

The Oppressive
Slave Owner,
Master Bates



Jim Fowler

The Oppressive Slave Owner, Master Bates

Jim Fowler

C.I.Y. Publishing
P.O. Box 1822
Fallbrook, CA 92088
www.christinyou.net

THE OPPRESSIVE SLAVE OWNER, MASTER BATES

© 2013 by James A. Fowler

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (including photocopying, recording, electronic transmission) without the prior written permission of the author, except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information contact author at C.I.Y. Publishing

Published by C.I.Y. Publishing
P.O. Box 1822
Fallbrook, California 92088-1822

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN – 978-1-929541-44-7

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from The New American Standard Bible, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975 by The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, California.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
God Created Sex	3
What About Masturbation?	4
The Bible and Masturbation	9
The Church and Masturbation	25
Christian Faith and Masturbation	31
Marriage and Masturbation	39
Human Choice and Masturbation	45
Conclusion	50

THE OPPRESSIVE SLAVE OWNER, MASTER BATES

The story is told that in the sixth decade of the nineteenth century, when the United States of America was less than one hundred years old and there was divisive contention among the states concerning the right to own slaves as property, there lived a ruthless and implacable slave owner called Master Bates. Bates had extensive land-holdings in the State of Virginia, and did not even know the number of slaves, both men and women, that he owned and controlled to perform his manually intensive work.

Did these enslaved people want to be relieved from their oppression? Some did! Some did not! This was the only life that most of them had known, and they could not contemplate doing anything else. A good many of them had developed a sense of pleasure and fulfillment in what they did.

Several itinerant, circuit-riding preachers would periodically visit the slave encampments on the day of worship when they were allowed respite from their endeavors, and some encouraged the men and women to seek their freedom from oppressive Master Bates. Other preachers had a different message for the slaves – that their involvement in what they did was natural to their race, and it was God's will that they should continue to do what they were doing, even as a service unto God.

The slaves were confused by the mixed messages, but there wasn't much they could do about their situation anyway. They were enslaved by Master Bates and were resigned to the fact that they would continue to follow his desires and dictates until the day they died. They could not even imagine that an "emancipation proclamation" would be issued in a few years that would give them a choice of freedom from the relentless bidding of Master Bates.

The allegorical veneer of this cover story is thinly veiled. Did you read between the lines to see the less than subliminal metaphor that this story is introducing? Do you need another clue? Take away the space between Master Bates, and change the first "e" to a "u," and then you will recognize that this introductory story was invented to lead into a consideration of human masturbation from a perspective that takes into account a Christian's relationship with God.

If you are not interested in a reasoned study on this stated subject, then you are advised to dispense of this document as you see fit. Few will do so, of course, for this is an almost universal subject of interest and concern among men and women of all ages, races and faiths.

Some readers will be appreciative that the cover title and image on this booklet is designed to convey and portray the subject of human slavery rather than human sexuality, thus avoiding a possible occasion of embarrassment or awkwardness for those who have

been socially conditioned to regard discussion of such sexual matters as a secretive, hush-hush subject. While we must agree that details about our personal sexual actions and interactions are usually best kept as a private, or at least consensual, matter, we must not fall prey to the puritanical (actually Victorian) cover-up that relegates honest discussion of human sexuality to a social taboo. Accordingly, this article will attempt to be open, honest and accurate in directly addressing the subject of personal masturbation – individual sexual self-stimulation. The context within which such auto-sexual pleasuring will be considered is that of a Christian perspective that seeks to bring glory to God in all that one does.

God Created Sex

Sexuality and sexual activity were God's idea and intent. God created human beings; "male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). The English word "sex" is etymologically derived from the Latin word *sexus*, meaning "to divide." God divided human beings into two genders, male and female. The original meaning of the word is found in the word "sextant," the instrument a surveyor uses to determine where parcels of property are to be divided.

God not only determined to divide humanity into two sexual genders, the separate sexes of male and female, He also created human beings with God-given needs, drives and desires to experience their sexuality at every level of their created being – physiologically, psychologically and spiritually. Sexuality is not just a physical urge fueled by our hormones to create friction

with our bodily genitalia to produce a sensate euphoria of pleasure – it involves our mind, our emotions, our choices, and even our spiritual function.

We do not want to revert to the Greek dualism of old that considered the physical human body and all expressions of physical sexuality to be less than godly and totally at odds with the inner being of mind and spirit. In fact, the ancient Greek thinkers taught that God only created the internal and spiritual part of human beings, while Satan was the originator of physical bodies and human sexuality. How unfortunate that Christians through the centuries have so often tended to adopt Greek ideas which despise and deprecate physical sexuality, rather than understanding God's biblical perspective of human sexuality.

When God created humanity, male and female, He told them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), i.e. to sexually copulate with each other to reproduce and have children. God's evaluative declaration on the sexually active function of the human beings He created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). He was not displeased, but quite delighted that human creatures were enjoying their sexuality.

What About Masturbation?

Would God have been equally as delighted if the first human creatures were enjoying their sexuality via solo self-stimulation, what is commonly called masturbation? The purpose of intercourse between male and female human beings was to reproduce the species by allowing the male semen to fertilize with the

female egg in the impregnation of conception leading to the eventual birth of a human child. Does that make masturbation an aberration of God's intent for sexual expression? Aside from the objective of procreation, sexual coital activity seems also to have been designed for personal stimulation of pleasure. For example, when Sarah was told that she was going to get pregnant and have a child even in her old age, she replied, "Shall I have pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12). Personal pleasure is just as legitimate a purpose for sexual involvement as is procreation, despite the kill-joy attitude of much religion that has often admonished, "Are you having fun? Quit it!" God did not intend human life to be without personal sexual pleasure and enjoyment.

The English word "masturbation" is likely derived from the Latin word *masturbari*, a compound of *manus*, meaning "hand" (cf. English word "manual") and *turbare*, meaning "to stir up" (cf. English word "turbine"). This etymology evidences that masturbation pertains to the stirring up of sexual passion and pleasure by manual genital stimulation with one's hands. The first appearance of the word "masturbation" in English literature occurred in 1621 in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in the context of dealing with the struggles of celibate women.

To be more precise in the definition that we will be using in this article, let us explain that the purpose and result of such manual stimulation of one's physical genitalia is the climax of an orgasm. When the clitoris of a female or the penis glans of a male is sufficiently stimulated, muscular contractions in the pelvic region bring intense sensations of pleasure, usually

accompanied by ejaculation of semen in the male. By thus limiting our definition of masturbation to the manual auto-stimulation of one's genitalia that culminates in orgasm, we forestall including reference to the natural touching and stroking of one's genitals that occurs daily (in bed, in the shower, etc.), as well as the spontaneous orgasmic sensations that can occur in men and women induced by mental images alone (including dreams) that can lead to nocturnal emissions of semen in males, called "wet dreams." The precision of our definition also delimits our use of the term "masturbation" from interpersonal sexual encounters involving more than one person in the fondling of foreplay or manual genital stimulation of a partner. Differentiation is being made, therefore, between interactive heterosexual or homosexual activity, and the auto-sexual activity of self-masturbation.

