

Masturbation

Pastor Rob,

As we've gone through 1 Corinthians over the last year and a half, you've mentioned masturbation along with other sexual sins. Like many men, I've dabbled and wrestled with this through much of my teen and college years, and it's still a struggle today, though by God's grace I have victory over it most of the time. Throughout my years of struggling against it, I've also struggled to find a Scriptural reference clearly speaking against it. Obviously I realize there's nothing in the Bible that says, "do not masturbate", but I sure wish there was! That would give me some unquestionable ammo against the rationalization that goes on in my mind when I'm tempted by it. Now I absolutely understand that what goes on in my mind (lust) is sin as well. With that in mind, when I was younger I even tried to go so far as to force my mind not to lust in order to be able to masturbate and "not sin." Which I realize is pretty much kidding myself.

When you have time, I'd like to hear your thoughts on why masturbation is sin. I don't disagree with you, but I've heard and read differing opinions within Christian circles, even some surprising ones from prominent Christian leaders and authors. As I've grown older, and spent many years married to the woman I love, the conclusion I've come to is that masturbation is essentially a sin of selfishness. It takes something that God designed to be shared in its enjoyment, and makes the enjoyment a self-serving act, even if illicit lust isn't involved in my head. There's also the issue of how I got to the place where I'm tempted to masturbate – usually it's because I've let my eyes or my mind enjoy a woman other than my wife, or I'm dwelling on the pleasure itself. I want to be better equipped to avoid and combat this in my own life, but now more than ever my thoughts turn to my kids, whom I want to thoroughly equip and inoculate against this before they are old enough to discover it for themselves as I did.

I appreciate your openness and honesty. I'm convinced that any man who denies any sort of desire to lust or masturbate, is either dead, or a liar. Granted, some have reigned the desire in more than others (by God's grace and help and discipline), but nobody gets completely free of all temptation in this respect while they're still breathing.

That said, I completely resonate with your thoughts that masturbation is "essentially a sin of selfishness." Yes. And, that it takes something that "God designed to be shared in [marriage] and makes the enjoyment a self-serving act, even if illicit lust isn't involved in my head." Again, yes. I also agree with your thought as to "how I got to the place where I'm tempted to masturbate – usually it's because I've let my eyes or my mind enjoy a woman other than my wife, or I'm dwelling on the pleasure itself." True again. And I appreciate your motive to train and disciple your kids in this, boys *and* girls.

That said, here are some thoughts (in no particular order) from Scripture on this. It's not intended to be comprehensive, but enough to come to the conclusion that it's wrong.

1. First, masturbating without lusting, is like talking without moving your mouth. You can try really hard, and do so to some extent, but when you get right down to it – it's next to impossible. And that definitely makes it wrong, because it's akin to adultery per Matthew 5:27 – *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* It's a heart issue.
2. Even assuming you *can* masturbate without lusting, it's still self-gratification; which is completely opposite to the entire biblical ethic. Nowhere is self-gratification upheld in the Bible as good and desirable. The clearest statement of which comes from 1 Cor 10:24 – *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.* Let no one seek his own good, his own gratification. His own self-pleasure.
3. Your body is not your own, it's your wife's. 1 Cor 7:4b – *The husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.* And for a wife to say to her husband that it's okay with her if he masturbates, even in her presence, I think is an abdication of her responsibility – she's withholding herself from him, and he's essentially saying to her, "your way isn't good enough for me." The solution to which, is not to indulge yourself, but communicate what pleases you! The Song of Solomon references all these things. Including the fact that it's totally okay for a husband and wife to touch each *other* with their hands as part of their intimacy – totally. And good. And loving. And pleasurable. You name it. And the sky's the limit there, as long as it's mutually agreeable and not harmful. But to do so yourself, is taking control of something that's not yours to take control of.
4. As a believer, your body is not your own even if you're *not* married. 1 Cor 6:19-20 – *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* So as a follower of Jesus, we give up the right to do as we please with our bodies. Especially something that is self-gratifying.
5. In light of the fact that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, I can't believe someone would be comfortable with the thought that what they're doing in masturbating, they're doing in the direct presence of the Holy Spirit. He's right there with them. Forced to observe. Needless to say, that would both quench and grieve him.
6. Again, referring to 1 Cor 6:19-20, I find it very difficult, if not impossible, to rationalize that masturbating is somehow glorifying God with my body. Especially since it's self-serving, per #2 above. How does that make him look good?
7. It's a youthful passion or desire, which Paul says to flee. 2 Timothy 2:22 – *Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* If masturbation is not a youthful passion, a youthful pursuit, something that younger generations want to do most, I don't know what is. And we're to flee it, not get as close as possible to it, without somehow crossing the line.

8. Based on its direct linkage with lust and self-gratification in the sexual realm, I think it falls within the very wide definition of “sexual immorality” that Paul says to abstain from in 1 Thess 4:3 – *This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.*
9. Masturbation doesn’t convey self-control, but loss of it. The very opposite of Paul’s continued admonition in 1 Thess 4:4-5 – *That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.* In holiness and honor.
10. Hebrews 13:4 says – *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.* Whether we indulge in sexual immorality with others, or ourselves, we accumulate baggage (even before we’re married) that we bring into the marriage bed, and run the risk of defiling something intended to be pure, and undefiled, and rich, and beautiful, and blessed, and awesome. This is one of the reasons so many marriages have such a hard time – their past baggage crowds their marriage bed, and is very difficult to unpack and deal with.
11. Solomon says 3 times in Song of Solomon – *That you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.* And I don’t think he means until it pleases *you*. In the context of that book, I think he means until it pleases you, your spouse, and God in the context of a loving marriage relationship. We tell our girls all the time – don’t awaken love too soon. Because once you do, it’s very difficult to keep it under control. And don’t go wasting your emotions – whether in private, or with others. Save them for your spouse. It’s one of the most other-oriented things you can do for them, even before you even know them.

Well, those are most of my thoughts on it. I hope it helps.
