

Masturbation

This is a challenging subject for a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Heavenly Father loves us and wants the best for us. Guidance from the Bible is for our wellbeing so when Jesus asks us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him it is for our long term good.

Paul writes to the church at Philippi 4:4-8 in the context of our anxiety, prayer and seeking peace he says *“Finally..whatever is true, whatever is honourable whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely. Whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things ... and the God of peace will be with you”*. Think about these things.

So in this context let's look at this subject.

Masturbation, sometimes called “sex by yourself”, is the act of massaging one's own penis or clitoris to produce an orgasm. An almost unbelievable amount of nonsense has been written and spoken about it. Victorian hypocrisy gave it an unhealthy image which lingers on, in a few circles, even today. Middle-aged teachers and preachers, who in most cases probably masturbated themselves as teenagers, regularly told young people a hundred years ago that it was likely to make them blind, or mad, or lead them to eternal damnation. It is not surprising that several generations of young people grew up to have a guilty conscience about masturbation, and that strong prejudices about it still persist.

Now for the facts. Surveys have shown that nearly all boys (over 90 percent) do it, and between one-third and two-thirds of girls. (Most of these girls who masturbated did it less frequently than the average boy.) Many of these young people felt that they ought not to do it, but admitted that they just couldn't resist the urge.

So presumably there will be a lot of readers eager to know where they stand. First of all, they can dismiss all that Victorian scare-mongering about its harming their health. Doctors now are generally agreed that there are no physical ill-effects at all.

But is masturbation sinful? This is not quite so easy to answer. To begin with, although many people have searched for a mention of it in the Bible, nobody has ever found one. (The story of Onan in Genesis 38:8-10 has nothing to do with it, even though the dictionary gives “masturbation” as one of the meanings of the word “onanism”. Read the passage for yourself and see that Onan's sin was to cut short the act of intercourse with Tamar, so as to prevent conception, even though he had been ordered to treat her as a wife and father a child by her.)

So it is clear that the physical act of masturbation is not forbidden by God, and therefore cannot be called sinful.

But that is not the whole story.

Our Lord Jesus Christ clearly states: *“Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:28).

The physical act is often accompanied by mental pictures of sexual intercourse. Some people get these through looking at porn while they masturbate; others just imagine themselves having sex with some real or imaginary person.

Pornography is addictive and perilous and fills our minds with damaging images which are almost impossible to remove. Avoid it and if you are caught up in it get help.

For us to indulge in “imaginary sex” (except, of course, with our own absent husband or wife) is clearly forbidden, and therefore sinful.

Nature's Release Mechanism

There is a physical reason why guys masturbate more than girls. Sexual tension builds up more regularly in a male body, where the tension is closely connected with the build-up of a store of semen

in the glands. In females, physical factors, especially the menstrual cycle, do play a part, but emotional factors affect a woman's sexual tension more than a man's.

In most men, the sexual tension just has to be released at fairly frequent intervals. Nature provides its own mechanism for ensuring this release. A healthy young man who has not had an orgasm for some time will find that an orgasm is produced, quite unconsciously, while he is asleep.

This is accompanied by a release of semen and, usually, by a vivid and realistic dream of having sex. Boys with sound moral attitudes are often shocked when this first happens to them, and may feel guilty about it. But there is no need for guilt feelings, since such dreams are produced by the unconscious part of our mind and it is beyond our power to prevent them. All we can do is to avoid dwelling on them and to get on with our everyday lives.

Nature also provides quite a lot of young women with a similar automatic release of tension, through an orgasm (or, sometimes, an incomplete orgasm) while asleep, and an accompanying sex-dream. Girls who experience this should blame nature for these dreams, not themselves.

The unmarried young disciple of Christ is therefore faced with a choice. He (or, quite often, she) can provide their own release from tension when it appears to be needed, by masturbating. Or they can leave things entirely to nature and try to overlook any sexually explicit dreams that may occur. Or they might sometimes follow one course and sometimes the other.

Matter of Conscience

The Roman Catholic Church opposes masturbation. So do quite a lot of teachers in other sects. But that is not surprising, since many religious leaders seem to like forbidding various practices. For example:

Catholics oppose eating meat on Fridays.

The Free Church of Scotland opposes gardening on Sundays.

The Seventh-Day Adventists oppose eating ham.

The Salvation Army opposes drinking wine.

Jehovah's Witnesses oppose blood transfusion and so on.

Yet the New Testament opposes none of those things. So, as people who go by the Bible, we must beware of making a similar mistake. We dare not lay down the law against masturbation when the Bible does not oppose it. This is something that must be left to each individual's conscience.

In those communities that do forbid masturbation, it appears that many of their young people cannot manage to obey the community's rule. Several men who were religious leaders in days gone by have left written accounts of how they fought the desire to masturbate. They were not successful in this, and their confessions of failure are heartbreaking to read.

It would be tragic if we were to push any of our young people into that sad predicament. As the apostle Peter said in connection with a rather different situation,

"Why do you now want to put God to the test by laying a load on the backs of the believers which neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were able to carry?" (Acts 15:10).

Acceptable

There is a view then, that masturbation is acceptable as long as your conscience does not forbid it. Sometimes it can be positively helpful, by relieving sexual tension before this reaches a dangerously high level, where severe temptation can occur.

But there are a couple of important provisos that must be made.

First of all, it must be carried out in absolute privacy. Masturbation in company with someone of the same sex has proved, for many people, to be the first step along the forbidden road of homosexual practice.

The other essential is that it should be, as far as possible, a purely physical act. Every effort must be made to avoid those thoughts of sex with an actual person that the Lord Jesus called “adultery in the heart”. If we find such thought-control difficult, a prayer along these lines will help:

“Thank you, Lord, that you allow us this method of releasing tension, and reducing the temptation to sin – a temptation that otherwise might prove too great for me. Help me to treat this as physical release and nothing more. Help me to keep my mind free of sinful thoughts, and not to commit adultery in my heart. Help me, please Lord, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

And if the idea of praying about such a very human thing as masturbation strikes you as rather odd, then perhaps the following passage will reassure you. It shows that prayer about every single part of life is pleasing to the Lord.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6,7).

UK Helpline

If you have a problem that you would like to discuss (in confidence) with a brother or sister, then contact:



Helping the Hurting. Encouraging Awareness

Telephone: 0800 9545 099

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Email support: help@chsn.org.uk

Web Site: www.chsn.org.uk

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