

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 48 – Addictions

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Introduction

Imagine this, you crave something so badly that you will do anything to have it. Not just something, but a substance, a chemical. It is something that you know is bad for you, which society tells you is bad for you, and that God says in His Word that is wrong for you. Even though you know these things, you lie to yourself and those around you and say that it doesn't control you. You do anything and everything you can to obtain it.

This is an addiction. Today, let's look at what God says about addictions.

Definitions

Webster defines "addiction" as 1) a compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal or 2) *broadly*: persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful.

Some may add to the definition of "addiction" the dependence on an activity (gambling, shopping, viewing pornography). This makes sense if "addiction" is defined as anything that gives a person the feeling they enjoy and therefore find difficult to stop once they have started. However, in our study we will define "addiction" as dependence on a substance. We might call this "substance abuse". That is, a biochemical dependence on a substance which develops a tolerance over time. The body needs the substance in ever increasing amounts to stave off the symptoms of withdrawal.

The Bible does not talk about drug abuse, but it does talk about intoxication. Believers are specifically commanded "do not get drunk".

¹⁸And **do not get drunk with wine**, for that is dissipation, **but be filled with the Spirit**,
Eph 5:18

The contrast between being drunk and being filled with the Spirit is clear. Someone who is drunk is under the influence of alcohol – they have surrendered control of themselves to alcohol. Believers should only be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Since the contrast speaks of control, the actual intoxicant is irrelevant. Paul used "drunk with wine" in his contrast because that was readily available in the ancient world, but he could just as well used any mind altering substance as the contrast. Any form of intentional intoxication for recreational purposes is prohibited.

A lifestyle (practice) of intentional intoxication is associated with unbelievers. "Practice" in Galatians 5 means to be occupied with, to accomplish, or to practice. The idea is to perform repeatedly or habitually and thus describes repetition or continuous action. It is in the present tense describing the activities as habitual, as one's lifestyle or bent of life.

¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, **drunkenness**, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**.
Gal 5:19-21

The good news is that God is powerful and all about setting people free from enslavement to sin.

²²But now **having been freed from sin and enslaved to God**, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. Rom 6:22

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

¹⁰nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹**Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

1 Cor 6:9-11

So, can a believer be addicted to a substance? Yes, either by accident (like prolonged medical treatment) or intention (pleasure seeking or pain avoidance use), a believer can become physically and emotionally addicted to a substance. The difference between the believer and unbeliever, is that the believer has the resources to put off the addiction and put on character that honors God.

Either way, the poor soul that has bowed to the master of a substance is dominated by it, enslaved to it. Perhaps a better descriptive name than “addict” is “slave”.

¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? Rom 6:16

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. John 8:34

¹⁹promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 2 Pet 2:19

Addiction is something that is entered voluntarily that enslaves people. These are life-dominating struggles.

Disease?

The question... Is substance abuse or addiction a disease?

The prevailing thought in the medical community is that people struggling with substance abuse are sick. This is based on a medical model of these struggles. When someone has cancer, there is a pathology showing that a disease is present which must be treated in a medical way. The problem with calling substance abuse an “illness” is that there are no tests that show a pathology.

The Bible calls substance abuse something different. The Bible clearly calls getting drunk as well as a lifestyle of drunkenness sin. If alcoholism is a disease, it is the only disease that bars a patient from the kingdom of God (unless there is repentance).

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¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, **drunkenness**, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** Gal 5:19-21

God holds each person responsible for their decision to choose to sin.

²⁰**The person who sins will die.** The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. Ezekiel 18:20

Believers must be careful to never call anything a disease that the Bible calls sin and to never call anything sin the Bible does not clearly identify as sin. Labeling sin as disease offers no hope and could tend to influence God's children to avoid responsibility for their sin.

❖ What do you call substance abuse, sin or disease?

The First Step

The initial step of overcoming enslavement to intoxicating substances is to be broken before God. Come to the place where you recognize the sinfulness of your heart lusts and behavior and turn from them. Unfortunately, addictions are usually characterized by denial, blame shifting, and failure to take responsibility. Therefore, it may take a long time, with significant life pain, before someone gets to this point.

