

Renewal Ministries of Colorado Springs

Hope and Healing Through Christ Centered Ministry

Masturbation: Natural Self-Expression or Dangerous Self-Sex

In over thirty years of ministry, I have talked to many men, from their early teens to people in their sixties regarding masturbation. In the majority of cases, their sexual behavior was cloaked by secrecy, producing confusion, guilt, and shame. In the book of Proverbs, the writer says that the human desire is never satisfied.¹ The same thought is repeated in Ecclesiastes 1:8. What may have started, as innocent discovery over time became sexual arousal that demanded more. Further experimentation with the addition of visual stimulation such as women's clothing, a lingerie catalog, or pornography has exacerbated the problem and in some cases lead to sexual addiction.

The purpose of this paper is to establish the moral, spiritual and emotional implications associated with the practice of masturbation. The scope of this paper is limited to self-stimulation among teenage and adult men and women only. It does not address the mutually agreed upon practice of sexual stimulation in marriage. This paper is not intended to criticize or condemn what varying authors, ministers, physicians or psychologists have said on this issue.

Premise: I firmly believe that when sound biblical theology and the pure science of psychology bear witness to each other you have a balanced approach that can effectively help the confused and hurting. All scripture is authoritative² and must be recognized as beneficial in addressing all matters pertaining to life where there is a desire to bring about meaningful and lasting change. Psychology that minimizes or ignores biblical truth, no matter how well intentioned, cannot lead to lasting change. Christians who would minimize or ignore legitimate findings in the realm of human behavior will frustrate the healing process of those they endeavor to help. As Christians, we must avoid the temptation to be simplistic or over spiritualize this issue. I say again, a balanced approach will facilitate the healing process for those we desire to serve and bring glory to God.

Masturbation defined:

"Erotic stimulation especially of one's own genital organs commonly resulting in orgasm and achieved by manual or other bodily contact exclusive of sexual intercourse, by instrumental manipulation, occasionally by sexual fantasies, or by various combinations of these agencies called also *onanism, self-abuse*"³

Let us start by exploring some of the more commonly asked questions and responses about masturbation. Please note that the answers given to these questions represent the views of many if not the majority of those working in the medical and mental health fields, both secular and Christian alike. In some cases, their answers may not represent my views.

Who Masturbates?

"Just about everybody. Masturbation is a very common behavior, even among people who have sexual relations with a partner. In one national study, 95% of males and 89% of females reported that they have masturbated. Masturbation is the first sexual act experienced by most males and females. In young children, masturbation is a normal part of the growing child's exploration of his or

¹ Proverbs 27:20

² 2 Timothy 3:16 (AMP)

³ Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary

her body. Most people continue to masturbate in adulthood, and many do so throughout their lives.”⁴

“Among the thousands of people interviewed by Kinsey during the 1940’s and 1950’s, 94 percent of males and 40 percent of females reported masturbating to orgasm. More recent studies report that about the same percentage of males masturbate but that the percentage of females has increased to around 70 percent (or more, depending on the study).”⁵

Is Masturbation Normal?

“While it once was regarded as a perversion and a sign of a mental problem, masturbation now is regarded by many as a normal, healthy sexual activity that is pleasant, fulfilling, acceptable, and safe. It is a good way to experience sexual pleasure and can be done throughout life. Most secular and Christian doctors and counselors say that Masturbation is only considered a problem when it inhibits sexual activity with a partner, is done in public, or causes significant distress to the person. It may cause distress if it is done compulsively and/or interferes with daily life and activities.”⁶

“... a good way to experience sexual pleasure and can be done throughout life.” This is purely a secular view that does not take into consideration the addictive nature of such sexual expression. Solo sex tends to be narcissistic and is a betrayal of Gods intent for sexual acts to be mutually stimulating enhancing the marriage relationship. While masturbation is considered by many to be normal, I reject the suggestion that it should be construed as emotionally or spiritually healthy.

(Writing to a teen audience) "It is my opinion that masturbation is not much of an issue with God. It's a normal part of adolescence, which involves no one else. It does not cause disease, it does not produce babies, and Jesus did not mention it in the Bible. I'm not telling you to masturbate, and I hope you won't feel the need for it. The best thing I can do is suggest that you talk to God personally about this matter and decide what He wants you to do."⁷

While I respect and admire Dr. Dobson, we are in strong disagreement on this point. To say, “Masturbation is not much of an issue with God” is theologically incorrect. Everything about our lives is an issue with God. There is no exception especially when it comes to sexual expression. While Jesus did not specifically mention the word masturbation, the Bible does teach the essentials of mental, physical, relational, and spiritual purity.

