

IS IT OK TO MASTURBATE?

As Researched
by Rev. John W. Brown

A while back some of our people went into the "Mature Chat Room" on Christian Gays to discuss the idea of masturbation and "cumming". Dad Larry found out about it, which started him thinking about a series of studies, of which this is the first one. With that in mind, what does the Bible say about masturbation? Does it condemn it, as many of us have been taught? Originally the church viewed sex for one purpose only - that of procreation. Any other reason was therefore morally suspect and wrong. It was also seen as wasting seed that was intended to produce life. Thus the condemnation of masturbation, and any sex outside of marriage, defined as between a man and a woman. However, is that a correct Biblical interpretation, or is there another view?

1. The Story of Onan

One section of scripture to which many will point as a condemnation of masturbation is the story of Onan. They would allege that God killed him for spilling his seed on the ground. However is that the real reason? Could there possibly be something else going on here that could be the reason that God killed Onan which had nothing to do with masturbation or spilling one's seed on the ground?

Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.

(Genesis 38:6-10 New King James Version)

Er died childless. By the law of that time it was the duty of the brother to take his dead brother's wife and have sex with her. Since women were not allowed to own property, this was so that she would conceive and bear a son who would be considered the son of the dead brother. That way the brother's name would not perish, and the woman would not become homeless. (See Deuteronomy 25:5-6)

It was Onan's duty to go into Tamar, his brother Er's wife, and have sex with her so that she could conceive and bear a son. Onan refused to do that and pulled out before "cumming" and impregnating Tamar. Instead he spilled his seed on the ground. The Catholic Bible infers that this happened several times, not just once.

Judah got a wife for his first-born, Er. Her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's first-born, greatly offended the LORD; so the LORD took his life. Then Judah said to Onan, "Unite with your brother's widow, in fulfillment of your duty as brother-in-law, and thus preserve your brother's line." Onan, however, knew that the descendants would not be counted as his; so whenever he had relations with his brother's widow, he wasted his seed on the ground, to avoid contributing offspring for his brother. What he did greatly offended the LORD, and the LORD took his life too. (Genesis 38:6-10 New American Bible St. Joseph Edition)

The issue here then is the refusal of Onan repeatedly to contribute his seed so his brother's widow could have a son who would be accounted as his brother's son. On repeated occasions he pulled out and spilled his seed on the ground, rather than have Tamar become pregnant with a child that wouldn't be considered his. He wanted her property, the property that had been his brother's, for himself. That is why God killed him. Not because he spilled his seed on the ground, but because he repeatedly refused to produce sons for his brother out of greed. Had he done what God required there would have been no problem. However because he wouldn't, he died.

There is another passage, however, that I think may show God's view on masturbation, and that it wasn't that big a deal.

2. What The Holiness Code Has To Say About Masturbation?

'If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water, and be unclean until evening. And any garment, and any leather on which there is semen, it shall be washed with water, and be unclean until evening. Also, when a woman lies with a man, and there is an emission of semen, they shall bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. (Leviticus 15:16-18 NKJV)

"Unclean" refers to ritual purity. Here we see that if a man had an emission of semen (slang "cum") then all he had to do afterwards was to wash and that was it - the same as if he had sex with a woman. Anything on which his semen fell would also have to be washed. No confession to a priest, no having to offer a sacrifice for it, nothing but go and wash to become ritually pure again. This would infer that God recognized that his people would be ritually unclean on a regular basis, and nothing more. This is confirmed in Leviticus 22:4-7.

In the New Testament there is no direct reference to the subject. However some may insist that masturbation is fornication, which they define as sex outside of marriage. However, that is not what the word means. As used in the Bible it refers to adultery, incest or idolatry. It has nothing to do with masturbation. Also the Bible was written to teach us about, and show us, a God of love. It was never intended to be a textbook on sex, or dictate what people do behind closed doors in the privacy of their own bedroom. It also doesn't say that we should enjoy sex in the familiar "missionary position" or in some other manner. At best it gives us guidelines for living, and then leaves it to us to figure out how to apply them to our lives.

This is what I have found on the subject and what I believe would be a pretty close Biblical view of the subject.