

Addictions II

Fighting addiction – Introduction

1 Corinthians 10:13-14

¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. **God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability**, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Often, addiction feels impossible to resist. This is part of the power of addiction – that it is hopeless to resist and that we are helpless before our addictions. This is the lie of Satan. The gospel is that God is faithful and gives us the strength to resist. But we must fight. How?

Christian life is marked by self-control

Luke 9:23

If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself** and take up his cross daily and follow me.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

³For this is **the will of God, your sanctification**: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to **control his own body in holiness and honor**, ⁵**not in the passion of lust** like the Gentiles who do not know God.

1 Peter 1:13-16

¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being **sober-minded**, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴As obedient children, **do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance**, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also **be holy in all your conduct**, ¹⁶since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²**training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Self-control is being captivated by a greater beauty

Ephesians 5:18

And do not get **drunk with wine**, for that is debauchery, but be **filled with the Spirit**.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²**looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Philippians 4:8

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Remind yourself addiction leads to death

Proverbs 23:29 – 35

²⁹Who has woe? Who has sorrow?

Who has strife? Who has complaining?

Who has wounds without cause?

Who has redness of eyes?

³⁰Those who tarry long over wine;
those who go to try mixed wine.

³¹Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup
and goes down smoothly.

³²In the end it bites like a serpent
and stings like an adder.

³³Your eyes will see strange things,
and your heart utter perverse things.

³⁴You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.

³⁵“They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt;
they beat me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake?

I must have another drink.”

Proverbs 23:20-21

²⁰ Be not among drunkards

or among gluttonous eaters of meat,

²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will **come to poverty**,
and slumber will clothe them with rags.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a **mock**er, strong drink a **br**wler,
and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Ephesians 4:17-22

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become **callous** and have **given themselves up to sensuality**, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to **your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires...**

Take violent measures against your addiction

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist the devil**, and **he will flee from you**.

Matthew 5:27-30

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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, **tear it out and throw it away**. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, **cut it off and throw it away**. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Proverbs 25:28

A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left **without walls**.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises **self-control** in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But **I discipline my body and keep it under control**, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

You can't do it without Christian community!

Romans 13:13 - 14

¹³ **Let us** walk properly as **in the daytime**, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires**.

Hebrews 3:13

But **exhort one another every day**, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the **deceitfulness of sin**.

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And **let us consider how to stir up one another** to love and good works, ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

1 Corinthians 12:26-27

²⁶ **If one member suffers, all suffer together**; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The role of the church in fighting addictions

Galatians 6:1-2

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should **restore him in a spirit of gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² **Bear one another's burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Notes: Fighting Addiction – Introduction

Read italics. The gospel tells us that the fight against addiction is not impossible. With the help of God, we can defeat addictions. This is the hope offered by the gospel.

1 Corinthians 10 – the Bible explicitly tells us that we are never tempted beyond our ability to resist. It's never fated that we will succumb to sin. There is always an escape. The goal of today's lesson is to marshal all the resources the Bible gives us to fight temptation.

This doesn't mean we will completely be free from sin or free from addictions.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (**1 John 1:8**)

The gospel gives us hope that we can fight addiction and be free from power of sin.

We must not give up. We must fight! There is hope!!

Christian life is marked by self-control

The problem of addiction is the problem of self-control. The Bible repeatedly tells us that self-control is essential to the Christian life. If you look at **Galatians 5:23**, Paul lists self-control as a fruit of the Spirit. Notice that it's singular "fruit." Meaning it's not optional. You must have self-control. This is an inevitable fruit of the Spirit-filled Christian life.

Luke 9 – Jesus tells us that self-denial is the essence of following him. Addictions is saying "yes" to our desires.

Godly self-control is saying "no" to our desires. To be a Christian is to subordinate all things to Christ.

People think, "if I have these desires, I should listen to them." But our desires are broken. They deceive us.

1 Thessalonians 4 – sanctification is to control our body's desires. Verse 5 has a very interesting word, "passion of lust."

The word passion is "*epithumia*," a word Paul often uses to describe sin, which means "over-desire."

Addictions is an over-desire. It's not wrong to desire and want things. But our desires should be controlled and reasonable.

The reason behind our over-desires is ultimately idolatry – we look to them to be for us what only God can be.

