



Are Porn, Masturbation, and Fantasy Sinful? Does the Bible/God Allow Them?

Description



One of the most popular articles on this website is [Why](#)

[“Lusting” in Matthew 5:27-28 Doesn’t Make All Men Adulterers.](#) I’ve gotten more emails about that article than any other; maybe more than all others combined. Virtually all of them ask about one of three topics: porn, masturbation, and fantasy. More specifically, they want to know if the Bible/God allows Christians to view/engage in them.

That’s our topic today, starting with porn.

Does the Bible/God allow Christians to view porn?

The obvious answer given by nearly all Christians is “No!”, and then they’ll cite Matthew 5:27-28. However, if you’ve read [my article on that passage](#), you’ll know that when properly understood, it’s not *necessarily* applicable. Perhaps some, but not directly. (*We’ll see why later in the article*). **However, just because that passage isn’t necessarily applicable, doesn’t mean the Bible is silent. The Bible does actually speak to this issue quite decisively, but not in a verse most people cite.** We’ll look at that verse soon, but first we’ll look at two others which aren’t *necessarily* applicable.

The first is Matthew 5:27-28, and the second is Job 31:1.

Is Matthew 5:27-28 applicable to Porn?

There are verses which clearly speak to the issue of porn, but this isn't one of them. To see why, we'll first look at the verse as it is usually translated:

Matthew 5:27-28 (NASB '95)

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';

28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

However, there's to this verse than that translation might indicate. It's not badly translated or anything (*the NASB '95 is one of the two best Bible translations on the market*) but there is more going on. I'll give a brief summary here, but for full details/proof you'll need to read [my article on Matthew 5:27-28](#).

- In the Bible, "adultery" is a technical term which means "a man having sex with another man's wife". If a **married woman** isn't involved, it isn't adultery. **Period**. Biblically, a married man who has sex with an unmarried woman commits the (*very serious*) sin of fornication, but *not* adultery. This is according to the Greek/Hebrew word definitions and the 100% consistent usage throughout the entire Bible.
- In Greek, the word for "wife" and the word for "woman" are the same word. They are identical, and only context tells you which is intended. Given the point above, "wife" seems contextually more appropriate since the topic is adultery, which *requires* a married woman *by definition*.
- The "looking" here is intentional in the Greek, *not* a mere glance.
- The word translated "lust" doesn't primarily denote sexual desire. It means any strong desire for something, whether good or bad. Elsewhere, this word is used when quoting the 10th commandment about **coveting**. That's important.

Putting that all together – and again, see my article for proof – you get a verse that should look something like this:

Matthew 5:27-28

27 You heard it was said: "You shall not have sex with another man's wife."

28 But I tell you; **everyone who looks at a wife in order to covet her** already had sex with the other man's wife in his heart.

The issue here isn't "lust" in the sense of inordinate sexual desire. The issue here is wanting to have/own/possess another man's wife. God commanded Israel not to covet in the Mosaic Law, but didn't place a penalty on it. Conversely, the biblical penalty for biblical adultery (*a man having sex with another man's wife*) was death. In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said that a man who "merely" coveted his neighbor's wife was as guilty as a man who actually had sex with her...

...and the penalty for that was death.

However, this verse doesn't really clarify the issue of porn very much.

Why?

Because coveting means more than simply "to want". [Dennis Prager has an excellent video on coveting](#) that explains this very well (~5 minutes long), and we also go over it in my article on Matthew 5:27-28. Again, the issue is **coveting**, not lust in this passage.

The best definition I've seen for coveting is this:

You are coveting when you desire something to the point that you **would like to** take it away from its rightful owner and own it yourself, regardless of if you actually **do**.

Even if you wouldn't take it away from its rightful owner given the chance, it can still be coveting. You covet when you desire something enough that you **want to** take it away from its rightful owner and own it yourself. You don't need to plan to do it, and maybe wouldn't even do so given the chance. It can still be coveting if you 'merely' **want** to take it away from its rightful owner so you can own it.

That's why porn isn't necessarily covered by Matthew 5:27-28

To be sure, if you're watching porn where the woman is married, then it might be applicable. However, if there's no coveting – aka a desire to actually have/own/possess that woman – it gets less clear if it's a sin. We'll look at this more closely later in the article.

That's why this verse doesn't clarify the issue of porn as much as most people think it does.

There are other verses which do, but this isn't it.

Is Job 31:1 applicable to Porn?

Here is the other verse that often comes up when porn is discussed.

Job 31:1

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?"

This clearly **leans** in one direction (*against porn*) but the trouble is that it's not a **clear** indictment.

The reason that Job doesn't gaze is because he made a "covenant with his eyes". In those many emails I've received, some people say that he made an actual vow/covenant and so it's only applicable to him.

It that the case?

Maybe.

