

Is masturbation a sin?

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Life Issues › Marriage and Sexuality

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Before answering the question “Is masturbation a sin?”, we need to ask another question. Why do we want to know something is sinful? It is very important to realize that some people will ask such questions, because they really don’t know what the Bible teaches about a certain matter. But there are other people who want to justify their sin and who want to argue about these matters.

What is sin?

Although we know that the Bible talks about sin and calls it “lawlessness” (cf. 1 John 3:4), we need to define sin in relation to holiness and progressive sanctification. In Colossians 3:9-10 the apostle Paul gives a wonderful description of practical holiness: “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Paul calls progressive sanctification “the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” It might be helpful to think about holiness in this positive sense. Holiness means becoming more like Jesus Christ. Sanctification is not merely keeping religious rules. It means that Christians will be reflectors of Christ’s holiness and righteous character.

Do you want to be like Jesus?

The question that needs to be answered first, is this: Do you want to be like Jesus? Because if you don’t want to be made in conformity to the image of Jesus Himself, you don’t have problems with sin. You will not have victory over sin if you don’t love Christ. You will not grow in sanctification if you do not worship the Christ Who gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Every Christian can tell you that the more you focus on Christ, the less you desire sin. If you want to grow in holiness, you shouldn’t ask the question “Is this a sin?” You should ask yourself whether something makes you more like Christ.

Holiness and sexuality

Let's take this principle to the topic of sexuality. Is masturbation sinful according to the Bible? Again, ask yourself whether something – in this case masturbation – makes you more like Jesus Christ? Can you honestly say that by masturbating, you are growing into the image of Christ? Hardly. The Bible nowhere encourages people to enjoy the gift of sex individually, nor does it give allowance to it.

We live in a culture that takes everything in order to be enjoyed by the individual, even sexuality. The secret of the Christian life is that we are to follow Jesus in giving. He gave Himself. He came to serve (cf. Matthew 20:28). So in marriage, a husband and wife are called to give themselves to each other. Yes, they are called to enjoy God's gift of sexuality together. The secret of healthy sexuality is that you are giving yourself for the enjoyment of your spouse and your spouse is giving himself or herself for your enjoyment. This is the reason that sexuality cannot be isolated from other aspects of

marriage. You become one flesh, not just physically, but emotionally as well.

Don't take sexual pleasure for yourself

So, if you are married, don't take sexual pleasure for yourself. Give yourself to your spouse. And if you aren't married, the Biblical advise is this: look for a godly spouse and learn the secret of giving in every area of marriage (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Most important of all: ask God for power of His Holy Spirit and ask Him to give you self-control (cf. Galatians 5:23).

Source: <https://www.biblword.net/is-masturbation-a-sin/>

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