1 Peter 1 – "sober-minded" is a synonym of "self-control." Literally, "be sober in your thoughts." Be wise and prudent and temperate. And again, Christian self-control is contrasted with pagan "passions" (same word: *epithumia*). Don't be conformed.

In this sense, the problem of addictions is really the universal problem of sin. And the way the Bible defines sin is not just doing "bad things," but desires that are out-of-control. Desires that enslave and ruin you because you're trying to squeeze meaning and happiness out of something that is finite and temporary.

In this sense, we all struggle with addiction. And holiness is defined as combatting our addictive desires. Holiness is not just doing "good things," but having control over our desires. Having Christ as lord, rather than our desires being lord.

Titus 2 – again, sin is defined as "worldly passions" (same word: *epithumia*) and godliness is defined as "self-control."

This is a good transition because Paul directs us to the "hope of the appearing of Jesus."

Self-control is being captivated by a greater beauty

The Bible never tells us to exercise self-control as a matter of will-power. "I will not be addicted!" For those of you who struggle with addiction, you know that will-power only works for awhile, but it has no staying power.

The gospel gives us a greater power. The reason why we are enslaved and addicted is because of our desires.

So we need a greater desire to draw us away from the carnal desires.

Ephesians 5 – This is a really interesting verse. Paul talks about the classic addiction in the Bible, alcoholism.

He calls drunkenness "debauchery," which means excessive indulgence in pleasures.

But notice his solution. He doesn't say, "just abstain! Just walk away and avoid alcohol." He says, "be filled with the Spirit."

Rather than being filled and controlled by alcohol, be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Think through the logic of what Paul is saying. He's saying the Spirit does something similar to alcohol (power that controls your life), and for the Christian, the attraction is not drunkenness but Spirit-filledness! In other words, it's not avoid alcohol and just be sober. But avoid alcohol because there's something so much better – being Spirit-filled! Do you see?

The Christian life is not abstention, but rather being captivated by a greater desire, a greater joy and a greater consolation. Alcohol is just a cheap imitation of the real thing – which is life in Christ.

Hebrews 12 – I love the way the writer of Hebrews describes sin. It “clings to us so closely.” Very realistic. Sin is so hard to fight and avoid. What’s the solution? Will-power? Moral determination? No! We are to “look to Jesus.”

And that word “look” is really a weak translation. Other translations is “fix our eyes.” It means to train your eyes and focus intently on something – *stare really hard*. We’re not supposed to just take a quick glance at Jesus. We’re to fix our eyes on Jesus. That’s the only hope for addictions. We need to be so overwhelmed and captivated by the beauty of Jesus dying on the cross for us, that all other desires fade away in his sight. And the only way we can get there is that we “fix our eyes.”

What does it practically mean to “fix our eyes” on Jesus? How do we practically do that?

Only by reading the Word, through prayer and fellowship – spiritual disciplines. To the degree you are serious about the spiritual disciplines, to that degree you are fixing your eyes on Jesus.

Philippians 4 – The Christian life is training our minds to love God and love beauty. It’s a training. It’s a habit of the mind.

Remind yourself addiction leads to death

If “fixing our eyes on Jesus” is the positive aspect of fighting addictions. This is the negative aspect.

We should also constantly remind ourselves of how destructive and repulsive and hateful our sins are.

Proverbs 23 – wonderfully vivid and accurate description of an alcoholic. What are some of the negatives of being a drunk?

- sorrow, strife with friends, physical ailments, delusions, callousness, desensitized to ruin, insatiable thirst for more, etc.
- poverty (**Prov. 23:20-21**)
- loss of friends and relationships (**Prov. 20:1**)

You can do this with all addictions – for example pornography:

There is this myth out there that pornography is harmless. But there’s a mountain of research out there on the negative effects. Pornography greatly distorts and twists your understanding of real sex. It greatly decreases your desire for intimacy with your wife. It heightens your need for sexual experience. It serves as a gateway drug to prostitution, adultery, etc. Pornography is not harmless but does indescribable damage to your life, your relationship with your future wife, and your satisfaction with marital sex. Pornography diminishes our joy in the real thing.

Ephesians 4 – Paul gives us a great description of the downsides of sin/addiction. Sin makes us “callous.”

Callous means to lose all feelings. Think about that. We’re addicted to something because of the pleasure it gives us.