Is Masturbation Harmful?

“In general, the medical community considers masturbation to be a natural and harmless expression of sexuality for both men and women. It does not cause any physical injury or harm to the body, and can be performed in moderation throughout a person's lifetime as a part of normal sexual behavior.”⁸

The key term here is moderation. Chronic masturbation can cause nerve damage, sexual dysfunction, and worse. Again, we see that there is no acknowledgment of the moral or spiritual aspects of this behavior. Man is not merely a physical. He is a triune being, body, mind, and spirit. Each is interconnected relating one to the other. To address masturbation exclusively on a biological plane with regard to the overall health of an individual is simply not honest.

(Writing to a teen audience) “... As for the emotional consequences of masturbation, only four circumstances should give us cause for concern. The first is when it is associated with oppressive

⁴ WebMD

⁵ The Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex By June Machover Reinisch, Ruth Beasley, page 95

⁶ WebMD

⁷ Dr. Dobson, Preparing for Adolescence

⁸ Reviewed by the doctors at The Cleveland Clinic Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. --WebMD

guilt from which the individual can't escape. That guilt has the potential to do considerable psychological and spiritual damage. Boys and girls who labor under divine condemnation can gradually become convinced that even God couldn't love them. They promise a thousand times with great sincerity never again to commit this "despicable" act. Then a week or two passes, or perhaps several months. Eventually, the hormonal pressure accumulates until nearly every waking moment reverberates with sexual desire. Finally, in a moment (and I do mean a *moment*) of weakness, it happens again. What then, dear friend? Tell me what a young person says to God after he or she has just broken the one-thousandth solemn promise to Him? I am convinced that some teenagers have thrown over their faith because of their inability to please God on this point."⁹

I can certainly empathize with the scenario of concerned parents and their teens struggle with masturbation. The fight to live a victorious life before the Lord can be intense and filled with disappointment. Trust me when I say I can relate. Several key things must be remembered here when dealing with teens and their struggle for purity. No matter how weak they are in those moments of temptation, they still have the power of choice. When they make the wrong choice and fall God will help them to rise again.¹⁰ Admittedly, there are times when teens and parents are discouraged beat down and despairing but we do not quite and abandon our faith.¹¹ To suggest that any person does not have the ability to please God simply because of failures is theologically inaccurate. Read the words of the Apostle Peter. "By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life."¹²

(Writing to a teen audience) "The second circumstance in which masturbation might have harmful implications is when it becomes extremely obsessive. That is more likely to occur when it has been understood by the individual to be "forbidden fruit." I believe the best way to prevent that kind of obsessive response is for adults not to emphasize or condemn it. Regardless of what you do, you will not stop the practice of masturbation in your teenagers. That is a certainty. You'll just drive it underground — or under covers. Nothing works as a "cure." Cold showers, lots of exercise, many activities, and awesome threats are ineffective. Attempting to suppress this act is one campaign that is destined to fail — so why wage it?"¹³

I do agree chronic masturbation is harmful in many respects. The key is early intervention not avoidance. It is not about suppression but teaching and loving confrontation without condemnation. With God, there is always a cure. Nothing is impossible.¹⁴ Our hope is in the power of God's word, the working of the Holy Spirit, and that He will honor our faith.¹⁵ In our struggle for purity, we must always remember that we are not limited to our strength alone. For those who love the Lord, have access to and share in His divine power and nature.¹⁶

(Writing to a teen audience) "The third situation around which we should be concerned is when the young person becomes addicted to pornographic material. The kind of obscenity available to teenagers today has the capacity to grab and hold a boy for the rest of his life. Parents will want to intervene if there is evidence that their son or daughter is heading down that well-worn path. I will discuss that danger in a subsequent chapter."¹⁷

⁹ Challenges in the Teen years, Dr. Dobson Answers Your Question

¹⁰ Proverbs 24:16

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 4:8

¹² 2 Peter 1:3

¹³ Challenges in the Teen years, Dr. Dobson Answers Your Question

¹⁴ Matthew 17:20; Luke 1:37

¹⁵ Hebrews 11:6

¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 1:11

¹⁷ Challenges in the Teen years, Dr. Dobson Answers Your Question

Dr. Dobson is correct when talking about the addictive nature of pornography, it has “capacity to grab and hold a boy for the rest of his life.” I would emphasize concern should start when the parent learns their teenager has been exposed to any form of pornography. Appropriate intervention should be immediate.

