



Masturbation...What Does God Think?

by Tom Blangiardo

In the course of my nine years here at Pure Life Ministries, I have witnessed over a thousand graduations from our residential program—over a thousand celebrations of the miracle-working power of God’s grace! Before he is sent on his way to walk out his new life in Christ, each graduating student is given the opportunity to share a brief testimony from our pulpit. Friends and family often attend this chapel service and share in the graduate’s tears of joy and thanksgiving.

While the details of each story are very different, the pattern is strikingly common: a self-absorbed inner man inevitably giving over to sin and “taken captive by the enemy to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:26) There is another curious distinction. Almost without exception, each graduation speech declares a life-controlling habit of “self-gratification.”

These are not words to cover up the more base term “masturbation,” but rather a more apt description, at least in spiritual terms, of what it truly is.

I can testify to this in my own life. Beginning in my early twenties, sexual sin was always an issue for me, specifically pornography, fornication, and a thought life ridden with lust. However, not until I gave over to masturbation, in my forties, did sexual sin take control of my life and send me down the path of Romans 1:28-32. By the time I entered the Pure Life Ministries Live-in Program in August 2003, the attributes of Romans 1:31 were in full bloom: I was blatantly “undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful.”

Do I blame this all directly on masturbation? No. But I do believe a pattern of masturbation will inexorably feed and fan the flames that burn away any resolve a man or woman may have to live for God and for others.

How then is masturbation so widely accepted, or at least considered benign, among Church leaders—even leaders of significant influence and stature among evangelical Christians? For one example, Dr. James Dobson wrote an article on the subject of masturbation in which he passes on the advice he received from his pastor father, “If you feel the need to engage in this act, you shouldn’t be concerned about it. I don’t believe it has much to do with your relationship with God.”

Dr. Dobson's advice seems to have permeated our culture. On one occasion when I was teaching a workshop in a sex-offender unit, I vividly remember one inmate declaring "I'm on fire for Jesus," and in that same testimony acknowledging a chronic habit of masturbation.

Pure Life Ministries certainly is aware that masturbation characterizes a phase that nearly every teenager goes through. However, based on scripture, as well as having seen the pattern of "self-gratification" played out over and over and over again in the lives of too many men, we see this as a black and white, right and wrong issue. Our reasons are many fold, and likely deserve a more in depth treatment than this brief article will permit, but they include:

1. Sex was invented and designed by God Himself for the purposes of procreation and to express intimacy and love between a husband and wife. Masturbation clearly does not fulfill God's purpose for sex.
2. Sex is not a *need*, but rather a *desire*. We do not need sex to live and prosper and fulfill the purposes for which we were created. In his book *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*, Steve Gallagher acknowledges that the sex drive peaks in the 5-10 day period after the last release, but dissipates thereafter to a manageable level. Scripture admonishes us to starve the flesh. (Colossians 3:5, Romans 8:13, Ephesians 4:22)
3. A practice of masturbation tends to make one sexually independent. Married persons no longer look to their spouse exclusively for sexual pleasure, and become less willing to give what it takes to satisfy and be satisfied completely with their partner. A single person has one less reason to make the kind of commitment needed for a godly marriage.
4. A practice of masturbation flies in the face of the virtue of self-control, a fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:23) Jesus said "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-35) Denying "self" includes resisting the temptation to gratify ourselves with the pleasure of masturbation.
5. It is virtually impossible to masturbate without fantasizing. Those who disagree are kidding themselves. Jesus said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28) Jesus' words leave no room for the fantasies that feed lust and masturbation.

Nevertheless, I'm sure there are those who will remain unconvinced by this list of reasons. So let's go right to the heart of this issue. There is an even more fundamental consideration than those listed above, an issue that marks every man who comes into our residential program.

Without exception, each man arrives here as a “taker.” Each one has come to a place where he looks at life and people with an attitude of “what’s in it for me.” In fact, this could easily define what lust is, seeking pleasure for *self* at the expense of *others*. This is why masturbation, or “self-gratification,” is so natural for them, so easy to rationalize.

Masturbation—having sex with *yourself*—is the pinnacle of selfishness.

During a man’s time here, the Lord will convert him, if he is willing, from a taker into a giver, from a man who lusts to a man who loves. Jesus’ words are compelling to this man, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35-36). Love is the opposite of lust. Love seeks pleasure for *others* at the expense of *self*.

If this conversion from “taker” to giver does not happen, that man will never walk in lasting victory over masturbation or sexual sin.

The fundamental question then for all of us is who we are going to serve? Are we going to live to please ourselves or to please God? Are we going to be concerned with our desires or the needs of others? Are we going to be self-conscious or Christ-conscious and other-conscious? Are we complete and satisfied in Him, or are we not?

In his daily devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers talks to this matter of self-awareness. “Ask the Lord to put awareness of Himself in you, and your self-awareness will disappear. Then He will be your all in all. Beware of allowing your self-awareness to continue, because slowly but surely it will awaken self-pity, and self-pity is satanic. Simply ask the Lord to give you Christ-awareness, and He will steady you until your completeness in Him is absolute.” (August 20)

Throughout my life, self-consciousness has always led me down the path of questioning God’s will and His Word, taking liberties that err on the side of allowing me what I want at the expense of what He wants.

Many years ago, when the upscale Italian leather goods manufacturer, Gucci, swept into the market, they had a marketing motto in their stores, “If you have to ask the price, you’re in the wrong place.” Perhaps the analogy is imperfect, but if you’re asking questions like, *Is masturbation sin?* you just might be in the wrong place spiritually. You may not have yet entered into that place where serving God and loving others rules and reigns.

It is in that place where true peace, joy and lasting victory are found.

Tom Blangiardo serves as Director of Ministry Development. He is responsible for increasing the visibility and influence of Pure Life Ministries within the Church and also leads PLM’s Speaking and Prison Ministries.

2012 www.purelifeministries.org. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to use, copy, distribute, or retransmit information or materials on this page, so long as proper acknowledgment is given to Pure Life Ministries as the source of the materials, and no modifications are made to such material.