has a tough road ahead. He needs prayer most of all.*

*2. Don't confront him with semen stained underwear with an "I gotcha" attitude. She'll get denial in return or names and bruises. She needs to be gentle in her confrontation. Gentle, yet firm...*

*3. Encourage accountability with another man. All men understand masturbation, yet we act like no one else has done it except us. (Sometimes we're not very smart...) It's OK to talk about. And it's OK to be accountable to another man. We need each other, especially if this is a problem.*

*4. I would also tell her that his masturbation is not because she is not desirable, or pretty or sexy enough for him. Again, he's done it from childhood...and he did it with porn before they were married. She does not need to own it as her fault...which many women do.*

*5. Encourage him to set boundaries for himself. When is he most prone to masturbation? When is he most likely to give in? Where does he masturbate? Does he stay up late after she goes to bed? Try to encourage him to answer these questions and then set up some boundaries or protective measures.*

*6. Finally, encourage him to pray, too. In fact, they can pray together! She knows his secret and she loves him. They can talk about it...*

I hope you find this as helpful as I did!

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

**See Also:**

**[Pornography](#) by Kerby Anderson**

**Probe Answers Our Email:**

- How Do I Handle My Husband's Porn Addiction?
  - [I Need Resources for My Porn Addiction](#)
  - [What's Wrong with Masturbation, Anyway?](#)
- [Men Have Always Looked at Porn—What's the Big Deal?](#)
  - [I'm a Compulsive Masturbator](#)