Can masturbation become habitual and/or contribute to sexual addiction?

This is a complex question and requires legitimate space to put forth a minimal but acceptable answer. Masturbation accompanied with lustful fantasies, reinforced by various forms of pornography is epidemic in our society and in our churches. Sexual addiction is one of the great thieves of our day robbing individuals and families of self-esteem and dignity. Countless lives are destroyed as our society continues to be ravaged by its industry. Every addict that I have encountered over the years has been in denial, minimized, and played the blame game. “What’s the big deal?” “I can quite any time I choose.” “It’s not my fault . . .” And even more attest “Addiction, it will never happen to me.”

C.S. Lewis wrote, "For me the real evil of masturbation would be that it takes an appetite which, in lawful use, leads the individual out of himself to complete (and correct) his own personality in that of another (and finally in children and even grandchildren) and turns it back, sends it back into the prison of himself, there to keep a harem of imaginary brides. And this harem, once admitted, works against his ever getting out and really uniting with a real woman. For the harem is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions, which no real woman can rival."¹⁸ "This quotation can be applied to women as well as men, expressing the meaning of masturbation as a personal flight from reality into the prison of lust."¹⁹

The euphoria associated with orgasm (the climax of sexual excitement, consisting of intense muscle tightening around the genital area experienced as a pleasurable wave of tingling sensations through parts of the body)²⁰ can lead to chronic and or addictive behavior. “In 2003, a Dutch scientist reported that brain scans of people having orgasm resemble scans of a heroin rush (Holstege, 2003). Dopamine soars during copulation and orgasm. (Putnam, 2001) These natural highs are only the first part of a neurochemical roller coaster ride - a ride that is essentially the cycle of all addictions.”²¹

Sexual addiction can be defined as a “pseudo-relationship to a mind altering sexual experience with destructive effects upon the self, and in some instances upon others as well.”²² Patrick Carnes, nationally recognized authority on sexual addiction states, "the addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict's relationship with a mood altering 'experience' becomes central to his life."²³

“The addictive process is a recognizable psychological and behavioral syndrome that expresses itself in a particular individual in regard to specific substances or processes but which exhibits a striking similarity and commonality among addicted individuals regardless of their specific circumstances and particular addictions... Addictions may be subdivided into:

- Substance addictions, including alcohol, various illicit and licit drugs
- Process addictions such as food, sex, gambling, work and spending.

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis' Case for the Christian Faith By Richard L. Purtill, page 132

¹⁹ Fr. Harvey, The Pastoral Problem of Masturbation

²⁰ Encarta Dictionary

²¹ Sex and Addiction, Mon, 2006-01-09 16:29 — Marnia,

http://www.reuniting.info/science/sex_and_addiction+orgasm+and+addiction&hl=en&gl=us&strip=1

²² John Bradshaw, *Healing The Shame That Binds You*, Health Communications Inc., Deerfield, FL

²³ Out of the Shadows, Compcare Publications, 2415 Annapolis Lane, Minneapolis, MN

Characteristics of the addictive process are:

- Salience, obsession, abnormal or pathological importance of the substance or behavior
- Persistence, rigidity, stereotypy, inflexibility and repetition of the particular addictive behavior
- Relative immunity to adverse consequences and resistance to learned modification of behavior
- The invocation of an interrelated system of *psychological defenses* which, like a string of military forts, function in concert to protect the individual from the full realization and acknowledgement of the self- and other- harmful nature of his addiction and hence provide cover and concealment for the continued expression of the addictive process.