¹⁸**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit.**
Psa 34:18

¹⁶For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. ¹⁷**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.** Psa 51:16-17

²⁴“For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the Lord. **“But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.** Isa 66:2

The broken hearted person will be a repentant person. Repentance will be demonstrated by sorrow, earnestness, vindication, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and avenging of wrong.

⁹I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 2 Cor 7:9-11

❖ What sin are you broken over?

A desire to change and make a decision of the will to honor God as their highest purpose. The desire to glorify God must be the greatest desire, the highest purpose, more important than anything. Remember, to glorify God is to show His character in our motives, thoughts, words, and deeds. We purpose to make choices that honor God in obedience. We glorify God when we live in a way that those around us can see God's character in us (Ex 33:17-23); when we display the life of Christ living through us (Gal 2:20).

³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever **you do, do all to the glory of God.** 1 Cor 10:31

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; and **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;** and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Gal 2:20

❖ What is your most important and over-riding purpose?

The overriding purpose to glorify God drives us to the goal for a slave of addiction. The goal is not “recovery” from addiction, fixing the problem of addiction, or to feel better. The goal is transformation. God wants the slave of substances to be transformed into something different than a slave; into the image of Jesus.

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
Rom 12:2

²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* **conformed** to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; Rom 8:29

Help on the Path

The person struggling with substance slavery must be actively involved in a local body of believers, in person. God has designed the church in such a way so that care can be brought to believers. In doing so, the body brings Him glory. A Bible-teaching body of believers who are committed to being doers of God’s Word and are growing in Christ-likeness are crucial to aiding a slave to substances. God’s people living out the one-another’s will come alongside the slave and provide love, edification, encouragement, admonition, and comfort.

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;
²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Heb 10:23-25

❖ Are you actively involved in your local body?

Also, God gives a wonderful promises to those struggling with sin; promises that the local body is involved in.

¹⁸And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and **lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” Matt 28:18-20

⁵*Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “**I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,**”
Heb 13:5

¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, **but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.** 1 Cor 10:13

Physical Component

Next, we deal with the physical component of addiction. The slave desiring to be set free from addiction will go through physical withdrawals. The substances we are talking about produce a biochemical dependence which develops a tolerance over time. The body needs the substance in ever increasing amounts to stave off the symptoms of withdrawal.

One website presented research conducted in Europe which listed drugs ranked by addictiveness: 1) Heroin, 2) Cocaine / Crack Cocaine, 3) Nicotine, 4) Street Methadone (opioid replacement therapy drug), 5) Crystal Meth, 6) Barbiturates (depressants), 7) Alcohol, 8) Benzodiazepines (anti-anxiety like Xanax or Valium), 9) Standard Amphetamines, and 10) Buprenorphine (opioid replacement therapy drug).

Physically, the slave has used/abused a substance and it has enslaved them.

Physical withdrawal symptoms vary depending on the specific substance and protraction of use. Some examples (from WebMD):

- Symptoms of opioid withdrawal include: diarrhea, large pupils, yawning, abdominal pain, chills and goose bumps, nausea and vomiting, body aches, and agitation and severe negative moods
- Symptoms of alcohol withdrawal include: tremors, anxiety, nausea and/or vomiting, headache, increased heart rate, sweating, irritability, confusion, insomnia, and nightmares. The most severe type of withdrawal is known as delirium tremens. Its symptoms include: extreme confusion and agitation; fever; seizures; and tactile, auditory, and visual hallucinations
- Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include: headache; nausea; constipation or diarrhea; fatigue, drowsiness, and insomnia; irritability, difficulty concentrating; anxiety; depressed mood; increased hunger and caloric intake; and increased desire for the taste of sweets.

Dealing with the physical component of addiction occurs through detoxification (detox). This is abstinence from the substance until the bloodstream is free from toxins.

Detox must always be accomplished under the care of a physician.

Detox can be accomplished relatively inexpensively over the course of several days under the care of a physician (biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2013/06/18/addiction-a-super-sized-issue).

Spiritual Component – Worship

The one who is addicted to a substance has bowed to that substance as master. The major issue with addiction worship. Who or what will you choose to worship? Will you bow to the substance or bow to the Lord?

❖ What do you bow to?

This is an issue from the beginning of the process when brokenness occurs.