Human beings, both male and female, have engaged in the pleasure of masturbation from the beginning of time. Ancient drawings on the walls of prehistoric caves depict such self-pleasuring, as well as line drawings and paintings throughout the history of human art. Folk songs, parlor songs and pub songs of previous centuries make reference to this auto-erotic practice, as do hundreds of contemporary pop-music songs. Reference to sexual self-stimulation is often made in music and humor by the use of slang euphemisms referencing masturbation, which in the English language alone number in the thousands. Masturbation has been a common human practice throughout the history of humanity, but open discussion of the subject has often been suppressed due to cultural taboos and religious admonitions.

The *Kama Sutra*, an ancient Hindu text, explained and illustrated masturbation techniques for both men and women. In ancient Egypt, the god Atum was believed to have created the universe by masturbating to ejaculation, and the ebb and flow of the Nile River was attributed to the frequency of his ejaculations. Archaeologists unearthed a clay figurine from the fourth century B.C. on the island of Malta, depicting a masturbating female. The ancient Greeks accepted masturbation as normal and natural, considering it to be a safety valve against sexual frustration.

Attitudes toward masturbation obviously vary in different cultures, and from one era to another. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Western cultures developed vehement reactive denunciations of this practice. In 1716 the Dutch theologian Balthazar Bekker was the first to label masturbation as “Onanism,” basing his identification upon a misunderstanding of Genesis 38:8,9. He and others of his time attributed almost every human medical malady to the consequences of sexual self-stimulation: blindness, gout, rheumatism, deafness, digestive problems, back pain, paralysis, pimples, warts, hair on one’s palms, premature balding, epilepsy, urinary infections, cancer, dementia, premature death, and of course eternal damnation. In 1758 the Swiss Catholic physician, Samuel-Auguste Tissot, published a treatise attributing all mental illness, from depression to insanity, on the practice of masturbation. They must have recognized the near universality of the practice, and had no other explanations for human physical or psychological problems.

In the nineteenth century in the U.S.A., Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and Rev. Sylvester Graham led adamant crusades against masturbation, advising a bland, meatless diet as a remedy. Kellogg originated “corn flakes” and Graham originated “graham crackers” as food items for this purpose.

In the twentieth century medical and psychological research began to override and debunk most of the fallacious attribution of physiological and psychological maladies to personal masturbation. In 1905 Sigmund Freud scandalously prescribed personal masturbation for women suffering from hysteria (which included most all emotional and physical problems of females), noting that the term was derived from the word “uterus.” The superstitious taboos associated with masturbation have been extremely slow to breakdown in many religious cultures, where masturbation is still often regarded as a grave or mortal sin.

Perhaps the greatest sin relating to human masturbation is the extent to which the diabolic “father of lies,” the devil himself, continues to cause so many people, especially Christian persons, to deny and lie about their involvement in this solo sexual experience. Satan seems to have an “open season” for deceit and falsehood among God’s people in this regard, conveniently set up by the fallacious information and denunciations provided by religious ignorance and misinformation.

The Bible and Masturbation

What does the Judeo-Christian bible have to say about the subject of masturbation? _____
That's right, NOTHING! There is no explicit reference to masturbation in either the Old Testament or the New Testament of the Bible. A valid hermeneutic for biblical study has been stated, "Where the bible speaks, we speak; where the bible is silent, we are silent." It might be surmised that we would be advised to conclude this study at this point and say nothing more about the subject at hand since the bible is "silent," but it is equally important to proceed to consider how a Christian might utilize their God-given freedom of choice in determining how they might act in matters where the bible is silent.

We previously mentioned that the Dutch theologian, Balthasar Bekker, was the first to apply the term "Onanism" to the practice of auto-sexual pleasuring when he published the book, *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences, in both Sexes: Considered with Spiritual and Physical Advice to Those who have Already Injured Themselves by this Abominable Practice*, in 1716. The book was based on his misinterpretation of Genesis 38:6-10:

⁶Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. ⁸Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." ⁹Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his

seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰ But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He (God) took his life also.”

The cultural-religious background necessary for interpreting this narrative is to be found in the Semitic custom of levirate marriage. “Levirate” is derived from the Latin word *levir*, meaning “husband’s brother.” Many cultures, especially those with a strong clan structure that forbade marriage outside of the clan, had a social code that demanded that a brother of a deceased and childless man was obligated to marry his brother’s widow. This remains as a cultural practice throughout Asia and Africa to this day. In ancient Jewish culture this was called the law of *yibbum* and was stated in Deuteronomy 25:5,6:

⁵ “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. ⁶ It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”

When Onan’s older brother, Er, died without child, Onan rightfully had sexual intercourse with his sister-in-law Tamar (and likely enjoyed such), but when he was approaching ejaculation he withdrew from her vagina and practiced *coitus interruptus*, “spilling” or “wasting” his seed (semen) on the ground instead of depositing the sperm in Tamar that she might be impregnated with a child. Why would he do this in disobedience to the Hebrew social law? Possible

reasons: first, because he would be responsible for raising the child if Tamar got pregnant. Second, and more importantly, if Tamar bore a son, that son would be the firstborn son of the oldest son of Onan's father, Judah, and that grandson would have the first right of inheritance to the family assets, replacing Onan who as the second-born son was now the oldest living son. Financial considerations loomed large for this Jewish man. (And who knows, maybe his wife was jealous of the sister-in-law?)

But why the harsh consequence of God's orchestrating Onan's death? It was not merely a punishment for "spilling his seed," as some Jewish and Roman Catholic commentators have suggested, regarding it a sin to engage in the sexual act for non-procreational purposes. This was the same kind of reasoning that led Balthasar Bekker to conclude that the sin of Onan's "spilling his seed" was masturbation, which also has a non-procreational purpose. Onan was obedient in the act of having intercourse with his sister-in-law, but disobedient in his intentions to avoid impregnating Tamar and defrauding her of the rights of inheritance that was at the heart of the objective of the law of *yibbum* or Levirate marriage.

Let us go one step farther: the birthright of the firstborn son was an important Hebrew concept, whereby the firstborn son became the priest of the family with a double portion of the family inheritance. If we follow the descendants of Judah through the sons of Tamar (cf. Matthew 1:2,3) we see that the genealogical line leads to the first-begotten Son of God who was the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; Hebrews

1:4-6), the high priest of the eternal family of God providing the ultimate, eternal inheritance of eternal life in Himself. There was more to the story than Onan's material and financial concerns, for there is a typological theme that leads to the spiritual concerns of the entire New Covenant foundation of Christianity. Therein we see the severity of Onan's sin that threatened to break or forestall the God-ordained lineage to the birth of Jesus Christ. And the consequence of death for Onan was just as severe as it was for Moses when he disobeyed and struck the rock twice to bring forth water at Meribah (Numbers 20:8), forever misrepresenting the fact that Christ, the Rock (cf. I Cor. 10:4), was to be smitten (Isa. 53:4) only once, on the cross, for all mankind. These incidents prefigured both the birth and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the consequence was dire as both Onan and Moses died for their disobedience.

All those words to say that Onan's "spilling his seed on the ground," has no reference whatsoever to masturbation, and for anyone to perpetuate such a fallacy is a gross misrepresentation of accurate scripture interpretation.

While male masturbation was obviously the subject being considered in the misapplied reference to Onan "spilling his seed on the ground," other Bible readers have seen a reference to female masturbation in the Song of Solomon 5:2-6:

"I was asleep but my heart was awake.
A voice! My beloved was knocking:
'Open to me, my sister, my darling,
My dove, my perfect one!

For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of the night.’
³“I have taken off my dress,
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet,
How can I dirty them again?
⁴“My beloved extended his hand through the opening,
And my feelings were aroused for him.
⁵“I arose to open to my beloved;
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the bolt.
⁶“I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and had gone!

