

Addictions I

Introduction to “Practical Theology”

coupled with delayed deleterious effects (long-term costs).” [Wikipedia]

Two reasons for the series:

- (1) Bring the gospel to bear on real life – rather than it being just pretty slogans on Sundays.
- (2) Demonstrate that our deepest psychological problems finds its ultimate cure in the gospel.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is **the power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes

1 Corinthians 4:20

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in **power**.

James 1:21-22

²¹ Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

What is addiction?

“Addiction is the continued use of a mood altering substance or behavior despite adverse consequences, or a neurological impairment leading to such behaviors. Classic hallmarks of addiction include: impaired control over substances/behavior, preoccupation with substance/behavior, continued use despite consequences, and denial. Habits and patterns associated with addiction are typically characterized by immediate gratification (short-term reward),

Biblical understanding of addiction

Genesis 4:6-7

⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door**. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

1 Peter 5:6-9

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. **Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

John 8:31-34

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.**”

Romans 7:15-20

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. **For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.** ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, **but not the ability to carry it out.** ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want,

but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

At the root, addiction is idolatry

Exodus 20:3

You shall have no other gods before me.

Behind idolatry is demonic power

1 Corinthians 10:19-20

¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be **participants with demons**.

Mark 5:1-5

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones.

Ephesians 6:11-13

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the **schemes of the devil**. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, **against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Idolatry → Bondage → Death

Proverbs 5:1-5

¹ My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
incline your ear to my understanding,
² that you may keep discretion,
and your lips may guard knowledge.
³ For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil,
⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.
⁵ Her feet go down to **death**;
her steps follow the path to **Sheol**;

The gospel is the only hope

Greatest tragedy of addictions is that it destroys faith. Sin alienates us from God. And when we give in to habitual sins, we feel like we've failed God, that God can't possibly forgive us – again!

Psalms 103:8-14

⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
¹² **as far as the east is from the west,**
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, **he is faithful and just** to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Notes: Introduction to “Practical Theology”

The gospel is not just something we hear on Sundays and then it has no relevance to our lives throughout the week.

The gospel should bear fruit in our lives and everyday problems. The Bible speaks again and again of the gospel as a “power” not mere talk. It transforms the heart and evidences itself in the way we live. Otherwise the gospel is not real.

The other reason is that people have this notion that the gospel can help us deal with relatively easy problems of everyday life, but it can’t help us solve the deep chronic psychological problems. We need to turn to professionals and secular psychology. I’m not dismissing the value of professional counseling, but I think the gospel has a deeper understanding of these problems and ultimately a more lasting solution.

Introduction to Addictions

Common addictions: alcohol/drugs, pornography/sex, video games/internet (most relevant in our church)

Stories of addictions:

- (1) Read a story about a couple who let their newborn die from neglect b/c video game addiction
- (2) Friend who left his wife and children b/c of sex addiction

What is addiction? (can Bible account for addiction?)

We can all recognize this definition of addiction. In plain English, people who are addicted continue to do their destructive behavior, even as they know they’re messing up their lives. But they can’t seem to stop. They want to stop but they find themselves helpless before their addictions.

Modern psychology tends to attribute this helplessness as a disease to be treated rather than as sin.

Conservative Christians tend to look at addictions as only think of it in terms of willful sins and think mere willpower should be enough. The reason why people continue their addictive behaviors is because they’re just wicked.

Both views are partially correct but ultimately shallow. I believe the biblical view offers a far richer and more complex understand and therein offers us hope.

Biblical view of addiction

Genesis 4 – First time word “sin” is used in Bible. God describes sin as “crouching,” a word used to describe a **wild beast**, like a lion. This is a very interesting description. Because Cain is contemplating murdering his brother.

So is Cain in control or is sin this overpowering beast that render us powerless? The answer is that it is both.

If you welcome sin into your life, it starts out you doing the sin, but eventually, sin does you.

This is a very powerful paradigm to help us understand addiction.

The other thing this metaphor of “sin crouching” teaches us is that sin hides itself. There is a self-deception and denial that facilitates addiction. No one starts out wanting to become addicted. It just seems to happen. But the Bible gives us an understanding of why. Because sin always lures us and makes us believe we are in control until at least we’re addicted.

1 Peter 5 – We have the same paradigm in the NT. Peter talks about the need for vigilance and watchfulness. Why?

Because Satan seeks to destroy us. But if it’s Satan trying to kill us, why would we need to be watchful? Wouldn’t we know?

The deeply scary answer is that we won’t know. Because Satan disguises himself. He’s a lion seeking to overpower us.

There’s volition involved (that’s why we must be watchful), but there’s also an element of helplessness (Satan is a lion).

It’s both. This is a deep paradigm of doctrine of sin.