If so, the Bible is clear that men should stand by their word:

Numbers 30:2

2 "If a man makes a VOW to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

So is Job 31:1 about an actual vow of Job's? If so, it's only really applicable to him. (*I've had some make that exact argument.*)

Or perhaps this is poetic imagery about how none of us should ever "gaze" at a virgin, which is the typical application. But then again, I've had people argue that God chastises Job at the end of the book for his words, so we can ignore Job's words because God corrected him for them. I've had people make that exact argument, and it's not a bad argument. Not a great one either, but not a bad one.

You see the point.

I don't like grounding doctrine/practice on verses which aren't clear, and this verse isn't as clear as I'd like. I would say it clearly leans in one direction, but "clearly leans" is different than "clearly says". Fortunately, there is one verse that does clearly say. Because of that, I won't bother with unclear verses because we have clear ones. We'll look at those now.

Deuteronomy 24:1

I've literally never seen anyone bring up this verse in the porn debate, which is a shame because it's the clearest verse on the topic, though indirectly.

Deuteronomy 24:1

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecent in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house

Many people take "indecent" to mean adultery as the reason for the divorce here. However that's simply not possible because the biblical penalty for biblical adultery is death. (*And remember that biblical adultery is a man having sex with another man's wife. If a man has sex with an unmarried woman, it's the {serious} sin of fornication, but it's not adultery.*)

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Deuteronomy 22:22

22 “If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall **die**, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; **thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.**

Leviticus 20:10

10 ‘If there is **a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife**, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, **the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.**

(And by the way, the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 is near universally agreed to have been added to the Bible and not original. Further, including that story introduces a massive error to the Bible, thus it doesn’t belong. Full details in [my article on the Pericope Adulterae](#).)

As we just saw, biblical adultery (*a man having sex with another man’s wife*) was punished by death according to God’s command. But if a divorce happens, then she’s clearly not being put to death for her crimes.

Therefore, this verse is not talking about adultery.

So what is it talking about, and how does it relate to porn? Well, the word translated “indecency” in Deuteronomy 24:1 is the Hebrew word “???????” ([ervah](#)). It primarily means “nakedness” in the sense of lewd exposure, as borne out by it’s definition.

nakedness, shame, uncleanness

From arah; **nudity, literally (especially the pudenda)** or figuratively (disgrace, blemish) — **nakedness, shame, unclean(-ness).**

And again from another one:

1 pudenda, of man ?????? ? **implying shameful exposure** Genesis 9:22,23 (J); **mostly of woman**: figurative of Jerusalem (with ??????) Lamentations 1:3; Ezekiel 16:37; usually with ? ??? **literal ??????????? ? i.e. be exposed to view**

2 ??????? ??????? nakedness of a thing, i.e. probably indecency, improper behavior
Deuteronomy 23:15; **Deuteronomy 24:1** (see Dr).

You might’ve noticed the word “pudenda” in both definitions. I had to look up the definition as I’d never heard the word before. Here’s [the definition of pudenda from Merriam-Webster](#):

pu-?den-?dum | \ pyu?-?den-d?m \
plural: pudenda \ pyu?-??den-?d? \
 \

the external genital organs of a human being and especially of a woman — usually used in plural

The Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 24:1 clearly involves lewd exposure. **Pudenda refers to the external sexual organs; any external sexual organs on men or women, including the ones not between a woman's legs; i.e. her breasts.** Again, the Hebrew word clearly refers to indecent exposure of these sexual organs, including breasts. Such (*intentional*) indecent exposure of **any** of these organs is grounds for divorce according to Deuteronomy 24:1.

Any of them.

I think you see how this relates to porn.

A wife lewdly exposing her sexual organs – either privately or publicly – was a legitimate cause for her husband to divorce her. **This quite clearly makes lewd/indecent exposure a sin.** Further, it's not only a sin, but **a very serious sin** because it was serious enough that man could divorce a wife for committing the sin of lewd/indecent exposure.

By definition, porn includes lewd/indecent exposure.

Therefore, porn is sinful **by definition**. Not necessarily because of lust or coveting (*though it could be because of that too*) but because **by definition** porn requires something that is sinful: lewd/indecent exposure.

That is a clear verse.

The verdict is in, and unsurprisingly porn isn't something that God allows Christians to watch.

(*Note: this also applies to other situations with lewd/indecent exposure too, like a strip club.*)

What about 'merely' watching

I can almost hear someone objecting like this: ***"But I'm not exposing myself, just watching someone else exposing themselves. Is it still a sin?"*** If that's an argument you're considering, think about it a little more. Or better yet, read that argument aloud. Hear how it sounds.

Go ahead, I'll wait.

...

...

Is that **really** an argument you want to make?

Just in case it is, we'll look at what the Bible has to say about it. Remember that the Hebrew word used in Deuteronomy 24:1 is "???????" (**ervah**), and that it means to lewdly/shamefully expose the sexual organs. So here's what the Bible says about seeing someone else's "ervah".