... Anyone who understands the terrific drive and intensity that underlies and propels well-established addictive illness will not be surprised at the difficulties individuals encounter when attempting to control or terminate their addictive behaviors. In such situations the old saying 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' is an apt description of affairs once the individual has reached the stage of recognizing his addiction and the need to do something about it. And in many if not most cases, such a recognition of harmful addiction may itself come only very late in the course of the addictive process, which has long managed by means of the psychological defenses mentioned above to conceal and therefore protect itself from the critical recognition of its host."²⁴

The author Floyd Garrett quoted above mentions "*psychological defenses* ('mental defense mechanisms')" stating that they "are normal and universal features of the human mind that operate consciously, half-consciously and unconsciously to protect the ego from awareness of difficult or painful feelings, facts and ideas. It is not the existence of these natural and necessary mental defense mechanisms but their maladaptive application that causes problems for people."²⁵ Simply put, these are the defenses employed to deny minimize or excuse sinful behavior patterns that damages ourselves and or others that we are in relationship with.

"The latest neuropsychology and brain research clearly show that pornography viewing and other illicit sexual behaviors trigger a tidal-wave-release of powerful chemicals in the brain and nervous system. In a process virtually identical to that of illicit drugs, an individual becomes dependent on this natural brain chemical flood for pleasure, self-medication, and escape."²⁶

At the end of this paper are two self-assessment forms, one for men, and the other for women. They are designed to help you self-identify a potential sexual addiction problem. It offers an overview of concerns frequently presented by both men and women seeking help for problem sexual behavior. Answering yes to more than 3 questions may indicate a sexual addiction problem, which should be openly discussed with a trained sexual addiction specialist.

Will masturbation damage my marital relationship?

"This habit has the capacity to follow us into marriage and become a substitution for healthy sexual relations between a husband and wife. This, I believe, is what the apostle Paul meant when he instructed us not to deprive or "defraud" one another as marital partners. The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5).²⁷

²⁴ Floyd P. Garrett, M.D., The Addictive Process, <http://www.bma-wellness.com/addictions/addictions.html>

²⁵ Floyd P. Garrett, M.D. Addiction and Its Mechanisms of Defense, http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/Addiction_Defenses.html

²⁶ Candeo LLC, <http://candeocan.com/index.php/faq/>

²⁷ Challenges in the Teen years, Dr. Dobson Answers Your Question

“It's clear that masturbation holds some potential dangers to your marriage. The first is if your masturbatory fantasies are adulterous. If you find pleasure in thinking about having sex with another woman, that can erode your erotic feelings toward your wife. And that's a thin-ice situation. The second danger is in gradually replacing marital sex with self-stimulation. Some men find this a convenient way to avoid marital intimacy. A third danger is giving your wife a feeling of being inadequate or unappealing. Many women have no inkling of how common masturbation is, and they are astonished when they discover that their husband does *that*.”²⁸ *To read this quote in context of the entire article see Christianity Today International /Marriage Partnership magazine, Fall 1997, Vol. 14, No. 3, Page 56*

“Giving oneself sexual pleasure instead of working on a loving sexual relationship with the person who has a right to it—this seems to be where the problem lies. Solo sex violates what a sexual partnership is all about; besides being an embarrassing mark of immaturity, masturbation is sexual solitaire played by one person who ought to be using sex as an expression of love for the spouse. Thus, masturbation may be a copout from the challenge of creating the personal closeness of partnership that is meant by intercourse, and hence may be an escape from one's partner. Sheer physical release is selfishly chosen over the personal challenges of lovemaking. If it is this, masturbation is cheap infidelity: it avoids the risk of adultery and declines the challenge of fidelity.”²⁹

Question, when is masturbation wrong or sinful?

While the Bible does not specifically mention the term “masturbation,” it does set forth the principles of personal responsibility and self-control concerning our mental and physical sexual purity, which we will explore in some detail. The moral question, when is masturbation a sin must be determined within the context of the act itself.

I. When masturbation fuels lustful sexual desire.

I would submit that those who engage in masturbation put themselves at risk regarding lustful sexual desires, setting themselves up for vivid sexual fantasy and “mental infidelity.” Again, we look to the scripture for clarity in relationships. Paul's letter to Timothy sets the gold standard on how we are to think of others. “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”³⁰ There can be no doubt regarding Paul's meaning. To fanaticize about another person male or female, in a lustful way is a violation of purity.

