

Masturbation: A Gift or a God?

by Byron L. Fike

When people ask the question, "Is it wrong to masturbate?" they generally want a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Unfortunately the question is not as simple as it appears. For Bible believing Christians the first place we want to look for an answer is in the Bible. Alas, the Bible is totally silent on the subject! There are certainly principles from the Bible one can use to make decisions on this topic but there is not a single scripture that directly addresses it. Let's begin by looking at some of those principles:

- **Sex is a gift from God to human beings for procreation and enjoyment** (Genesis 1:28, 2:25, 4:1; Song of Songs 2:3-17, 4:1-7; Proverbs 5:18-19; Hebrews 13:4).
- **Sexual relations outside of marriage are always wrong** (Leviticus 18:6-23; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20).
- **Lust is always wrong.** We are not talking here about natural sexual desire. For instance noticing someone is sexually attractive or having a sexual thought about another person is not lust. Lust is dwelling and encouraging thoughts about having sex with a forbidden partner. This is why pornography is wrong. Its only purpose is to create a fantasy world where one can lust (Proverbs 6:23-26; Matthew 5:27-30; Colossians 3:5).
- **There is always a way to escape temptation.** s
"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 Corinthians 10:12).

We often don't find the way of escape because we don't want to find it! Joseph had to flee for his life and paid a big price for his refusal to engage in adultery (see Genesis 39). Culling off your hand and plucking out your eye are hyperboles (not to be taken literally!) which Jesus used to say one should make serious, painful sacrifices when necessary to avoid sexual sins such as lust (Matthew 5:29-30; 18:7-9).

Using the Biblical principles given above what conclusions can we draw about masturbation? First of all, the fact that the Bible is silent on the topic is instructive in itself. The Bible is very explicit on the topic of sexual sins. In addition to condemning adultery and fornication God's word also condemns incest, bestiality, homosexuality and lust. If God considers the act of masturbation a sin it is odd that it is not included in the list of sexual sins in Leviticus 18 or in any of the general listings of sin given in the New Testament (for example Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:17-5:7; Colossians 3:5-10). Since God has not specifically condemned this activity

we should not make blanket statements prohibiting it.

Secondly, masturbation can be an aid to help one avoid sexual sins. It can provide the release needed to help a man keep his thoughts pure. For the young man who is not sexually active there is a build up of seminal fluid that will be released one way or the other. If it is not released through sexual intercourse or masturbation it will be released by means of a "wet dream." Such dreams, while normal, can be extremely embarrassing and often the dreams produce guilt feelings. The young man awakes out of a semi-conscious dream state with his thoughts filled with his dream of engaging in sex with some forbidden partner. Masturbation may also help keep a young man from sinning sexually with his dating partner (especially during engagement). Even after marriage there are occasions when a wife either physically cannot or for some other reason may not be able to engage in intercourse (sometimes for extended periods of time). Masturbation may help keep the husband from selfishly "forcing" his wife to engage in sex or causing her to feel guilty for not taking care of her husbands sexual needs.. When used as a means of keeping sexually pure or as an act of combating selfish impulses in marriage, masturbation could rightly be called a "gift of God".¹

Thirdly, in spite of what it said above masturbation is easily abused and can become an addictive means of encouraging lustful thoughts. The sin is not the act itself but the motives and accompanying thoughts. Paul said, "*I will not be mastered by anything*" (1 Corinthians 6:12). How easy it is for masturbation to become the master! When this happens it is no longer simply a means of release or an aid in resisting sexual or other temptation. Obsessive masturbation involves attempting to have a satisfying sexual experience without a marriage partner. This is a fruitless pursuit as God designed sex to be between a man and his wife. Sex was designed to be a bonding experience that is physical, emotional and spiritual. The big lie that causes addiction to lustful masturbation is that one can have a satisfying sex life by themselves. Belief in this lie causes a person to change masturbation from a gift to a god. Evidence that one has become obsessive would include:

- Using pornography to become sexually excited. No longer is masturbation to release seminal build up - it is now used as an excuse to lust.
- When you use masturbation as a way to "punish" or deny sexual relations with your marriage partner. (See 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.)
- When you cannot thank God for the gift of masturbation. When you attempt to hide your actions from God. As in all areas of life, your sexuality needs to be a matter of prayer.

So, returning to the opening question of this article, "Is it wrong to masturbate?". The short answer is, "It depends." The act itself is not wrong. Therefore, one must examine his motives and other accompanying considerations. Is masturbation being used as a gift from God to release fluid, help one overcome sexual temptations or as a way to show genuine love to one's wife when she is unable to perform sexually? Or, is masturbation an idol that one is using to find

¹I am indebted to Charlie W. Shedd for this terms which appeared as a chapter heading in his excellent book written for teenagers of a previous generation, *The Stork is Dead* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1968), pp. 70-73.

sexual fulfillment through lustful fantasies or as a weapon to hurt one's spouse for not being more sexually responsive? These are the kind of questions that must be honestly answered for one to use masturbation as a gift and not as a god.²

² For more information on masturbation from a Christian perspective (especially for teenage boys) I recommend www.bigmword.com.