(Note: Ham is Noah's youngest son)

Genesis 9:20

20 Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

21 He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the **nakedness (ervah)** of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the **nakedness (ervah)** of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's **nakedness (ervah)**.

24 **When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.**

Notice the phrase "had done to him". Clearly what Ham did was wrong, yet he did nothing more than simply see Noah's "nakedness" (ervah) and tell his brothers about it. However, the brothers took pains to make sure they didn't see any "nakedness" (ervah). The pains they take is **clearly** commendable from the context.

This is quite clear.

We aren't supposed to go looking at other people's "ervah" (*nakedness/external sexual organs*) unless we're married to them.

Noah actually pronounced a curse in retaliation because of this incident, while he blessed the two brothers who covered him up without looking. So no, it's not acceptable to view pudendum/ervah (*external sexual organs*) for your own sexual gratification.

Porn includes viewing exposed pudendum by definition. So no, God doesn't allow Christians to look at porn.

The scripture is clear on this point.

One important thing before we move on: the word ervah specifically focuses on lewd/indecent exposure. This likely wouldn't apply in medical situations/doctors because the exposure isn't lewd/indecent. (*There are likely other times/situations when such exposure would be acceptable as well, especially when not in mixed company, but we won't get into that here because it's off topic.*)

Next, we'll look at masturbation.

Masturbation

There are two primary verses that some Christians use to say that masturbation is wrong; one in Leviticus and one in Genesis. We'll start with the one in Leviticus.

Leviticus 15:16

We'll also look at the following verse for context.

Leviticus 15:16-17

16 'Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be unclean until evening.

17 As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be unclean until evening.

This has traditionally been applied to nocturnal emissions (*aka "wet dreams", where a man ejaculates while asleep*), which is probably why it mentions "any garments or any leather". (*The leather is likely a bed mat*).

It should be noted that being ceremonially "unclean" was not a sin.

Sometimes people will quote the verse above to say that masturbation is a sin/wrong because it made a man ceremonially unclean. That's not what this verse is saying, which is obvious if you read the following verses for context.

Leviticus 15:16-19

16 'Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be unclean until evening.

17 As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be unclean until evening.

18 'If a man lies with a woman so that there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

19 'When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her **menstrual impurity** for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.

So, having sex with your wife also made you “unclean until evening”. However, God **requires** husbands to have sex with their wives – which made both of them unclean – so being unclean **can’t** be a sin. This is repeated in both the Mosaic Law and the New Testament.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes another wife to himself, **he shall not diminish her** food, her clothing, or her **conjugal rights**.

11 **And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing**, without payment of money.

In the Mosaic Law, a man refusing to have sex with a wife (*on an ongoing basis*) was cause for her to divorce him. God also tells husbands and wives that they must have sex through Paul.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5

2. But because of *temptation to* fornication, **let each man have the wife to himself, and let each wife have her husband**.

3. Let the husband give what is owed to the wife, and likewise also the wife to the husband.

4. The wife doesn’t have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise also, the husband doesn’t have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

5. **Don’t defraud each other**, except by agreement for a suitable time, that you might devote yourselves to prayer; **and then be together again** so Satan won’t tempt you through your lack of self-control.

Since God requires husbands and wives to have sex, and since having sex made them “unclean until evening”, then being ceremonially unclean can’t be a sin because God commanded that they do something which made them unclean. Driving the point home, a woman menstruating made her unclean too, so it’s *obviously* not a sin.

Remember that these were laws about ceremonial cleanliness, not morality.

There’s a difference.

Now, we’ll look at the other verse.

Genesis 38:9

This is the second verse that some use to say that masturbation is wrong. However, the couple involved were married and having actual penetrative sex... so it's not applicable.

Genesis 38:6-10

6 Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was **Tamar**.

7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life.

8 Then 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."

9 Onan 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 took his life also.

The argument that some people make is that "wasting his seed on the ground" refers to masturbation, which (*in some Christian's eyes*) is a serious sin, and that's why God killed him. However, that's blatantly contradicted by the text.

Notice the phrase "he went in to his brother's wife".

That's an obvious, clear, explicit statement referring to penetrative sexual intercourse. It's hard to get clearer than "he went in to her" to describe sex. Onan was having actual sex with Tamar, he just pulled out in order to avoid impregnating her. The sin here had to do with levirate marriage and not taking care of his brother's widow by giving her children (*after marrying her; see the law on levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, which made this ancient custom law*).

This particular verse isn't about masturbation.

Period.

Adding to God's prohibitions?

Now, there's a guiding light that we should always hold sacrosanct when we read the Bible, and it's this: **We should never say "thus saith the lord" unless God actually said it. Ever. Period.** This applies to many things, and one of them is what we call sin.

If God hasn't called something a sin -either directly or indirectly – then we should be **very careful** about calling it a sin. I'd argue we shouldn't call it a sin, because that's putting words in God's mouth, adding to His words which He commanded us not to do. I recommend you read the first heading on my article [What's the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?](#) for more on this point. In that article, I go to great lengths show why we shouldn't add to God's commands, which includes adding to His prohibitions.