Lust defined

- Intense or unrestrained sexual craving. **2a.** An overwhelming desire or craving: *a lust for power.*³¹
- G1937 *πιθυμω* *epithumeo* ep-ee-thoo-meh'-o From G1909 and G2372; to set the heart upon, that is, long for (rightfully or otherwise):—covet, desire, would fain, lust (after).³²
- In the ethical sense, lust is used to express sinful desire—sinful either in being directed toward forbidden objects or in being so violent as to overcome self-control and to engross the mind with earthly, carnal, and perishable things. “By lusts Paul, “Like Peter and James, understands, not the natural appetites of the body, but the sinful, godless inclinations (Romans 1:24), whether these be of a sensuous or of a spiritual nature. He purposely quotes the Old Testament commandment against sinful lust (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21) in such a manner that it is not any definite objects of lust, but the longing for them as such that he calls forbidden (Romans 7:7, see margin). In his sense every lust is a product

²⁸ Sex as a Solo Act, Premarital Regrets and Questions of Infertility by Louis and Melissa McBurney

²⁹ Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, Eerdmans Publishing, page 219

³⁰ 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV)

³¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000

³² Strong's Exhaustive Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

of sin (Romans 7:8), which compels us to obey the lusts of the body (Romans 6:12); every natural appetite may be perverted by sin into lust (Romans 13:14)” (Weiss, Theology of the N.T., 1:328).³³

The words of Jesus are clear on the issue of lust, “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”³⁴ There is no question as to his meaning. Adultery in the mind is on the same level as adultery in the flesh. Both corrupt the soul.

Matthew 5:28 (The Message) *But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices--they also corrupt.*

“A man who gazes at a woman with the purpose of wanting her sexually has mentally committed adultery.”³⁵ There are those who engage in lustful masturbation who would defend them selves saying that they have not physically touched a woman inappropriately and thus have not sinned sexually. In light of scripture, this kind of argument is void of truth and is delusional. Any form of pornography, whether in print, video, or Internet that visually stimulates inappropriate sexual desire and lust is a violation of God’s word. To allow ourselves to indulge our minds in such activity is sinful and must be rejected. “Lust is as much a violation of the law’s intent as is illicit sexual intercourse”³⁶

2 Peter 2:14 (NLT) *They commit adultery with their eyes, and their lust is never satisfied. They make a game of luring unstable people into sin. They train themselves to be greedy; they are doomed and cursed.*

Dr. J. Budziszewski states “Masturbation is wrong because it goes against what the sexual powers were designed for, because it is inseparable from illicit fantasies, because these fantasies take on a life of their own, and because it draws the erotic longing backward into self instead of outward. It doesn't "release" lust, but reinforces it, so that next time the temptation is stronger yet. The hard thing, most people find, isn't figuring out that they *ought* to stop, but *stopping*.”³⁷

The Apostle Paul writing to his young protégé Timothy advised, “Shun youthful lusts and flee from them, and aim at and pursue righteousness (all that is virtuous and good, right living, conformity to the will of God in thought, word, and deed); [and aim at and pursue] faith, love, [and] peace (harmony and concord with others) in fellowship with all [Christians], who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.”³⁸

2 Corinthians 12:21 (NLT) *21Yes, I am afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence. And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.*

II. When masturbation is a violation of “spiritual mindedness.”

Masturbation accompanied by lustful thoughts and or sexual fantasy is a violation of spiritual mindedness. The battle is in the mind. Wrong thinking produces wrong actions. Remember the old saying GIGO, garbage in garbage out? Where our mind is our feet will take us.

³³ The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary

³⁴ Matthew 5:28 (NIV)

³⁵ The Nelson Study Bible

³⁶ Holman Bible Dictionary, Michael Fink (Matt. 5:27-28)

³⁷ http://www.boundless.org/2002_2003/departments/theophilus/a0000768.html

³⁸ 2 Timothy 2:22 (AMP)

Romans 8:5 – 8 (NIV) *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

The one thing that distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation is our God given ability to choose. We are not to be driven by our base nature and thus fulfill our lustful cravings. Instead, we can choose to live above the societal norm. We can live free from the guilt and shame brought on by ill-advised sexual experimentation.