The Song of Solomon has a history of varied interpretation in both Jewish and Christian writings. Some commentators offer a literal and direct interpretation, viewing it as an erotic love-manual for the people of God with explicit depictions of male and female anatomy as well as the sexual interactions of physical foreplay and coital consummation. Other commentators approach the Song of Solomon as an analogy or allegory of the intimacy of relationship between Christ and a Christian or between Christ and the Church, taking what is often considered to be a more “spiritual” approach likely conditioned by underlying aversions to explicit sexual themes in the bible. The euphemisms and symbolisms found throughout the Song of Solomon make the details of the text difficult to explain with any degree of specificity regardless of what interpretive method one employs.

If we employ the literal and direct method, the passage cited above may refer to the male lover returning to the bedroom or sleeping chamber late at

night. The female has already bolted the door, undressed and bathed herself when her man attempts to open the door. After making a few excuses to avoid letting him inside, she admits that her “feelings were aroused for him,” and reports, “my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with liquid myrrh.” Some have understood this to be a reference to the aftereffects of feminine masturbation with the natural vaginal lubricant secreted by sexual arousal on her hands and fingers. Myrrh is an aromatic substance derived from the root of a word that meant “bitter,” which corresponds with the acidic nature of the female vaginal secretion. If this somewhat speculative interpretation is valid, it should be noted that the narrative accepts the action as natural, without any sense of abnormality or sin.

Let us take the time to consider some other biblical references that have speculatively been interpreted as having application to the practice of masturbation:

The term “unclean” has long been used in association with the act of masturbation. Several scriptures have been utilized to justify and document this identification.

¹⁶Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be *unclean* until evening. ¹⁷As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be *unclean* until evening. ¹⁸If a man lies with a woman so that there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be *unclean* until evening. (Lev. 15:16-18)

³²This is the law for the one with a discharge, and for the man who has a seminal emission so that he is *unclean* by it, ³³ and for the woman who is ill because of menstrual impurity, and for the one who has a discharge, whether a male or a female, or a man who lies with an *unclean* woman. (Lev. 15:32,33)

And if one touches anything made *unclean* by a corpse or if a man has a seminal emission, ⁵ or if a man touches any teeming things by which he is made *unclean*, or any man by whom he is made *unclean*, whatever his *uncleanness*; ⁶ a person who touches any such shall be *unclean* until evening, and shall not eat of the holy gifts unless he has bathed his body in water. (Lev. 22:4-6)

The first question we need to ask concerning the statements in these verses pertains to the meaning of “seminal emission.” Does this phrase imply the act of masturbation with the ejaculation of semen as many have indicated, or does it refer to a male nocturnal seminal emission (wet dream) or spontaneous orgasm? There is nothing in the text to indicate that it refers to masturbation, and its association with the natural process of feminine menstrual discharge has led most commentators to assume the latter. The parallelism with Deuteronomy 23:10,11 would seem to verify such also:

¹⁰“If there is among you any man who is *unclean* because of a nocturnal emission, then he must go outside the camp; he may not reenter the camp. ¹¹ But it shall be when evening approaches, he shall bathe himself with water, and at sundown he may reenter the camp. (Deuteronomy 23:10,11)

The second issue to clarify is the meaning of the word “unclean.” Numerous actions in the old covenant literature result in the designation “unclean,” including the touching of a dead body. This does not mean that these actions are evil or sinful before God, but simply that they render a person ceremonially unclean in the religious and social codes of the Law of Moses, requiring a ceremonial cleansing and waiting until sundown, the start of a new day, to resume social activity in the community. In that Christians participate in the new covenant grace of God in Jesus Christ, they are under no obligation to the old covenant moral and social codes. This was a lesson that Peter had a difficult time accepting as God twice told him at Caesarea, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 10:15; 11:9), until he finally admitted, “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Paul understood that God had cleansed all new covenant Christians in the Church of Jesus Christ, having “loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:25,26). Cleansed by the blood of Christ, Paul could say to the Roman Christians,

“I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is *unclean* in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be *unclean*, to him it is *unclean*.” (Romans 14:14)

The Apostle John explained that in the heavenly sphere

“nothing is unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:2)

In like manner, the term “impurity” is often associated with the practice of masturbation, but such a connection is nowhere found in the inspired scriptures. Once again, “impurity” was a designation of offense in the ceremonial standards of the Law in the old covenant, but is not pertinent for new covenant Christians. Predicated on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, taking the death consequences we deserved in order to give us His purity of life, all Christians can “draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). Paul explained to the Corinthians, “I betrothed you to one husband (Christ), so that I might present you as a pure virgin” (II Cor. 11:2). “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure,” writes the apostle John. Christians have been made spiritually pure by the indwelling presence of the pure and sinless Son of God, and the purity of the character of Christ is to be expressed in all Christian behavior by His grace. “Flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (II Tim. 2:22), Paul advises Timothy. “God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification” (I Thess. 4:7), i.e., to manifest the holy character of God. From the indwelling purity of the presence of the divinely Pure One, Jesus Christ, Christians can revel and rest in the knowledge that “unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15).

The practice of auto-sexual pleasuring is often denigrated and denounced with the reasoning that it constitutes a “gratifying of the flesh.” Scriptures used to defend this line of reasoning are:

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

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not *gratify the desires of the flesh*. (Gal. 5:16)

What does it mean to “gratify the flesh”? Is this a prohibition against all bodily pleasures? If so, then perhaps we should forbid scratching an itch on our body, having hot water in the shower or air conditioning in our homes, and of course all sexual intercourse between husband and wives. God is most certainly not opposed to our fulfilling or satisfying the basic God-given needs and desires of our “flesh and blood” physical bodies.

The scriptures, however, also use the word “flesh” in reference to patterns of selfishness and sinfulness that each individual has allowed to develop in the desires of their soul. When God-given desires have deformed into patterns of “fleshly desires” and are set in conflict against the desires of the Spirit in the Christian (cf. Gal. 5:17), then we do have the responsibility to avoid engaging in the “deeds of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19). This is not, however, a constant battle wherein the Christian individual must be vigilant and diligent to suppress the fleshly patterns, for Paul states explicitly that “the Spirit sets its desires against the flesh;” “...walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). We have the

provision by the indwelling Spirit of Christ “to abstain from fleshly desires which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

Paul is quite clear that when we attempt to overcome our patterns of “fleshly desires” by our own self-will and self-effort, the usual recommendation of religion, it will always be a losing battle.

²¹“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:21-23)

These “do not handle” and “do not touch” admonitions of “self-made religion” mentioned in this verse have often been inaccurately applied to the action of masturbatory self-stimulation, but Paul indicates this such prohibitions are of no value before God in reference to curbing or overcoming any of our fleshly patterns of sinfulness and selfishness.

Instead, Christians need to be cognizant that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). Though “we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), we are now dead to that domination of the “desires of the flesh.” “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Col. 3:5), Paul asserts. Christians have been given the greater power

and provision of the divine desires of the all-powerful Spirit of Christ, and He is quite competent and desirous and willing to keep us from and to overcome the “deeds of the flesh ... such as immorality, impurity, sensuality,” etc. (Gal. 5:19), and cause us “to possess our own vessel (i.e. our body, which includes our genitals) in sanctification and honor” (I Thess. 4:5), to the glory of God. Writing to the Roman Christians, Paul advises:

“Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13).