(BTW, I can make a powerful argument that Christians adding to God's prohibitions – that is, Christians saying we shouldn't do something that God allows – is currently causing the moral decline of the West... but I digress.)

I'll quote just one verse about not adding to or taking away from to His words, but there are more.

Deuteronomy 4:2

2 “**You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you**, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you

So if God hasn't said “*you shouldn't _____*” then we aren't allow to say “*God says you shouldn't _____*”. He directly commanded us **not** to do that. So make sure you have solid chapter and verse before saying that God requires or forbids something.

That's important...

...and it applies to masturbation.

We've just looked at all the verses that some Christians use to say that masturbation is wrong. However, none of them are about masturbation so they certainly don't say it's wrong. Since the Bible never says it's wrong – explicitly or implicitly – then we can't claim it's wrong without adding to God's commands, which is a sin.

Therefore, masturbation is not wrong in and of itself.

However...

It takes some kind of stimulation to masturbate, and the source of that stimulation could be wrong. Not saying it always is, just that it could be.

Since we've already ruled out porn and looking at naked/scantily clad women (*unless you're married to them*), the next obvious place to look is the mind itself through fantasy.

We'll look at that next.

(Note: masturbation comes with a warning label if done too often, but it's not necessarily unhealthy otherwise. We'll look at this at the end, but it's rather important to know the side effects of masturbating – and how to avoid them – if you plan to masturbate. We'll look at that near the conclusion of this article.)

Fantasy

To be clear: we're not talking about "high fantasy" stories with dragons, magic, and other mythological elements. *(Like the Chronicles of Narnia or Lord of the Rings.)* We're talking about a person intentionally imagining a sexual situation for any reason, including for the purpose of masturbating. But before we can talk about that, we'll talk about non-sexual fantasy for context.

Is non-sexual fantasy bad/wrong?

We'll start with non-sexual fantasy because it will provide a framework to talk about sexual fantasy. There's one verse that might seem to indicate it's wrong, but only in certain (*poor*) translations.

Proverbs 28:19 (NIV)

Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase **fantasies** will have their fill of poverty.

In my article [What's the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?](#), we talk about the importance of not changing God's words. Sadly, the NIV translators simply don't care about accurately translating God's words (*proof in the article on Bible translations*). The word they translate "fantasies" simply doesn't mean "fantasies" at all. *(It's the NIV though, so who's really surprised?)*

Here's the same verse in a few other translations.

Proverbs 28:19

ESV: Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows **worthless pursuits** will have plenty of poverty

NKJV: He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows **frivolity** will have poverty enough

NASB '95: He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows **empty pursuits** will have poverty in plenty

(Note: please don't consider my quoting the ESV to be an endorsement of that {poor} translation. It intentionally mistranslates quite often and is quite sneaky about it too, so most people don't know; details in [my article on Bible translations](#).)

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The Hebrew word highlighted in red is “????” (*req*, pronounced “rake”) and it primarily means “empty, idle, worthless, vain”. Notice that “fantasy” is **not** among the definitions. Again though, the NIV mistranslating a verse/passage is almost more normal than not.

Shakes head “Oh NIV, what will I do with you?”

...but I digress.

Back to the topic of fantasy, and not my incredible frustration with bad Bible translations (*ESV, NIV, NLT, etc*) giving people bad theology...

The Bible does actually lightly touch the topic of fantasy; sort of.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are **true**, whatever things are **noble**, whatever things are **just**, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are **lovely**, whatever things are of good report, if *there is any virtue* and if *there is anything praiseworthy* — **meditate on these things**.

Notice the word “meditate”. To meditate on something is much more than to merely think about it. It means to give something serious, deep thought. The Greek word translated “meditate” here is “?????????” (*logizomai*) and it means:

3049 *logízomai* (the root of the English terms “*logic, logical*”) – properly, *compute*, “take into account”; *reckon* (come to a “bottom-line”), i.e. ***reason to a logical conclusion*** (decision).

Or in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon:

1. (rationes conferre) to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over; hence,
2. (in animo rationes conferre) to **reckon inwardly**, count up or weigh the reasons, **to deliberate**
3. by reckoning up all the reasons to gather or **infer**; i. e., a. **to consider, take account, weigh, meditate on: ??, a thing, with a view to obtaining it**, Philippians 4:8;

Notice the phrase: “with a view toward obtaining it”.

Hmm...

Now, that sounds like you’re supposed to think about good things, and then think about how to be/get those good things. **Doesn’t that sound like fantasy, or at least “fantasy adjacent”?** It certainly seems to be the case. Further, it makes a lot of sense.

Man is a visual creature.

We “fantasize” about things literally every day. Engineers have to imagine/fantasize how the finished product would work to design it. Artists have to “fantasize” about the finished product to paint it.