Romans 8:12-13(NIV) *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,*

Galatians 5:16-17 (NRSV) *Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.*

Philippians 4:8 (NIV) *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.*

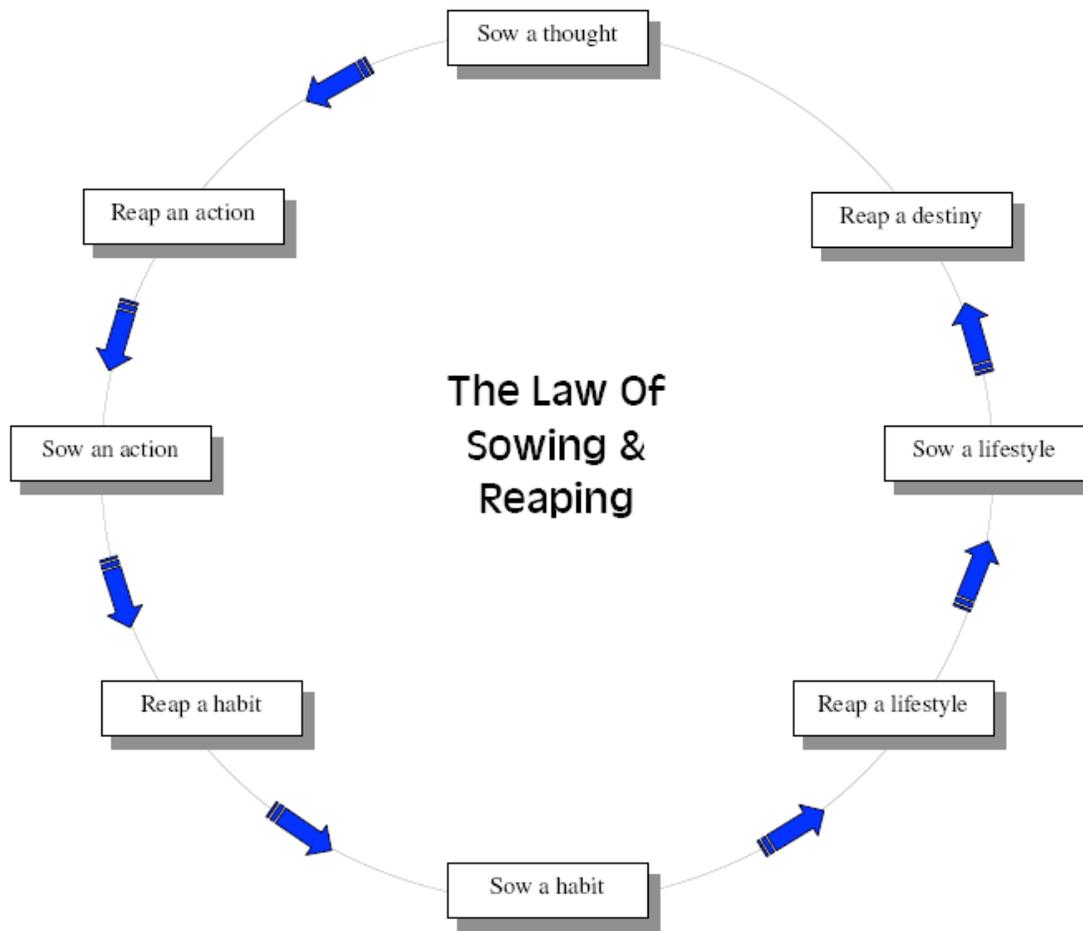
I say again, the battle for sexual purity is in the mind. The scriptures clearly teach that what we sow into our mind we will reap through our action. Always remember, we win or lose by how we choose.

Hosea 10:12-13 (NIV) *Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,*

Galatians 6:7-9 (NIV) *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Romans 12:2 (Message) *Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

In the illustration on page 9, we see the cycle of sowing and reaping. When you sow a thought, you reap an action. When you sow an action, you reap a habit. When you sow a habit, you reap a lifestyle. When you sow a lifestyle, you will reap a destiny. Do you, a friend, or family member have concerns about a habit or lifestyle of lust, sexual fantasies, pornography, or sexual addiction? If so, do not make the mistake of focusing exclusively on the damaging behavior trying to effect change. Meaningful and lasting change comes from the inside out by the renewing of your thought processes. Focus on renewing your mind and you will have the strength, courage, and humility to see harmful habits broken and destinies reborn.



III. When masturbation is an act of sexual self-gratification.

In an effort to be fair, we must recognize, not everyone who has masturbated or does so occasionally has a problem with lust. That being said I think that we can agree that the practice of masturbation tends to promote strong sexual urges. The scriptures clearly teach us to resist, abstain from, and put off such desires that cannot be fulfilled within the context of marriage. Again, we come back to importance of choice. Do we fulfill our lust or do we with humility, exercise self-control, and honor God?