Another category that has often been associated with the act of personal masturbation is our thought life. The wisdom literature of old indicates, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7), i.e. our thinking is likely to act as a springboard that leads to our “acting out” on what we are thinking. Our thought life is important, and this is particularly true in the area of our sexual behavior. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt. 5:28)

This can go both ways of course – for men and for women. “It is not wrong to look at a person of the opposite sex, is it? God gave us eyes to see!” But what does our mind do with the image we see? The satanic tempter is quick to introduce and conjure up a tempting thought of how we might fulfill our God-given sexual

desires in a God-forbidden way. In the epistle of James we read:

“Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” (James 1:14,15)

When the “seed” of a thought-temptation in our mind is fertilized with the “egg of intent” in our will, then a sin-decision has been conceived in a very brief gestation period. We have already determined, “I would if I could; I’m willing,” and whether we “act-out” in the behavioral expression, or not, we have already sinned internally in our heart by assenting to the selfish and sinful character of the Evil One. How quickly (almost instantaneously) the thought of the mind moves into the internal action of sinful intention – waiting only for an opportunity to be manifested externally.

“So what’s wrong with imaginations and fantasies in the thoughts of one’s mind? If we do not “act-out,” no one else gets affected or injured.” This is certainly the contemporary thinking of the world around us. “What’s wrong with creating a skin-flick on the front side of our cranium, and serving as the produce-actor of this movie? And what’s wrong with facilitating and enhancing our mental creativity by viewing some pornographic images of nude bodies and sexual acts?” When we set up the imagined scenario in our head, we are writing the script for probable subsequent action in our behavior, which can have devastating results and reviews.

Now, it must be admitted that imaginations and fantasies in our minds are not necessarily sinful. We encourage children to imagine and fantasize about many scenarios and creatures that are surreal and unreal. The entire movie industry is engaged in creating phantasmal images on the screen that are then run through the thoughts of our minds. Our lives would be dull and one-dimensional if we were not able to imagine and develop mental images of what might be possible, and inventive progress would be stifled. Even mental images and mind-pictures formed on lustful desires of how we view our marital spouse and what we would like to do together is completely healthy and to be encouraged, for the biblical book of the Song of Solomon is replete with the recitation of such images. But if sexual fantasies in our mind are of forbidden relationships with other persons outside of the God-ordained context of marriage, we have set ourselves up to fall into sin and to “act-out” in sinful behaviors.

How, then, does mental fantasy relate to the manual stimulation of masturbation? Some find it difficult to conceive of personal genital self-stimulation apart from engaging in illicit thought fantasies. But the physical pleasuring of masturbation does not necessarily or inevitably have to be combined with improper sexual fantasies. Children stroke their genitals, even *in utero* in embryonic movements in the womb, and there is no evidence that they are improperly fantasizing, but merely exploring their God-given bodies. Many species of animals self-stimulate their genitalia in pleasurable masturbation, and zoologists do not believe that they have the capability for the mental projection of fantasy. Male or female

human masturbation is not necessarily integrally tied to the fantasy of mental imagery, even though it has been stated, “human sexuality is 90% in one’s mind.” It is no more necessary to fantasize about the cheerleader next door or the hunk at the ballgame or the latest magazine centerfold when engaging in masturbation, than it is inevitable that we fantasize about eating a T-bone steak while eating a hamburger at McDonalds. One of the drawbacks of engaging in illicit fantasies, whether while engaging in masturbation or at any other time, is that fantasy usually creates a mental ideal of perfection that sets up an unfair standard by which one then judges or compares their spouse. The reality (“no one is perfect”) cannot compete with the projected perfection of the fantasy, and we end up relating to an “ideal” rather than to the reality of our spouse. The energy expended in excessive sexual fantasies also diminishes one’s creativity in other areas of life.

Yes, our thought life is important, for “as a man thinks, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). That is why Paul writes:

²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:2,3)

“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Phil. 4:8)

“The mind set on (and controlled by) the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6), and this is true in the midst of whatever human behavior we might be engaged.

A final passage to be considered in this category of “the Bible and Masturbation” is a couple of Pauline verses that have been used by some to identify masturbation as an “unfruitful deed of darkness, done in secret.”

¹¹ Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; ¹² for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. (Eph. 5:11,12)

There is absolutely no evidence that the phrases used in these verses are intended to refer to masturbation! Marital intercourse in “the marriage bed” (Hebrews 13:4 – the Greek word is *coite*, from which we get “coitus,” meaning sexual intercourse) is also usually “done in secret,” i.e. privately, but there is no basis for identifying the marital act as an “unfruitful deed of darkness.” Did not God Himself encourage Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28).

The basic truth Paul seems to have had in mind is that sinful actions of any kind are often done clandestinely and surreptitiously, under the cover of darkness in order to avoid detection, and secretly to avoid being noticed. But scripture is clear:

“God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 2:16)

“For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”
(Luke 8:17)

Masturbation, however, is not necessarily to be regarded as an example of such a “secret sin” that will come under God’s judgment. We will, however, discuss the issue of the secrecy of solo-sex masturbation within the context of marriage later in this document.

What conclusion can we draw from this array of biblical references? There is no explicit biblical reference to personal masturbation, and no biblical prohibition against such in the inspired scriptures. Masturbation is not the “unforgivable sin” that many people seem to think it is. Since masturbation is practiced among men and women around the world far more often than their participation in adultery, why then does God have so much to say in forbidding adultery but is totally silent in His scriptures concerning masturbation. The observation of Dr. James Dobson seems to be valid: “It is my opinion that masturbation is not much of an issue with God.” (*Preparing for Adolescence*, pg. 83.)

Since there is no explicit mention of masturbation in the scriptures, there is no divine authority to state categorically or dogmatically that it is wrong or sinful to engage in sexual self-stimulation, nor on the other hand should there be a freedom to encourage individuals to masturbate without careful consideration of the character and motivations involved in the action and their personal relationship with God.

The Church and Masturbation

Despite the absence of biblical reference to masturbation, the Church through the centuries has

made proclamations about the acceptability or inadvisability of Christians participating in the personal act of masturbation. It is quite proper for the institutional church to give counsel to its participants in behavioral matters that do not have divine decree, and to advise Christian believers concerning their personal decision-making in all areas of life.

Early in church history, Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215) discouraged masturbation, saying, "Because of its (i.e. sexuality's) divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed (male sperm) is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted." Over one millennia later, Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274) explained that masturbation is an "unnatural vice which is a species of lust as bad as bestiality and sodomy, and that it "by procuring pollution (i.e. ejaculation apart from marital intercourse), without any copulation, for the sake of venereal pleasure is indicative of "the sin of uncleanness" which some call "effeminacy" (unmanliness)." The Roman Catholic Church has been quite consistent in its condemnation of masturbation, based on its presupposition that sexual expression was reserved for procreation in the marital relationship within the sacrament of marriage, and therefore any sexual act outside of marriage (fornication) that did not facilitate procreation (ex. contraceptive birth control and masturbation) was contrary to the God-ordained purpose of sexuality. As recently as 1994 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* listed six "offenses against chastity" – lust, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, and rape. The predominance of the

discussion related to masturbation, regarded as “an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.”