As we bow before God in complete submission, we will be filled with the Spirit and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. If we find ourselves sinning and therefore bowed before a master other than the Lord, then we must repent and bow again before the Lord. As we repent and once again bow before the Lord as master, we will be filled with the Spirit and the life of Christ will flow through us. We will have the power to live a God-glorifying life and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit.

When a believer is submitted to God (Eph 5:18-6:9) and His Word (Col 3:16-4:1), the indwelling Holy Spirit fills (or controls) them and produces Christ-like character, heart motives, attitudes, words, and reactions. The believer in a right relationship with God will be filled with the Spirit. This is the usual, expected state of a believer.

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** ... ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Gal 5:16, 22-23

Living a consistently God-glorifying life is possible only through Spirit-filling. The Christian life is not lived in the believer's own strength. It is a life lived filled with the Spirit as the life of Christ flows through us.

❖ Are you consistently walking in the Spirit?

Spiritual Component – Renewing the Mind

There are many reasons people abuse substances. Each of the reasons focuses on self, to meeting their own perceived needs like escape, emotional pain relief, fun and pleasure, etc.

God addresses each of those reasons in His Word specifically as well as gives the process of putting off sin.

²⁰But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²²that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, ²⁴and **put on the new self**, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Eph 4:20-24

Paul spends the first 3 chapters of Ephesians detailing the blessings of salvation. Then in chapter 4, because of that salvation, believers are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”. Do not be like you were before, be something different. This process of change or sanctification (changing into Christ-likeness) is described as: 1) put off, 2) renew, and 3) put on.

“Lay aside” (“put off” in the ESV) means to cease doing what you were previously accustomed to doing; stop doing it; throw it off like filthy, foul smelling clothes; be done with it. It is a metaphor like having your clothes soaked with sewage and stripping them off and throwing them away and never getting them back. Like repentance from sin – we strip the sin off and never get it back.

❖ Do you through off sin with the intent to never pick it up again?

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” – our minds are made new as we fill it with the Word of God. It is not about covering up sin with something that smells good. It is about being transformed so that the sin is no longer a part of you. God’s Word is the tool that God’s Spirit uses to produce God honoring change in God’s child. Similarly in Romans:

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Rom 12:2

Where is your focus?

¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²**fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb 12:1-2

¹Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is**, seated at the right hand of God. 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 3:1-3

❖ Are you spending time in God’s Word? Where do you set your eyes/mind?

“Put on the new self” – Paul continues his clothing metaphor. The idea is "sinking into a garment". It is like sinking into a new coat when it is freezing outside. This is making a choice to obey, to do righteousness, to replace the sin that you “put off” with obedience.

❖ Is your purpose to glorify God through obedience?

Be Prepared

There are many principles that could be discussed regarding putting off the life-dominating sin of addiction. Two of note:

1. Consider your activities and purchases to ensure you are not doing something that will easily allow sin to be accomplished.

¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** Rom 13:14

2. Consider your friends so that you will not be led into sin.

³³**Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”** ³⁴Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame. 1 Cor 15:33-34

❖ **Are you careful of your provision and acquaintances when strive to put off sin?**

Concluding Thoughts

Drug addiction is not a disease. The Bible calls it sin for which each person who succumbs to it is accountable. Yet, God has given believers the resources to be free from the enslavement to a substance and glorify Him.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself: You are sad. You think that life isn't going well for you. You have experienced the deaths of several close relatives and friends over the last year, you are not doing well at work/school, and your peers are more successful in their career/school than you. You have never been a drinker, but you happen to have a little too much one evening and it really felt good. The pain of your emotional struggles goes away for that time. After some time, you find yourself getting drunk every night and then sneaking drinks during the work day. What precepts, principles, and promises from today's study can be encouraging to you?

Someone Else: Your family is friendly with your neighbors and you have tried to share the gospel with them on many occasions. One day you come to find that he/she has been arrested for DUI (not the first time). Over the back wall one day you strike up a conversation and they confide in you their difficulties including the consequences of their addiction. In thinking about bringing Biblical care to your friend, what is the first thing you need to know? How might you begin to care for him/her? What precepts, principles, and promises from today's study can be encouraging to him/her