Writers need to imagine/fantasize the world in order to accurately describe it. Gardeners – especially landscapers – need to imagine how the finished product will look before they starts. Architects need to imagine the final product before they can draw up plans.

Need I go on?

Consider, how many verses you've heard where we're told to "set our eyes" on God, Jesus, heavenly things, etc.?

Fantasy is nothing more than the result of our imagination, and I see literally no place in scripture where that's a bad thing... provided you fantasize about moral things. Philippians says to meditate on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, "of good report" and "if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy".

So good things are 100% fine to imagine/fantasize about.

You wouldn't tell a kid to stop imagining while he plays games, why would you do the same to an adult? These fantasies can be extremely productive too, propelling us to seek things we wouldn't have reach for if we hadn't dreamed, imagined fantasized about them.

There's another example of fantasy that's important and had a profound impact on me growing up: superheroes.

I loved Spider-Man and imagined fantasized that I was him all the time. My favorite action figure was a crazy-articulated Spider-man that could bend like no action figure I've seen before nor since. I would pretend I had web-shooters, I read (*almost*) every issue of the Amazing Spider-Man. I spent a lot of time imagining fantasizing that I was him... including his character.

I wanted to be like Spider-Man in every way, so I imitated his character so much. His catchphrase was important: "*With great power comes great responsibility*", and the fact that he always tried to do the right thing, even – or perhaps especially – when it was hard. That had a profound impact on me growing up **for the good**. I fantasized about being like Spider-Man, which made me a better man. I fantasized about what Spider-Man would do when I was in a tough spot or when I was tempted to do something wrong, and that fantasy made me better.

Let me say that again:

That fantasy actually, truly, and deeply made me into a a better man.

I'm not alone in this either. One of my favorite YouTube channels [has a video about this](#), though He-Man was the superhero who impacted him the same way. He talks about this at length and it's well worth the ~35 minutes. This ability of fantasy to instill the desire for morality (*especially in young boys*) is the reason we've had mythology forever. Boys especially need someone they can emulate; a masculine hero who does the right thing when it's hard so they can learn what that looks like.

Why else would we still be retelling the story of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae thousands of years later?

It's because we want our sons to emulate these heroic acts when they are confronted with hard

choices. We want them to be better, so we give them a (*super*)hero they can emulate and look up to. We use the *fantasy* of being a hero to teach moral lessons to boys about how to be men; lessons that will stick with them for a lifetime.

(*Non-sexual*) fantasy can actually be one of the most powerful forces for good in the world. It can be used to inspire and uplift and instill timeless values in a way few other things can.

The only real limitation God gave us on imagination/fantasy is to do so about good/moral things. That's a pretty great limitation when you consider where immoral fantasies can lead.

Now that we've established that non-sexual fantasy is fine, we'll look at sexual fantasy.

Is sexual fantasy bad/wrong?

I'm going to start this section with a suggestion: **please read the entire book of Song of Solomon.** [Here's a link](#) where you can read the whole thing. It's not too long, being less than half the length of this article.

I'll wait.

No really, I will.

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Back? Good; here's the pop-quiz:

- Did you notice that the words "God" and "Lord" both don't appear even a single time? Yes, there's a book of the **Bible** which doesn't even mention God once. No joke.
- Did you catch the part where Solomon goes on for some length describing a naked woman?
- Did you catch the part where she eats – and likes the taste of – his semen?
- Did you catch the parts – plural (*as in more than one*) – where she wants him to perform oral sex on her?

No?

Okay, I don't blame you for missing the last two... but they're in there. (*Song 2:3, and then 4:16 & 8:2 respectively; though a bit of cultural context makes it clearer*). It's enough to make anyone blush... and God inspired it.

Let me repeat that:

God inspired a book about love/sex and put it in the Bible even though He isn't mentioned even once in that book.

Think about that for a moment.

Really think about it.

Then consider that He inspired a book which spends a lot of time waxing eloquently about love, sex, a naked woman, and other erotic things. In fact, that's the topic of the whole book. So if you were to classify the Song of Solomon, do you know what genre it would be?

Erotic poetry.

No seriously; I'm not kidding.

(I'd also accept "erotic fiction" or "erotic autobiography" depending on if you believe Solomon 'merely' composed a poem like David did in Psalms or recorded real events; I loosely hold to the former idea and so would call it "erotic fiction/poetry".)

God does not have a problem with moral/ethical sex.

Now I want to be clear. This **only** applies to moral/ethical sex. There's a very real sense where the Song of Solomon is almost designed to create sexual fantasy. I'm not saying that's why it was written, but it's a near unavoidable result of reading it... and God Himself inspired the book.

We'll come back to that in a moment.

For now, let's look at a related pair of verses that might make things a bit clearer.

