

Answer to Jason

Hi, I am Michael Schuch from Germany, and I want to share my thoughts with you about an article Jason DeRouchie publish December 3rd 2016 (<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/if-your-right-hand-causes-you-to-sin>). You will find the link in the comments to this video.

I am 57 years of age, married, I have 3 children and I am working as an IT-Inhouse-Consultant.

The article's headline is this:

If Your Right Hand Causes You to Sin
Ten Biblical Reflections on
Masturbation

I was shocked reading Jason's statements on masturbation. And that for multiple reasons. I do not doubt his fair-mindedness. But I am convinced that he carries this topic to excess. And in doing so he fails 2. Timothy 2,15: "...rightly dividing the word of truth".

Lets start with the picture at the top of the article. It shows a single person in the dark, his or her head covered with a hood - probably to hide - because of shame. You cannot see his or her face. So, the message to me is quite clear: "I did it. And because I did it, I have to hide myself, I can't show my face". So, my question is: should a person who masturbates feel guilty, should he feel lonely and in the dark? That would be a technique to manipulate people's conscience, well known from Catholicism.

In his first paragraph Jason states that sex is "an outlet for play and passion". The word "outlet" is important here: where there is no pressure or urgency, there is no need for an outlet or a valve. Now, Jason limits the license to open this valve strictly to marriage. By using words like "perversion" and "scares" he implies that masturbation is a harmful gross sin that causes severe damage. This kind of vocabulary can lead a believer into despair. Is that really necessary?

I don't think that Jason's focus on the pursuit of holiness is as limited as his article suggests. The whole tone is: you must overcome this specific sin. Many young people will struggle and strive to achieve it and fail and be frustrated. Controlling ones body is much more than refraining from masturbation: how about eating? Eating the wrong stuff, eating too much etc. How about watching TV? I came to know that the average American watches about 4 hours a day. What is this, honestly, compared to 5 minutes of opening a valve?

Now I want to consider 6 out of Jason's 10 reflections one by one.

1. Raising up godly offspring is a primary way to make disciples. Masturbation belittles God's passion for global praise.

The argument goes like this: Sex in marriage produces children, they become disciples and therefore God is glorified. Masturbation does not produce children and therefore it belittles God's passion for praise. But in the same passage Jason allows a couple to use "certain types of birth control". Now, when a couple has sexual intercourse using "certain types of birth control" the result is the same as of masturbation - no children. And no children means no disciples. And no disciples means no glorification of God. If the belittling of God's passion has to be avoided, why then would the author allow fruitless sex? If masturbation minimizes God's passion for global praise, any kind of birth control would do the same.

2. God purposed that all righteous forms of sexual expression be for the marriage bed. Masturbation hijacks intimacy.

In this point Jason states that orgasms are only for married couples to strengthen marital intimacy. "When people reach orgasm outside the covenant-confirming act of love-making in marriage, the act becomes solely self-seeking, divorced from its purpose of creating intimacy."

Question: Has every coitus with our wives been driven by covenant-confirmation? Haven't there been times, when we came home after a long day of hard work and we were hungry, thirsty and horny? If we counted all our orgasms as horny husbands, tell me the truth: How many of them were purely for the purpose of creating intimacy and how many were solely self-seeking in the sense that we just wanted to silence our pressure boiler? If Jason is right, then all your orgasms, that did not have the goal of creating more intimacy with your wife, were achieved by abusing your wife as a medium for masturbation. That is not what I am saying - that is just the logical conclusion of his arguments we find in the text.

3. Sexual intimacy between a husband and wife points to the love between Christ and his church. Those who substitute masturbation for marital intimacy undervalue God's glory.

I like to quote one more sentence out of this paragraph. "When masturbation is a substitute for marital intimacy, it minimizes the glory of God displayed in sexual expression by taking God's good gift out of its God-ordained context of marital love (compare Jeremiah 31:31-32; Ezekiel 16:30-32; Hosea 2:13-14, 16, 20)."

Here just a word to the professor of theology: all these references are quotes concerning Israel's spiritual fornication, called idolatry. Do you dare to say that masturbation is equivalent to fornication? If not, why do you quote these verses in that context? But if you do say that masturbation is equivalent to fornication, would you agree that a wife is right in claiming the right to divorce because she caught her husband masturbating? For that question please see Matthew 19,9.

5. Jesus urged his followers to guard themselves from lustful masturbation, and Paul called Christians to control their sexual parts in holiness and honor.