After the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Protestant portion of the Church retained, for the most part, the prior teaching of the Roman church, sometimes with even more vehement denunciations of the practice of masturbation. Having rejected the authority of the Magisterium of the Roman church, as well as “the sacrament of marriage,” Protestants could only point to biblical statements as authoritative, and as we have seen the bible is silent about masturbation. During the twentieth century much Protestant church thinking was strongly influenced by the newly developed discipline of secular psychology, and the practice of masturbation came to be regarded as normative and a natural part of human development with no moral implications, even though some more conservative segments of Protestantism continued to discourage or condemn the practice of masturbation.

An integral part of the gospel message that the church proclaims is the essential reality of personal relationality. Commencing with a distinctive view of God’s very Being comprised in the Triune personal relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interacting in the perfect harmony of divine love, Christian theology views God’s objective to be the drawing of human creatures into participation of loving personal relationship with the Triune God and with one another. When God created human beings, a specific part of our human creatureliness was that of being relational creatures. That is why God began by dividing us by gender into male and female, indicating, “it is not good

that man (or woman) should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). We are not meant to be solitary creatures. The sexual relationship of male and female was designed by God to be the expression of loving personal relationship with one another before God.

In light of this divine objective of personal relationality among human creatures, some have pointed out that the sexual self-stimulation of masturbation is by definition “non-relational.” The self-stimulation of one’s own genitalia in masturbation is an individual and private activity. The question then is: Does the “self-for-self” action of self-masturbation necessarily make this a selfish or egocentric activity? It can be, and often is done selfishly, but is it possible to conceptualize the personal stroking of one’s genitalia as a non-selfish, loving act before God? This will be a difficult thought-stretch for many people, due primarily to previous exclusively self-oriented masturbatory experience or religious inculcation. But, with an open mind we must consider whether masturbation, though non-relational with a human partner, might be practiced in the context of an intimate and personal relationship with God, wherein the relationality that is an integral part of our creatureliness and sexuality is maintained. We must not categorically deny the possibility of such a God-honoring participation in masturbation, though some will remain skeptical. We will pick up this thought later in the article.

There is a long history in the teaching of the church that views sinfulness or righteousness in terms of the commission or omission of certain human actions. This has certainly been true in terms of the act

of personal masturbation, wherein the very act is regarded as tainted with the character of evil. This should be legitimately questioned. Is character implicitly embedded in any physical human action? Those who begin their considerations with the unsubstantiated premise that the act of masturbation is an intrinsically sinful action, contrary to any biblical evidence, will necessarily draw conclusions that are invalid and misleading.

Individual human persons are not inherently sinful or righteous in themselves, and no human actions are intrinsically sinful or righteous in themselves. God created human beings as derivative beings intended to derive the identity of their being and the character displayed in their behavior from a spiritual source, either from God or Satan. The indwelling spiritual presence of either the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:9) or spirit of Satan (cf. Eph. 2:2) determines one's spiritual condition, and the character expressed in our behavior will be derived from one spiritual source or the other, either godliness from God, or sinfulness from Satan. Godliness or sinfulness is not essentially intrinsic to any human action, but the spiritual character of one or the other spiritual source will be exhibited motivationally and attitudinally in every human action.

Let us consider an example: The human act of sexual intercourse is not sinful in itself. God commanded the original human couple to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), meaning copulate and procreate. The act of human sexual intercourse is a holy action when the character of the Holy God is brought to the action in the context of a marriage between a loving

husband and wife. The same action of human sexual intercourse is an unholy and sinful action when the unholy and selfish character of the Evil One is brought into the action by an unmarried or married man and woman committing adultery. Sin is not intrinsic in the act. It is the spiritual character exhibited and displayed in the act that determines the sinfulness or godliness of the action. The character within any act must be traced back to the spiritual root, the spiritual “treasure” within the human spirit of the individual.

“The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.
(Matt. 12:35; Lk. 6:45)

From this foregoing discussion we draw the conclusion that the human act of masturbation is not sinful in itself, and never identified as sinful in scripture. The sin is not in the act. The righteousness or sinfulness of an action is determined by the spiritual character brought to the action. Every act that exhibits God’s character is holy, and godly, and constitutes an act of worship. Every act that conveys and exhibits the character of selfishness is sinful and idolatrous, and derived out of the Evil One. The act of masturbation can be either.

It is tragic, then, that the misinformation of religious teaching that identifies all acts of masturbation as evil or sinful has caused so much shame and false-guilt among God’s people. How many people have attempted to confess their actions of sexual self-stimulation to God as sin, when God never identifies such as sin? Since confession (Greek *homologeo*) is “to

say the same thing” as God, and God never says that masturbation is sin, it is impossible to confess masturbation as sin, unless an unholy, selfish and sinful character has been brought into the action.

Christian Faith and Masturbation

Christian faith is the reception of the risen Lord Jesus who has become “the life-giving Spirit” (I Cor. 15: 45), lovingly desirous of dwelling in every person’s spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9,16), in order to be internally present and manifest God’s life (John 20:31; Col. 3:4; II Cor. 4:10,11) in all persons. This is the new covenant arrangement that God has implemented in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The question now before us is whether it is possible or feasible to develop a new covenant Christian perspective of an individual Christian’s involvement in sexual masturbation.

Jesus explained to His disciples that in the new covenant relationship of God with man, “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free; ...and when the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:32,36). The Truth, the reality, of the Christian covenant is exclusively and completely the personal presence and function of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by His Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:6). In other words, new covenant Christianity is not an organized expression of religion wherein human behavior is externally regulated and modified by laws and rules of performance acceptability and conformity. The very word “religion” implies bondage, for the Latin root word, *religare*, means to “bind back” in obligation to moral regulations or rituals of devotion. “It was for freedom that Christ set us free,

therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1), Paul declared. Freedom is our birthright in the new covenant. This entails freedom from the bondage of religion with its hierarchically dictated indictments attributing sinfulness to specific human actions, and its admonitions of “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not” in various systems of behavior modification to control people’s lives. The freedom that Christians have in the new covenant is a freedom to live by the dynamic of God’s grace, “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18) in every facet of one’s life, “listening under” God in obedience to His direction in our lives. This includes the freedom to explore our God-given sexuality, and to consider whether masturbation should or will be a part of our lives. God created us male and female, with testosterone and estrogen hormones that fuel our sexual needs, drives and desires, and we are all responsible within our Christian freedom “in Christ” to determine how best to satisfy those God-given desires – all of them – to the glory of God. Sexual intercourse within marriage and personal self-stimulation of masturbation are means for doing so.

The Christian individual, however, has more to consider than merely the question of self-pleasuring or self-fulfillment of one’s bodily desires and function. In conjunction with Paul’s statement, we must recognize that “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God...” (Gal. 2:20). The Christian is a “new creature” (II Cor. 5:17) who has accepted the life of another, the living Lord Jesus, to be his/her identity, nature, and life. A Christian is a Christ-one in whom the living Lord Jesus

lives as “the life-giving Spirit” (I Cor. 15:45). This is the fundamental essence of what it means to be a Christian – the “mystery of Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:26,27). “Do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you believed in vain?” (II Cor. 13:5), Paul asked the Corinthian Christians.

The Christian life, then, is simply allowing for the manifestation of the life and character of the indwelling Jesus in the behavior of a Christian individual – “the life of Jesus manifested in our mortal body” (II Cor. 4:10,11). The Christian life is not an attempt by Christians to copy the example of Jesus’ life and try to reproduce His life, as often encouraged by so-called Christian religion, but the opportunity to allow the very life of Jesus that rose from the grave and was poured out in Spirit-form at Pentecost to be re-presented in the behavior of our bodies.