Romans 13:14 (NRSV) *Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

1 Peter 2:11 (AMP) *Beloved, I implore you as aliens and strangers and exiles [in this world] to abstain from the sensual urges (the evil desires, the passions of the flesh, your lower nature) that wage war against the soul.*

Ephesians 2:3(AMP) *Among these we as well as you once lived and conducted ourselves in the passions of our flesh [our behavior governed by our corrupt and sensual nature], obeying the impulses of the flesh and the thoughts of the mind [our cravings dictated by our senses and our dark imaginings]. We were then by nature children of [God's] wrath and heirs of [His] indignation, like the rest of mankind.*

IV. When masturbation violates the conscience.

The statement that everyone does it gives the practice no credibility. Do we go with the flow and throw conscience aside? Thomas Aquinas wrote "Every judgment of conscience, be it right or

wrong, be it about things evil in themselves or morally indifferent, is obligatory, in such wise that he who acts against his conscience always sins.” In the fourteenth chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul spends a great deal of time writing about matters of conscience. Here are just a few of his statements.

Romans 14:22 (NIV) *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.*

Romans 14:23 (AMP) *But the man who has doubts (misgivings, an uneasy conscience) about eating, and then eats [perhaps because of you], stands condemned [before God], because he is not true to his convictions and he does not act from faith. For whatever does not originate and proceed from faith is sin [whatever is done without a conviction of its approval by God is sinful].*

If there is any doubt as to whether or not the practice of masturbation pleases God, then in good conscience it is best to give it up. Let take this matter a step further. If your practice of masturbation violates your wife’s conscience, you must stop. Here is Paul’s counsel to the Roman Christians. “let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and for mutual upbuilding (edification and development) of one another.”³⁹

V. When masturbation becomes a sin issue.

Masturbation becomes a matter of sin through sexual expressions that violates conscience, compromises mental purity, feeds lustful desire, or hinders relational intimacy with a spouse. When we resist or refuse to deal with issues of sin the result is continued guilt and shame. Further denial will produce hardening of the heart (searing of the conscience), self-deception, bondage, and spiritual darkness.

Ephesians 4:17 - 19 (NLT) *17 With the Lord’s authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.*

Paul writing to the Christians in Galatia warns them a second time to live lives that honor God and to resist the sinful desires that could cost them dearly.

Galatians 5:19 - 21 (NLT) *19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

If you have struggled with masturbation, crossing the line into sin, there is good news. Jesus came into the world not with a desire to condemn⁴⁰ but with a passionate longing to bring hope, healing,⁴¹ freedom from sin and its bondage.⁴² God stands ready to forgive you completely. “If we admit our sins--make a clean breast of them--he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.”⁴³

³⁹ Romans 14:19 (AMP)

⁴⁰ John 3:16-17, 8:1-11

⁴¹ Isaiah 53:5

⁴² Luke 4:18

⁴³ 1 John 1:9 (The Message)

Conclusion:

I would like to draw a comparison between the debate on the legalization of marijuana and the notion that masturbation is just a normal/natural expression of sexuality. The proponents of marijuana legalization speak of the “medicinal” benefits that provide proven relief for the user. The opposition argues that marijuana is a “gateway” drug that leads to dangerous experimentation, addiction, and death. For those who need the medicinal benefits of marijuana it is readily available by prescription.

Some in the psychiatric and counseling community would say that masturbation is a natural expression of human sexuality. They report that it provides needed physical and or emotional relief for the participant (user). With all due respect, the need is not ejaculation but self-control.

May I submit to the reader that in all the people I have talked with over the years, masturbation was a behavior surrounded by secrecy. May I also add that in most cases, after the initial rush, the result was confusion, guilt, and shame. The truth is that once was never enough! What may have begun as curiosity and experimentation for too many developed into full-blown sexual addiction.

Is it natural self-expression or dangerous self-sex? The Apostle Paul said it well. “Everything is permissible (allowable and lawful) for me; but not all things are helpful (good for me to do, expedient and profitable when considered with other things). Everything is lawful for me, but I will not become the slave of anything or be brought under its power.”⁴⁴ As for me I choose to live my life to honor God in every area.⁴⁵ I hope you will too!

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:31 (AMP)

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:31