John 8 – We see the same thing here with Jesus. Jesus talks about the freedom of the gospel. This confuses people. But we're already free. Jesus says, "no, you're not – you're slaves." Sin is slavery. We are slaves.

This is so deep. It teaches us that all of us suffer from addiction to some degree. We're all helpless and out of control. We all experience that sense of deep regret and yet we find ourselves going back to the same old sins.

Will power is not enough. This is why the good news of Christianity is that the gospel is a power. It's not just words. It saves us from the enslavement of sin.

Romans 7 – Paul gives us a great description of slavery to sin. He hates his sin but finds himself doing things against his own will. This is a great description of addiction. It's as if you're at war with yourself. Part of you hates it; part of you loves it. You want to stop, but you can't. The reason is because sin is slavery. It's not just you doing sin, but sin doing you.

Heart (paradox)

voluntary, conscious sin
(self-conscious disobedience)

*If you only look at this,
underestimate power of sin;
not a matter of simple will power*

involuntary addiction
(enslaved)

*If only look at this,
lose all responsibility;
feel hopeless*

Addiction is idolatry

At the root, addiction is looking to some created thing as the ultimate thing. It's looking to good feelings (drunkenness), power (video games), or sense of connection (pornography) to be what only God can be.

It's making your own desires Lord when God alone should be Lord.

Ultimately, addiction comes down to the question: do you love God more or your desires more?

Exodus 20 – this is a violation of the First Commandment, to have no other gods.

Behind idolatry is demonic power

Reason why idolatry leads to addiction/slavery is because behind idolatry is demonic power. This is something modern people are uncomfortable with. We dismiss ideas of the devil and demon-possession as outdated and ridiculous. But the biblical view gives us a powerful understanding of why sin has such a grip on us and why the world is so profoundly broken.

There's an evil force behind sin and that evil force is Satan. Without understanding the role of Satan in the world, we can make little sense of systemic evil and the pervasive problems we see in the world.

1 Corinthians 10 – Paul says when you worship idols, you are really participating with demons. This participation with demons is not voluntary or conscious – you think you're just worshipping your idol.

But in reality, you are giving yourself over to Satan.

Mark 5 – Once you ally yourself with Satan, it starts out with you feeling in control, but eventually, Satan has enslaved you and you do things you never would have imagined doing before.

Illustration – Chronicles of Narnia. Edmund wants Turkish Delights from White Witch. It starts out with his desires and promise of ruling Narnia. But in the end, Edmund is shocked to discover that he becomes her slave and he no longer has access to the delicious Turkish Delights.

Ephesians 6 – Bible continually reminds us that the Christian life is not just avoiding sin, but it's a fight to the death.

In Satan, we have an adversary who wants to dominate us and destroy us. So many of us are asleep and we don't realize this. We need to wake up and realize we're in a cosmic battle.

Idolatry → Bondage → Death

The pattern is idolatry inevitably leads to bondage/enslavement. Bondage, then, leads to death.

Addiction is serious business because it leads us down into hell.

Proverbs 5 – warning that the lure and attraction of sin will inevitably lead to death. It starts out pleasant and enjoyable, but eventually you stop having fun and you're trapped. Very scary vision of sin. Too often, we as Christians take sin lightly. We think we can stop sinning anytime we want. This is a deeply naïve view. Don't trifle with sin.

Hope of the gospel

We need an outside power to rescue us. This is the gospel. We'll talk much more extensively about how gospel rescues us from addiction next week, but I wanted to end on this simple reflection.

The greatest tragedy of addiction is that it destroys our faith and separates us from God. We feel like when we give in to habitual sins, we've failed God and that God can't possibly forgive us again.

We need to be reminded of the gospel. The gospel is not that we are saved by our moral effort. We are saved because the righteousness of Christ covers us and therefore God looks at us with delight because of Christ. In Christ, God cannot love us more (because of our goodness) nor can he love us less (because of our sins) than he already loves us in Christ.

We need to deeply drink this truth in.

Psalm 103 – Our sins are forever taken away from us. One image is particularly arresting. God is our father. This is a powerful image. When we sin, God is hurt and disappointed as a father. But as a father, that doesn't not mean he will stop loving us or reject us. We are his children. He will love us and pursue us forever.

1 John 1:9 – it's not that God is saying, "okay, I feel pity for you and just because you seem really sincere in your repentance, I'll forgive you. I'll show mercy." No, 1 John tells us God forgives us because it is just to do so. He is obligated by the demands of justice, because he cannot punish for sin twice.

Our salvation is rock-solid. There is nothing we can do to "un-earn" our salvation. We must remind ourselves of us every day. God's attitude towards us is not dependent on our relative holiness for the day. It depends on Christ's saving work.