Honorable things

Notice the highlight words in the following two verses, and especially how they might fit together. (*Admittedly, I'm mixing translations to make the point clearer. The NASB has "is to be held in honor" instead of "honorable" in Hebrews 13:4.*)

Hebrews 13:4 (NKJV)

Marriage **is honorable** among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Now, notice what God says we should meditate on in the following verse...

Philippians 4:8 (NASB '95)

Finally, brethren, 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.**

The Greek word translated “dwell” in the NASB is the same one translated “meditate” in the NKJV, and we already looked at it. Now bearing that in mind, consider this:

Remember how we said that fantasizing about noble things is a good thing? well, Sex inside of marriage is a noble/honorable thing.

It is.

That’s clear from scripture, especially the Song of Solomon.

Now, I’m not saying these two verses (*when combined*) are saying Christians should fantasize about having sex.

I’m not saying that at all.

However, I do see a clear indication in scripture with these two verses that fantasy is permissible... provided you follow the example of Song of Solomon.

What example?

Song of Solomon only talks about moral/ethical sex inside of marriage. Remember too that Philippians has a similar pattern, i.e. whatever is honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, anything of excellence, anything worthy of praise. **Sex inside of marriage is all of those things. Sex outside of marriage is none of those things.**

None of them.

I have a whole article on [Yes, The Bible CLEARLY Says Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong](#). In one place, it’s called a “shameful, stupid, wicked, sin/crime”. (*Details in the article.*) In no case **whatsoever** can fantasizing about an immoral sexual act **ever** be considered a good thing.

Period.

But what about fantasizing about moral/ethical sex?

It depends. There’s two broad classes of fantasy that can occur. The first type is fantasizing about a real/specific woman. The second type is fantasizing about a non-real/imagined woman who you conjure with your own imagination. Because these two are separate types, we’ll handle them separately.

Fantasy about a real/specific woman

If you’ll remember back a few thousand words to the beginning of this article, we talked a bit about coveting. If you’ll remember, we had this definition:

You are coveting when you desire something to the point that you **would like to** take it away from its rightful owner to own it yourself, regardless of if you actually **do**.

That includes if you would refuse the opportunity if it was presented to you. For example, if you coveted your neighbor's wife and she started making advances on you and you turned her down for fear of being found out, you could **still** covet her. Even if you don't commit adultery with her – even if you turn her down – you can still covet if the desire is there.

It doesn't matter if you **do** something; the **desire** to take something from its rightful owner is enough to be coveting, **even if you don't do anything**.

You can still covet your neighbors wife even if you would “never in a million years” actually have sex with her.

Now, in the case of fantasizing about a real/specific woman, this is nearly coveting *by definition*. You don't have the right to access a woman sexually unless you've married her. If you want the right to access her sexually, you must marry her. If you disagree, please see my article: [Yes, The Bible CLEARLY Says Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong](#).

Now, if you have married her, then you can't “covet” what you already have: the right to access her sexually. Thus – keeping Hebrews and Philipians in mind – **I see no reason whatsoever that a married man can't fantasize about his wife**. (and vice-verse)

No reason at all.

Now, the sexual fantasies must still be moral even when they're about your wife.

For example, the Bible *clearly* condemns anal sex as immoral/wrong. (In Romans 1:26 when properly translated; please see [my article on homosexuality](#), as it contains an in-depth treatment of this verse.) Thus, fantasizing about any kind of anal sex – even anal sex with your wife – is wrong in and of itself. It's wrong because the Bible says anal sex is wrong, so no fantasizing about it.

Period.

However, it's perfectly fine to fantasize about doing any moral sexual act with your wife (which includes oral sex; see the Song of Solomon above).

However, fantasizing about **any** woman to whom you aren't married very nearly becomes coveting *by definition*.

“Yes, but what about a fiancée?”

We need to draw a distinction between a “fiancée” and a “betrothed woman” before we can properly understand the Bible on this. They are **very** different, and not understanding the difference can lead you into error. This is especially true when you look at books like Song of Solomon.

A modern **fiancée** has said that she would marry a man, but there is no binding agreement. Either can break off the engagement at any point without repercussion. The man has no legal, moral, or biblical claim on her whatsoever.

However, a **betrothed woman** is **completely different**. For starters, the woman almost certainly didn't choose her groom; her father did. A woman becomes betrothed when the groom pays a “bride-price” to her father, literally buying the daughter to be his wife. The daughter had no say in this other than perhaps trying to convince her father of a certain man (*think like Jane Austen's Pride & Prejudice*). In fact, she could be married against her will and her consent was not required for the marriage to take place.

Please note, one of the two Hebrew ways to say “husband” is the Hebrew word “??????” (*baal*, *not to be confused with the pagan god “Ba'al”, which doesn't have the apostrophe in most modern bibles*). It means:

Brown-Driver-Briggs (Lexicon)

I. ?????? 166 noun masculine: **owner**, lord

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance:

From ba'al; **a master; hence, a husband**, or (figuratively) **owner**

I bet you've never heard that while studying Proverbs 31!