Our physical bodies become the instruments through which Christ continues to live contemporarily. Paul advised the Christians in Rome,

“Do not go on presenting the members of your *body* to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom. 6:13)

Likewise, to the Corinthians he wrote,

“the *body* is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the *body*. (I Cor. 6:13)

“Do you not know that your *body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you

are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your *body*. (1 Cor. 6:19,20)

Since the physical body of the Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, every action that takes place in that body-temple should be regarded as an act of worship. Christian worship should not be thought of merely as an hour or two of orchestrated singing and morale boosting that takes place within a church building on a particular day of the week. Genuine Christian worship is the everyday, everywhere behavioral expression of the worth-ship (“worship” is derived from Old English *worthscipe* or “worth-ship”) of the character of Jesus in all that we do or say. The character of Christ is expressed in the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23), in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and the godly control of oneself.”

The question must then be asked: Can personal masturbation be an act of Christian worship? This is not a sacrilegious or irreverent question, although some may consider it almost blasphemous. In correlation to Paul’s reference to “redeeming the time” (Eph. 5:16), is it possible to “redeem (buy back) the experience of masturbation” to the point where we can view this act as an act that honors God? If it is to be regarded as an act that Christians participate in, it must be so considered.

Previous mention was made of the possibility of viewing masturbation as an act that was not necessarily selfish in its orientation. If an individual approaches the act of masturbation with a selfish concern for orgasmic

pleasure, then it is quite likely that this man or woman is worshipping their own sexuality in idolatry, rather than the God who created them as sexual beings. We must admit, however, that orgasmic pleasure need not be approached with “selfish concern,” but can also be approached with “loving concern” for another. The veracity and exemplary proof of such is to be found in proper God-ordained marital coitus, which can indeed be an act of Christian worship with “loving concern” for the other partner.

We return to the question: Can masturbation be an act of Christian worship? Obviously not if an individual carries any thought of a fantasized illicit liaison into the action of genital self-stimulation. But if the thought life is pure, centered on appreciation for how God has created us as sexual creatures, and the recognition of our redemption and sanctification by the Lord Jesus Christ, is it not conceivable that the act of masturbation could be an act of Christian worship expressing one’s adoration and praise to God in Christ?

The apostle Paul indicates that we should “give thanks” both *for* all things and *in* all things as Christians.

²⁰always *giving thanks* for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph. 5:20)

¹⁸in everything *give thanks*; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thess. 5:18)

Surely the “all things” and “everything” are inclusive of our expressions of sexuality, without any need to exclude masturbation.

Since the expression of “giving thanks” throughout the new covenant literature of the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word *eucharisteo* (*eu* = good; *charis* = grace), from which we get the English word “eucharist,” could the Christian individual not consider the act of masturbation as a eucharistic act of worship? This is not as far-fetched as it may sound to some. It is not unfathomable to envision a Christian person giving thanks for the “good grace” and blessing, the gift and pleasure of their sexuality and the experience thereof.

“Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks* through Him to God the Father. (Col. 3:17)

“(the things and matters of life) which God hath created to be *received with thanksgiving* of them which believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be *received with thanksgiving*: (I Timothy 4:3,4)

May God be pleased as we “give thanks” ***in*** and ***for*** all things, including masturbation.

We proceed to consider the dynamic moment-by-moment process of Christian faith. Many Christians do not realize that Christian faith is not just static mental belief in the historical record about Jesus or the correct doctrinal statements of the church in which they participate. The Scottish writer, William Barclay, explained, “the first element in Christian faith is receptivity” (*The Mind of Paul*, pg. 112). Both initially and continually in the Christian life, faith involves the dynamic receptivity of the activity of the Lord Jesus

Christ. This means that every Christian action in the Christian life is meant to be our receptivity of the action of the living Lord Jesus manifesting Himself in us and through us.

That being the case, a Christian must ask himself/herself whether they think that Jesus indwelling them as their life might be receptive to engaging in the action of self-stimulated masturbation unto sexual orgasm. "Inconceivable," might be the exclamation of some. Others might question whether the historical Jesus might have masturbated during his 33 years on earth. No one knows. There is no record of such, but the argument of silence is a very weak logical argument. The word of caution here is that we must not, cannot, commence with the premise that masturbation is sin. If personal masturbation is not sin *per se* (and there is no scriptural proof that it is), then it must be left open as to whether Jesus physically masturbated, and whether He continues to be involved in the masturbation actions of His disciples. There are Christians who will tell you that the Spirit of Christ has prompted or compelled them to engage in masturbation as a God-honoring act of their Christian life. Others find that unbelievable!

In the context of discussing questionable activities among the Roman Christians (ex. the eating of meat offered to idols), Paul explained, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Utilizing the definition of faith proposed above, we could interpret this phrase to mean, "Whatever is not your receptivity of the activity of the living Lord Jesus in your life is a sinful action." Just as was the case for the Roman Christians, each

individual Christian must spiritually discern whether this is the case in their activity (including masturbation), and the outcome will be that some will regard it as sinful for them to act in this way, and others will consider it to be the holy expression of Christ within them.

As we proceed through the Christian life, we do not want anyone or anything to control us other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord, and “no man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Sexual behaviors, and this is particularly true of masturbation, can become persistent habits that preoccupy our minds, master us and put us into bondage. We must beware of being mastered by masturbation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

¹² All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be *mastered* by anything. (1 Cor. 6:12)

The pop-psychology of our contemporary society refers to these obsessive and compulsive behavior patterns as “addiction,” but they are quite consistent with what the apostle Paul calls the patterns of the “flesh” that wage war against the Spirit (Gal. 5:16,17). It is not merely the frequency of our involvement in these activities that causes them to be excessive and addictive, but the spiritual character and mental energy that we bring to the action, and whether we are doing what we are doing “as unto the Lord.”

Marriage and Masturbation

We turn now to the consideration of masturbation in the context of Christian marriage. Some would surmise that since marriage provides the God-ordained context for mutual sexual fulfillment for both husband and wife, any consideration of masturbation within marriage would be unnecessary or “out-of-order.” Yet, surveys indicate that the majority of both men and women in committed marriages (including Christian marriages) continue to engage in the personal practice of masturbation.

Why is this so? Why do marital partners still find it necessary or desirable to engage in sexual self-stimulation? Does such action constitute a violation of the marriage vows to “keep oneself only for the other”? Can the action of masturbation be construed as a defrauding of the marital partner of what is rightfully theirs? These are questions that must be addressed in this section of the study.

Let us go back to God’s preparation for the institution and establishment of marriage in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1,2). The Creator God divided the sexes, male and female, and instituted the bringing of the two together in marriage for the pleasurable purposes of relationality, mutuality, and interpersonal interactivity that included the “one flesh” union. Man and woman were designed by God to fit together sexually in such a way that they would procreate and produce a family that allowed for the propagation of the human race. The husband and the wife were united and “made one” in the unity of a social unit that was to be the most

intimate connective relationship on this earth, used as an analogy of the spiritual intimacy of Christ and the Christian (Eph. 5:25-33).

What is the explanation, then, for the widespread practice of self-stimulated sexual orgasm among husbands and wives in a marriage relationship? There are, no doubt, some who are not happily married, who no longer love their spouses and have no interest in sexual intimacy with the partner they married. Theirs is a sham marriage – often just an arrangement of convenience, for whatever reason. Our objective, on the other hand, is to address the prominence of the practice of masturbation among happily married partners who love one another and continue to engage in marital sexual intercourse on a regular basis. What are their reasons for also engaging in the practice of personal masturbation?