Jesus never said explicitly that we should refrain from lustful masturbation. The context in Matthew 5 is clearly about adultery and not, as Jason makes the reader feel, masturbation. Jesus said, to look at a woman, that is not yours, lustfully, is equal to adultery. When Jesus admonishes his disciples to care for their eyes and hands, I do not think that he had masturbation in mind. That sounds artificial or contrived.

Now it becomes completely absurd.

I quote Jason: "Note that the ESV's "members" in Romans 6:19 refers to "body parts," and that the ESV's "body" in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 is literally "vessel" and may refer to a man's penis".

I had to read this obscure statement a few times. If I understand Jason correctly, what he means is following: members = body parts; body = vessel; vessel = penis. so members = a penis' parts or the "parts of a penis". If we read Romans 6,19 in the "light of this revelation", we read following: "Just as you once presented the parts of your penis as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present the parts of your penis as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification." (Romans 6:19)

You got it? Think about, whether this could have been Pauls concept in mind.

6. Masturbation outside the marriage bed does not glorify God because evil desire always fuels it.

Jason seems to know exactly and without any doubt, how evil masturbation is. It is, he says, always fueled by evil desires. Always means without exception. Well, from my own experience, let me tell you: masturbation is not the same as masturbation. There is a vast difference between just "opening a valve" to smooth your pressure boiler and "indulging in sexual fantasies". No more details, but I think, you got it.

One more point: He says: "In God's good design, marital love is the only justified context for one to enjoy a sexual craving for orgasm. Misplaced and mis-timed desires do not honor God and are a form of lust".

Again, as I said above, if we are honest, we all have to admit, that this kind of misplacement and wrong timing is something you can experience in your marriage life as well - a hundred times. But your conscience might not realize it. Because you have a marriage covenant, you might feel justified. And that's worse than masturbation.

7. Paul declares that the answer to sexual desire is either the marriage bed or self-control, not masturbation.

This is Jason in his ivory tower. As a church leader he should know, that there are single persons who do not find a fitting partner. They want to get married, but sometimes - just no chance. At the same time, these brothers and sisters definitely do not have the gift of virginity. Is this Jason's answer to desperate church members?

Conclusion: I am thankful for this article, because sometimes one's own position can be sharpened when you have to deal with extreme views. If I am on the wrong track, I am thankful as well for correction.

As a summary, here are my main points of critique:

1. Jason's interpretation of masturbation is highly questionable. It seems, as if he would not agree, that there are other interpretations possible. One reason might be that he is reading too much ESV. The greek word porneia is translated in the ESV as "sexual immorality". This translation opens the door for the thought that masturbation could be part of it. If you translate porneia with fornication, as in KJV, the sense is altered completely. I also got the impression that Jason sometimes uses the

bible to support his own narrow view on the subject masturbation.

2. There is not much encouragement in this article. There are quite some harsh phrases to digest. I would prefer to read something, that transports holy fear combined with loving affection. Instead, all you get is feelings of guilt. Some readers, mainly teenagers, will feel utter frustration at the end (if they stand to read this article to the end).

3. Our way on this earth leads to heaven by being transformed into Christ's image. This process is called sanctification. We should cooperate with our Lord in achieving this goal here on earth as much as possible. Masturbation can be an obstacle on this path. But it is not the only one. There are many more aspects. Sanctification is not achieved by focussing on overcoming a single sin. That is dangerous and misleading. How about anger, rage, slander, disrespect to parents, pride, gossip, judgmentalism, envy, unforgiveness ... are they not worthy to be fought against?

4. Jason speaks out of an ivory tower. Why? Because Jason is married. In his condemnation of masturbation, he is always on the secure side, so to say. If someone is qualified to teach about such a hot topic as masturbation, it should be someone who lives his life as a Christian in singleness. That man's message would be full of impact.

5. What I really missed was Jason's own experience. In the midst of all his "reflections" there was no personal hint, how he experienced Christ's liberating work. He quotes many verses from the bible, but I missed his personal testimony about the effect, God's word had on him. He could have said something like this: "Brothers and sisters, when I was not yet married, I did struggle with masturbation for some time. But I got free by Christ's nearness and sweetness ..." Or whatever. But sorry to say, his article does not echo such a tune!

Lastly, let me tell you: I do not promote masturbation nor do I defend it. Don't get me wrong. But let me give the hearer a simple advice: Do not concentrate on overcoming masturbation. If you are an expert in self-control, fine. Whether you are free or not, serve the Lord with your whole heart. Get yourself filled with his word and with sound doctrine. Pray for being used by God. If you fail, get up again. Run the race. That's all.