The reason that “husband” and “owner” were synonymous was because a man was required to purchase his wife from her father. He literally “owned” her. In fact, **a betrothal was an actual marriage that required a divorce to break**. Because the groom had paid for her, she was considered his wife even though the actual wedding hadn't happened yet. **A betrothed woman was – for all intents and purposes – the man's wife in a legal sense**. This is made clear because the penalty for sleeping with another man's betrothed woman was the same as sleep with another man's wife: death.

Deuteronomy 22:23-24

23 “If there is **a girl who is a virgin betrothed to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her,**

24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and **you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife**. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

Notice, **the Bible calls a betrothed woman a wife**. In a legal sense, betrothal = marriage.

Therefore, you could make a reasonable argument that since he owned/married her, he could rightfully fantasize about her like he would a wife... because she technically already was his wife. Parts of Song of Solomon could be read as sexual fantasy before marriage, but remember – in that culture – he would've already paid the bride price for her. Therefore, she was already his betrothed/wife.

It's not this way with a modern fiancée.

Because of this ownership component, anything the Bible says about a betrothed woman is NOT applicable to a modern fiancée.

Not at all.

There's no ownership component and no marriage, so fantasizing about your fiancée is **no different whatsoever** than fantasizing about any other unmarried woman.

And being no different, it's almost coveting by definition.

In fact, fantasizing about any real woman whatsoever – if you haven't married her – is slipping into dangerous territory, even if you are fantasizing about (for example) your wedding night with her.

I can't absolutely, 100%, "for sure" say it's a sin because the Bible doesn't speak directly to the topic. However, I find it hard to believe that you could fantasize about a real woman – especially one you personally know – and not covet her. After all you would be fantasizing about "having" her in the Biblical sense, as in 1 Corinthians 7:

1 Corinthians 7:2

2. But because of *temptation to* fornication, let each man **have** the wife to himself, and let each wife **have** her husband.

This concept of "having" is why I say it's dangerous territory. A man would be fantasizing about "having" her while at the same time saying he's not fantasizing about "having" her. Is that possible?

I doubt it.

Again, it seems virtually impossible to fantasize about "having" a real woman (sexually) without also fantasizing about "having" her (coveting).

You see the problem.

It's technically possible I suppose, but certainly not something I'd recommend.

Fantasy about a non-real/imagined woman

The Bible says nothing about this. Nothing at all, and there's definitely no prohibition. Because of that, everything we said earlier about not adding to God's commands applies. Don't add to His commands, which include His prohibitions.

Period.

Further, you can't "covet" a figment of your imagination because it either **(a)** doesn't exist, or **(b)** if you want to say it does exist, then it exists in your own head and thus is already yours. Therefore, it can't be coveting because it either doesn't exist or you already own it.

I don't see a problem with fantasizing about a non-real/imagined woman. I simply don't.

I don't see a scriptural argument for prohibiting a man from fantasizing about having (moral/ethical) sex with a non-real woman/wife he's imagined and masturbating to that fantasy.

Remember the Song of Solomon.

It's essentially an erotic poem and it's in the Bible. Frankly, I don't see how you can read that book and **not** have some of those images float into your head. I don't see how it's possible. (*Unless you try to make it about Christ and the church – which I've seen some men do – and then it gets pretty disturbing.*) You don't have to like the fact that God included an long erotic poem in the Bible, but He did.

Whatever is honorable, meditate on these things, and sex inside marriage is honorable.

So if you have a strong sex drive but aren't married, there's a Biblical command for how to deal with that: get married. But until you find a wife, a little masturbation with a fantasy about some non-real/imagined future wife might help ease the tension and provide some relief.

I see zero problem with that Biblically

None.

Now, a slight warning about masturbation

It's not wrong, and it's not even unhealthy... unless you over-indulge. Let me explain. The follow quotes are all from [this article about the potential ill-effects of over masturbating](#).

It is easy to assume that your brain is effected the same way during masturbation as with intercourse simply because the end result is the same. **Not true. Several studies have proven that your brain reacts differently when having sex than it does when you masturbate.** For instance, in a study conducted by Dr. Stuart Brody and Tillman Kruger found that **certain hormones are released in as much as 400% higher concentrations during sex as they are when you masturbate.** In this particular study, they measured the amounts

of prolactin which is triggered by another hormone: oxytocin.

The article then goes on to say that oxytocin provides a moderating effect to the hormone that makes sex pleasurable: dopamine, then says this:

So basically, although masturbation provides a sense of pleasure and release that floods our brains with dopamine, **it doesn't produce as much of the hormone that counters dopamine.**

...

Our brains can only produce so much dopamine at a time, so if you are using it all up on feeding into your brain's need for pleasure with masturbation it isn't being released at any other time. Without dopamine releases in other aspects of your life, you begin to lose motivation to do even the simplest things like spend time with friends or engage in activity that used to make you happy.