There are some, no doubt, who masturbate for selfish reasons, seeking their own self-gratification, without consideration for their spouse or communication with their partner. Instead of engaging in marital intimacy with their mate, they engage in masturbation because it is quicker, easier, less messy, less of a hassle, and avoids any possibility of misunderstanding or conflict between the partners because one does not have to personally relate to the other. In that process, however, they violate the intended mutuality and relationality of marriage and its sexual expression. When self-stimulation is employed as a substitute for marital intimacy in a manner that disallows one's being available to the other partner to express love and companionship in sexual coitus, the deprivation serves

to defraud the spouse of what is rightfully theirs to enjoy. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

³The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.⁵Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (I Cor. 7:3-5)

Both husband and wife are to avoid defrauding the other by depriving the other of the mutuality of sexuality in marriage. The singularly stated exception involves communication between the married parties whereby they come to an agreement together to some set parameters of abstaining from sexual intercourse together. Paul's suggestion was that the couple devote themselves to prayer, seeking instead intimacy with God, what older Christian writers referred to as "having intercourse with God." But Paul is quick to recommend that such a period of abstinence from marital coitus be temporary, "lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The open communication between husband and wife, and the arriving at a consensus about what they are going to do is important to the mutuality and transparency of the marriage relationship, as well as preserving the unity of the relationship from the inevitable temptations of Satan, the deceiver (II John 1:7) and destroyer (I Cor. 10:10).

Applying this, then, to masturbation by one or both marriage partners, the question must be posed: If

their masturbatory activity is done secretly and without the knowledge of their spouse, does this impinge upon the mutuality and transparency that should be an integral part of their marital oneness? It would appear that it might do so. In order to maintain the mutuality of their marital oneness there should be a clear channel of communication wherein the spouse is aware and advised of the other's engagement in masturbation. Some may consider this unthinkable – beyond their imagination of possibility! There are couples, however, in healthy marital relationships who have granted permission to their mates to practice masturbation. Far better, though, in preserving the mutuality of marriage, are those couples that are free enough to find enjoyment in the mutual observation of each other masturbate unto orgasmic pleasure. If they are not together in the same location, some couples have engaged in phone-sex or cyber-sex, conversing with each other from afar on the telephone or the computer while masturbating and communicating their intimate thoughts to one another. These free-thinking variations retain the mutuality, relationality, and transparency that are essential elements of a sexual marriage relationship, and avoid the secretive solo-sex masturbation that tends to be selfish and threatens to defraud one's partner, but can never be regarded as equal to the intimacy of merging bodily genitalia in penetrative sexual intercourse in accord with God's creative design.

We return to consider the reasons why marriage partners might choose to engage in masturbation within the context of a loving marital relationship:

Husbands and wives often have differing levels of needs and interest in sexual desires. One partner may seem to be supercharged with sexual appetite, while the other seems to have an ambivalent attitude toward sexual involvement. This can change during the course of a marriage, and the attitudes can reverse. Not wanting to harass or be demanding of the partner with lower libido, a loving spouse may seek permission to engage in self-stimulation to satisfy his or her higher level of sexual needs.

Believe it or not, men and women are constructed differently in their physiological and psychological sexual construction. God designed it that way! Many men do not understand, nor take into account, the hormonal changes that occur during a woman's menstrual cycle and how this affects their arousal as they experience monthly ovulation, and thus their desire of sexual expression. Neither do some men understand that many women are unable achieve a climactic orgasm by the friction of penetrative coitus, and require instead manual stimulation of the clitoris either by their partner or by their own participation in masturbation. Men need to understand and be sympathetic to such hormonal, emotional, and physiological differences in their wives.

In like manner, women are often not aware of physiological factors, much less the psychological factors, in male sexuality. Medical authorities explain that a male builds up a full supply of semen every 48-72 hours (every 2 to 3 days), and this "testosterone flood" can create a hydraulic pressure creating sexual tension and discomfort, begging for the release of ejaculation.

The technical term for this condition is called “testicular vasocongestion” causing “epididymal hypertension” by prolonged unsatisfied sexual release, with the added possibility of prostate inflammation or prostatitis. The slang term often used for this condition is “blue balls.” This is certainly one explanation for the propensity of males to engage in masturbation, both prior to marriage and in the context of marriage (especially when the female partner is unaware of this male phenomenon or unwilling to accommodate a mutual solution for relieving this pressure through ejaculation in masturbation or coitus.)

Masturbation may be recommended by medical physicians for either a husband or a wife – for the male partner to relieve prostatitis; for a female to reduce menstrual cramping, or to strengthen the PC (*pubococcygeus*) muscle used for constriction in urination and copulation. One of the more publicly discussed issues recently has been erectile dysfunction and the availability of medical prescriptions like Viagra and Cialis, etc. Some men are able to get an erection, but unable to maintain such for any extended period of time. The penile erection may last long enough to ejaculate by means of rapid and vigorous manual masturbation, but cannot be maintained long enough to come to orgasm in loving coital activity. One of the physiological problems for women is that they often lose their natural vaginal lubrication after menopause and the consequent vaginal dryness makes for painful intercourse. There are a variety of lubricants available that serve to remedy this problem (KY Jelly, Liquid Silk, Astroglide, etc.), but in some older women the vaginal membranes are susceptible to tearing and the internal

organs can become irritated by penetrative intercourse. These are possible reasons why some loving husbands and wives choose to engage in masturbation.

Paul admonished, “it is better to marry than to burn” (I Cor. 7:9), but the “burn” of sexual desires does not necessarily diminish after one is married, nor is it always quenched in the context of marriage. The busy schedules and work obligations of modern marriages place additional stresses on husbands and wives to find creative ways to express their mutual love and intimacy, whether in the “marriage bed” or in masturbation.

Human Choice and Masturbation

God created human beings as choosing creatures with freedom of choice in their decision-making. Every individual person has a choice whether they will engage in the self-stimulation of masturbation and the context in which they are willing to do so. We must always recognize, of course, that our choices have consequences in reference to God, other people, and even within ourselves.

Having previously established that there are no direct biblical dictates for or against personal masturbation, every Christian individual must ask themselves, “what does God want for me?” and expectantly await a revelatory enlightenment from God of an inner peace of acceptability, or a personal check in one’s spirit to refrain from such activity. This is no time for taking a survey to determine what others may be doing, for this is between you and God – not a democratic determination of acceptability. One person

may decide that God would not have them to participate in masturbation, while another person may have the freedom to engage in self-stimulation whether outside or inside of marriage.

Some Christians have a very difficult time with this diversity of personal acceptability, considering it unfair that God would not clarify the issue in the same manner for all persons. They are often the people who want everything divinely dictated in black or white, right or wrong categories. But God did not choose to declare that masturbation was sinful or godly behavior. Does this mean that there are “grey areas” between sinfulness and righteousness? No, but just as any design artist or painter knows that they are there are an abundance of variations and different hues, even of white and black, so God, the master designer and painter, has a myriad of ways of expressing His character uniquely and with novelty in our lives and behavior. Godliness does not always look the same in the lives and behavior of all of God’s people. This forces us to live by grace in the midst of a personal relationship with God, rather than in the bondage of strict rules and regulations. When we have “listened under” God in personal obedience to ascertain what God would have us to do, then we still have a choice to determine whether we will derive from the spiritual source of either God or Satan in the midst of a particular amoral action, in order to manifest the sinful character of the Evil One or the godly character of the Spirit of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within our behavioral actions.