But all addictions eventually, inevitably lead to a lessening of pleasure and dulling of our senses.

In psychology, it’s call “adaptation.” We develop a tolerance.

“given themselves up to sensuality” – picture of people who have handed over their lives to the pursuit of pleasure and sin.

“corrupt through deceitful desires” – our sins *lie* to us. Addiction, by its very nature, hides itself and we deceive ourselves.

Take violent measures against your addiction

We can’t be passive with our sins/addictions. We need to take action. We’re in a fight for our lives.

James 4 – what great hope this verse gives us. If we submit to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us.

It’s not hopeless! We can say “no” to our addictions and when we say “no,” the power of the addiction lessens.

Matthew 5 – Jesus is ruthless with sin. He says, “don’t you realize sin will kill you? Don’t you realize it’s sending you to hell?”

Therefore, do whatever it takes to fight it. If it’s your right eye, gouge it out. If it’s your right hand, cut it off. Wow!

Do we have this attitude towards the sinful habits of our lives. Are we willing to take radical measures against it?

What are some radical steps you can take to rid yourself of addictive sins? What are the triggers to your addiction?

Are you willing to ruthlessly eliminate the triggers in your life?

Proverbs 25 – great image of addiction. It's like a city without walls. It is to be defenseless against any passing temptation. To fight addictions is to slowly build up the walls again, to build up protections and spiritual disciplines.

1 Corinthians 9 – another great image of Christian life. It's like competing in a race. Olympic athletes have a fanatical training regimen and exercise incredible discipline. They do it for a gold medal. But we train our bodies and discipline our lives for a much greater goal – eternal life.

You can't do it without Christian community!

This is *vital*. We need Christian community to battle our addictions.

Romans 13 – notice Paul decries drunkenness, sensuality, but he says we are to avoid these things together as a community. He says, “let us walk properly in the daytime.” Fighting addictions cannot be a solo effort. It is impossible and you will fail. The Christian life was meant to be lived together with others, each person helping the other. Corporate holiness.

Notice also the metaphor of walking in the daylight. One of the keys to fighting addiction is transparency and openness before others. What allows addictions to fester and grow is secrecy, privacy and hiddenness. But if you live your life in community, opening up your life to the scrutiny of friends and brothers/sisters in Christ, they will hold you accountable.

This is the only way to combat the self-deception of addiction/sin. How will you know if you truly are addicted?

The very nature of addiction is that you won't. You need the perspective of community.

Hebrews 3 – again, notice that sin deceives us. The solution is mutual encouragement in the church.

We need to exhort one another daily. Exhort means to advise, counsel, speak truth to. And this needs to happen all the time. Hebrews says, “daily.” It can't just be once a week on Sundays. But we need small groups, friendships throughout the week, hanging out with each other.

Hebrews 10 – the purpose of Christian community is not to just hang out and have fun. But to “stir up one another” to love and good works. Do you have that perspective? Do you see the reason for Christian community as stirring each other up. Pushing each other towards godliness and a deeper faith in Christ. We are all responsible for each other. We are all bound to one another. Do not neglect meeting together!

1 Corinthians 12 – modern attitude is individualism. What people do is their own business and as long as it doesn't affect you, it's not your problem. The gospel goes completely against this. We are one body. We are all organically linked together. If someone is suffering addiction, it's not just their problem, it's everyone's problem. We're all in this together.

We need to be bold and speak the truth in love when a brother or sister is in sin. It might hurt the relationship. They might get mad at us. But a true friend will wound you, but an enemy will cover you with kisses. If we really care for and love each other, we will interject ourselves into each other's lives. And it goes both ways. We must be open to criticism. Sometimes our Christian friends will be wrong. But we must never punish them for speaking into our lives. We must welcome it and invite it.

The role of the church in fighting addictions

Galatians 6 – This is one of the chief roles of the church. To keep each other accountable and restore one another from sin. Paul describes it as, “bearing each other's burdens.” If someone is carrying a sack that is too heavy, we don't shrug our shoulders and say, “oh well.” We come alongside and help them. This is the very meaning of church.

And notice how we are to do it – “in a spirit of gentleness.” We must do it with humility and love.

Never with a superior or prideful attitude. We are all sinners, all addicts, all broken. Each of us are sinners helping other sinners.