Now, this doesn't mean you need to stop masturbating completely. The article I quoted from doesn't even say that. In fact, they end it with this: *(though it should be noted that sex has the same benefits with no downsides.)*

In the end, I do think there is a medical benefit to regular masturbation.

There is plenty of research that supports that notion. But just like anything else in life that we get pleasure from, we can sometimes go overboard with the need for that pleasure. **Moderation becomes the key to maintaining that balance between what is good for us, and what can ruin our lives.**

So while there's nothing morally wrong with masturbation, indulging too much can have negatives effects. From both personal experience and research, **it seems like once or twice a week is the realistic maximum before side effects appear.** *(If you're married, sex has all the same benefits with none of the downsides, so feel free to indulge as often as you like.)*

Here's where the idea that "sex is dirty" came from:

One final note.

Christians tend to have a "puritanical" view of sex that somehow makes sex "dirty" in many Christian's minds. That mindset is patently unbiblical. God's first three commands to mankind were to "*be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth*". That means children, which requires sex. There's a very real sense where God's first three commands to mankind boil down to "*have lots of sex, so you make lots of babies.*"

I'd love to double the length of this article explaining where this ungodly view that "sex is dirty" comes from, but that's not why you're here. So I'm going to give a super short explanation with zero proof and you can do the research yourself if you're interested.

Basically, it all comes from Greco-Roman ideas about purity.

They had this idea that a woman never having sex and never getting married was somehow super pure, and eventually that idea carried over to men also. These ideas were typified by Gnosticism, and especially the ascetic forms of Gnosticism which said anything that you enjoyed physically – including food, drink, and especially sex – was bad by nature. This is part of why they forbade marriage and certain (*enjoyable*) foods. Paul alludes to this in 1 Timothy 4:3:

1 Timothy 4:3

men who **forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods** which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

When Christianity spread across the Greco-Roman world, the converts took these ideas with them into the church. (*They definitely didn't get them from the Jews, who were polygamous from Abraham until ~thousand years after Christ.*)

Before long, you had the church saying that since sex wasn't as holy as being a virgin, only unmarried men could become elders/priests/pastors, (*in direct contradiction to the requirements for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1*). This caused a negative feedback loop because eventually all the "holy men" never had sex, and thus virginity became synonymous with holiness. Once virginity became synonymous with holiness, then having sex – even when married – sort of automatically became the opposite of holy in many people's minds.

That's an unbiblical and unchristian.

God loves moral/ethical sex inside of marriage. In fact, He commanded that married couples not stop having sex except temporarily to fast and pray, and then to have sex again. Sex isn't "dirty"; sex is great. In fact, it's awesome and was created by God for our enjoyment. So enjoy it, as long as you do so ethically/morally.

Conclusion

Matthew 5:27-28 isn't as applicable to porn the way most people think, though it does have some application as far as coveting is concerned. Job 31:1 is better, but still not clear.

In Deuteronomy 24:1, a woman exposing her "pudendum" or "external sexual organs" was cause for her husband to divorce her, meaning it was a serious sin. Those who "merely" (*intentionally*) view the pudendum are guilty of sin too, as the passage in Genesis with Noah and his sons proves. Porn includes the viewing of another persons pudendum by definition.

Therefore, porn is wrong.

Masturbation isn't mentioned directly or indirectly anywhere in the Bible, and certainly isn't prohibited. Therefore, God never said that it's wrong. Since God never said that it's wrong, any Christian who says masturbation is wrong is (*unknowingly*) sinning. However, doing it too often can cause problems. Once or twice a week is probably safe, more is less so.

So masturbation isn't wrong, but don't over-indulge for health reasons.

Fantasy is trickier and stickier. The Bible seems to encourage fantasy about moral/ethical/honorable things in the non-sexual arena. I don't see why this wouldn't extend to the sexual arena as well, as long as you are fantasizing about moral sexual acts (*which doesn't include anal sex*).

Fantasy in general is fine if you fantasize about moral/ethical things.

Fantasizing about a real/specific woman get into dangerous territory very fast. It instantly runs right up the point of coveting, because it seems impossible to fantasize about "having" a woman (*in the biblical sense*) without fantasizing about "having" a woman. I'm not saying it is impossible, but it seems that way.

So, fantasy about a specific/real woman = very dangerous = almost indistinguishable from coveting = do not recommend. (*unless you're married and she's your wife*)

Fantasizing about a non-real/imagined woman is far simpler, and there's appears to be no problem with that whatsoever. It could even inspire an unmarried man to seek a wife, and as proverbs 18:22 says: "*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.*"

So, fantasy about a non-real/imaginary woman is fine, if you fantasize about moral/ethical things.

If you are an unmarried man who wants sex, seek a wife. Until you find one, you can fantasize about sex with an imagined/imaginary wife in the future, and masturbate to that fantasy... just don't over indulge.

Okay, 8k+ words later, I hope that clears things up. ?