Some Christians may determine that for them masturbation is a sin which they are unable to participate in with good conscience. “Whatever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Other Christians may conclude that in the receptivity of personal faith in God’s loving and gracious provision, they have the freedom to participate in masturbation with no qualms of improper behavior. Those wavering between these contrasting determinations may consider Paul’s statement to the Corinthians:

²³All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. (I Cor. 10:23)

If we cannot discern that an activity beneficially serves the development of our Christian life and growth, we might be best to avoid it at the present time, and continue to pray for more assurance of God’s direction for our lives in this particular matter.

Some will recognize that masturbation is a problem in their life, that they are obsessively or excessively engaged in sexual self-stimulation. It has become a “besetting sin” (Heb. 12:1). This is not determined by frequency of engagement (whether once a month, once a week, once a day, or multiple times per day), but by a mind-set of preoccupation on sexual satisfaction that supersedes a mind set on the Lord (cf. Isa. 26:3), and participation in His ways. The habituated patterning of our thought and behavior can become deeply entrenched in our psyche. We can become “slaves to sin” (Jn. 8:34) whereby “sin becomes master over us” (cf. Rom. 6:12-34). This was the reason we

commenced this booklet with the imagery of enslavement, the story of Master Bates.

The vast majority of those enslaved by self-obsessed masturbation habits have been fighting an internal “civil war” for many years. They have loaded their muskets time after time with self-resolve, self-discipline, self-dedication, self-commitment, and self-consecration – all to no avail. They are fighting a losing battle. The self-effort of avoidance or suppression can never overcome the self-pleasuring of masturbation. So-called human “will-power” is inadequate to the task. The only “emancipation proclamation” for such habituated behavior is “the Son shall set you free” (John 8:36). The grace-aware Christian will recognize that “the battle is the Lord’s” (II Chron. 20:15). The One who has become our life (Col. 3:4) must be the “Overcomer” (John 16:33) in our lives. It is the fruit of the Spirit that will produce “godly control of oneself” (Gal. 5:23), whereby we are transformed into the image of Christ (cf. II Cor. 3:18).

A word of caution to those who have struggled with masturbatory sin: Many have tried to convince themselves that they have “found the victory” and triumphed over their addictive tendency, only to find that they stumble and relapse into behaviors that they have previously determined to avoid (cf. Rom. 7:15). The diabolic tempter is relentless in his attempts to deceive us and to tempt us to misrepresent our new identity in Christ. The internal conflict between the “flesh and Spirit” (Gal. 5:16,17) will remain until our dying breath. It seems to be one of the “ways of God” to make sure that we never come to the point where we

can pat ourselves on the back and say, "I made it; I have arrived; I have figured it out and know how to live the victorious Christian life; I have mastered masturbation in my life." You can be sure that such pride will go before a fall (cf. Prov. 16:18). When it happens – and it will – the answer is not to wallow in the kind of confessionism that engages in the pseudo-surprise of exclaiming, "I can't believe it Lord; I've done it again; Please forgive me!" God's answer to that might well be, "I didn't expect anything else out of you. Now get up and remember, 'apart from Me, you can do nothing' (Jn. 15:5)." It does no good to beat ourselves up masochistically for our obvious inability to muster enough self-resolve to withstand the temptation to the masturbatory procedures we want to avoid. Our simple confession might better be, "Lord, I can't; only You can; I want You to control this weakness in my life. By Your grace give me the strength 'one day at a time'." Continued relapses serve the constructive purpose of reminding us that this must be our daily conversation, "Lord, I can't; only You can; I want You to be my ALL this day." The grace of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient" (II Corinthians 12:19) to "supply all our needs" (cf. Phil. 4:19) according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.

The Christian life is full of human choices. That is what Christian "faith" is, the continuing choice to allow for "the receptivity of His activity" in our daily lives. When we fallible human persons fail and fall, as we repetitively do, – "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8) – we can identify with the apostle Paul in admitting, "not that I am already perfect, ...but forgetting what lies behind, I

press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14).

If you have made your choice and have come to a conclusion of whether masturbation will be a part of your life, then do not try to foist your opinion of what God would have you do onto others. Do not try to “play Holy Spirit” in other’s lives. Allow every other Christian brother and sister to “listen under” God in obedience to hear His “still small voice” for themselves.

Conclusion

Some people feel uncomfortable about addressing the subject of masturbation. But if Christian leaders do not teach on the subject, where will Christian people get their information? They will get their input from the secular world, where they will **not** get God’s perspective, or be given the full range of options to be considered by Christ-indwelt people. I do not think that the contemporary religious approach of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” or “just say no!” is the best policy for approaching masturbation in the Christian community. It obviously isn’t working, for there are so many young people and adults, men and women, in the churches today seeking advice on how to make decisions in those behavioral areas that are not specifically defined in the scriptures.

On one occasion when I mentioned this subject in a public message, I had an 80 year old woman come to me in tears, explaining that she had self-stimulated since she was a young girl of five years of age, and had experienced much fear and guilt over such, especially

when she began attending church. She said she had never heard a pastor address the subject of masturbation in the 70 years of her involvement in the church. This is a sad scenario that indicts the contemporary church for failing to be relevant to people's daily lives. It also reveals the importance and necessity of such an article as this.

Some will read this treatise on a Christian approach to masturbation and reply, "I can't tell whether you are *for* it or *against* it." My response will be, "Excellent, I have achieved my purpose to present an unbiased survey of the subject and the decisions that every individual must make concerning such matters." It was not my intent to favor or forbid, to commend or condemn, or to encourage or discourage Christian participation in the personal self-stimulation of sexual masturbation. My objective has been to provide thoughts and concepts that an individual might take into consideration as they make their personal choices about involvement in the practice of personal masturbation. I have attempted to provide a matrix, if you will, that allows every person to exercise spiritual discernment within their individual decision-making.

As we all know, the very subject of sexuality, and more specifically masturbation, can excite the mind and emotions of readers, but the author's personal style of writing, tending to be more cerebral and academic, is more likely to be regarded as boring, so perhaps they balance each other out. I did not want the discussion of this subject to titillate the reader, nor did I want it to be so technical that the article was not of practical value

for the average reader. If anything, I have probably erred toward the latter.

We have given the reader much to consider. Only you, individually, can make the decisions of how you will deal with your God-given sexuality. Some will find the freedom of God's grace as they read these pages, freedom from the false-guilt that is based on misinformation and religious denunciation. Others may conclude that the freedom of grace suggested is a slippery-slope that might lead to license, libertinism, or permissiveness, and develop an inner acceptance that God would have them refrain from masturbation.

The author's hope and desire is that every Christian brother and sister might submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their life, as they allow the living Lord Jesus to live out His life in and through them in every life experience. May we each find the "rest" (cf. Heb. 4:1-11) and the "peace" (Phil. 4:7) that is in Christ Jesus alone, and walk in faithful receptivity of His activity.

Please remember that it is not about YOU – not about the pleasure of your orgasms – the Christian life is all about HIM, as you participate in the intimacy of a personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus. So, to paraphrase Paul in I Cor. 10:31, "whether you masturbate or do not masturbate, do all to the glory of God."