

The Gospel and Addiction

Introduction

- how does Christianity account for mental health illness?
- the problem of addiction

The power 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 5:8

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

John 8:34

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

Romans 7:15, 17

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.

The power of 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

A word of hope

1 Corinthians 10:13-14

¹³ No 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. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

The Christian life is self-control

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Titus 2:11-12

¹¹ For 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.

Where does Christian self-control come from?

Ephesians 5:18

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

Acts 2

⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit”?

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, 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.

How are we “filled with the Spirit”?

Ephesians 5:18-21

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Vital role of 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.

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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.

Notes

Introduction

- what is mental health illness? (20%; 4% severe; 8% substance)
- analogy to physical illness – breakdown of mind and psychology that results in destructive behaviors and thoughts, destroys relationships
- range from very severe: schizophrenia and bipolar disorder to more common-place, but still very serious: depression, addiction
- traditional understanding – shameful, weakness of will, moral fault, primarily a lack of willpower and strength | *moral category*
- modern approach (take away stigma) – medical problem (genetics, neurological causes), like heart disease or diabetes | *medical category*
 - in particular, presents challenge to Christianity

How does Christianity account for mental health illnesses?

- gives us a far deeper understanding than either traditional or modern
 - both explanations have part of the truth | both dynamics at play
 - but ultimately shallow and reductionistic

Answer: 2 parts

- comprehensiveness of the Fall
 - plunged world into sin and death | everything became broken
 - no direct correlation between sin and brokenness (ex., John 9)
- in Bible, mind and body are profoundly connected
 - lot of people think of body as an outer shell, discard in heaven
 - Bible promises bodily resurrection into physical Earth
 - human beings are souls and bodies, both integrated together
 - therefore, moral decisions affect body, and body affect our souls

Psalm 38:3

There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones because of my sin.

What is addiction?

- a pattern of destructive, *compulsive behavior*, unable to be controlled
- cycle of regret and resolve, then withdrawal, short-term gratification, then destruction, devastation for friends and family | denial of severity
- substance abuse (chemical) – alcoholism, drug addiction
- behavioral – gambling, sex & pornography, video game, eating disorders

Bible explains addiction extremely well – power of addiction

Genesis 4

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.”

First time word “sin” used in Bible – described as “crouching”

- word used to describe a wild beast, like a lion
- Cain contemplating murdering his brother

So is Cain in control? (sin is act of will)

- or sin an overpowering beast renders us powerless? (sin is power)
- answer: both
 - sin both something that you do, moral decision you make
 - and, it’s a power over you, so that sin has dominion over you

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Same imagery of prowling lion

- told to be watchful and vigilant – why?
- because Satan’s attack is stealthy | “crouching” means hidden

No one starts out saying – “I want to be addicted”

- addiction begins with sin | begins with abusing God’s good gifts
- initially, feels satisfying and pleasurable | you feel in control
- but eventually, addiction sets in and you lose control – Satan has you
- sin is a crouching lion – it seems safe and harmless, until kills you

“Be sober-minded”

- literally: “take little to no wine”
- be sober, clear-headed, self-controlled, temperate in mind
- drunkenness/addiction takes away ability think clearly, perceive danger

John 8:34

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

Sin is not a pure act of the will

- but sin is enslavement | sin is terrible power over sinner
- a slave is under cruel control of taskmaster – compulsion and misery

Compassion for addiction

- addiction produces shockwaves of hurt for friends and family
- anger and blame are very normal reactions – b/c being harmed
- but if understand Bible, realize alcoholics and addicts can’t stop
- not a matter of simple willpower | can’t make resolution and change

Romans 7:15

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Paul hates his sin | doesn’t want to do it, and yet he sins

- great description of addiction – as if you’re *at war with yourself*
- part of you hates it; but part of you loves it
- you want to stop; but you can’t stop

Paradox of heart

voluntary, conscious sin

self-conscious disobedience

involuntary addiction

enslavement

All of us, to varying degrees, are addicted to sin

- not just some sins, but all sin is slavery
- all helpless and out of control | experience regret, yet compulsion

The Power of 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

If sin/addiction is a power over us, we need *outside power* to rescue us

- this is gospel | gospel is a power
- gospel is not good advice, not self-help instructions, do-it-yourself

A word of hope

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.

The fight against addiction is not impossible or hopeless

- never fated that succumb to sin – but always escape
- doesn’t not mean completely free from sin/addiction
- but gospel gives us hope | don’t give up, fight!

The Christian life is self-control

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Addiction is compulsively saying “yes” to our desires

- gospel-changed life is learning to say “no” to our desires | self-control
- “worldly passions” – *epithumia* | literally, “over-desire”
- sin is not desiring evil things, but desiring good things excessively
- addiction is over-desire; desire without restraint and uncontrolled

Where does Christian self-control come from?

- not as an act of will power | doesn’t work, addiction too strong
- not a volitional, rational decision you make
- godly self-control comes from being overtaken by a superior power

Ephesians 5:18

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Acts 2

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Alcoholism is the classic addiction in the Bible

- but applies to all addictions
- describes as “debauchery,” means excessive indulgence in pleasure

So what is the solution to alcoholism/addiction?

- Paul doesn’t say, “just abstain! Just walk away and avoid alcohol.”
- he says, “be filled with the Spirit”
 - instead of being filled and controlled by alcohol,
 - be filled and controlled by the Spirit

Notice parallel b/w drunkenness and being “filled with the Spirit”

- drunkenness gives an artificial joy and courage | but it’s fake
- Spirit gives you true joy, and true courage
- rather than turn to counterfeit joy, seek true joy

The Christian approach to addiction isn’t abstention or willpower

- but to give yourself over to the greater power of the Spirit
- to find a greater master than sin to rule your life
- to be so overwhelmed and captivated and controlled by Spirit

What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit”?

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To be filled with the Spirit is to look at Jesus

- NIV translation, “fix our eyes on Jesus”
- stare intently | not just a quick glance
- but to stare and stare, until beauty of Jesus dying on cross is so real, until his love and power is so vivid, that all other desires fade away

How do we do that?

Ephesians 5:18-21

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Colossians 3:16

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To be “filled with the Spirit” is:

- to be filled with Christ through ordinary means of grace
 - singing gospel songs: pounding gospel truths home into heart
 - giving thanks: cultivating a heart of Godward gratitude and praise
 - studying the word of God: notice Spirit of Christ is in the Word
 - submitting to one another: living in deep community
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Vital role of Christian community

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Notice we are to “walk in the light”

- key to addiction is transparency and openness to trusted friends
- what allows addiction to grow is secrecy, privacy and hiddenness
- but living in community, you invite accountability into your life

Community must be intentional and purposeful

- can’t just be friends hanging out together
- notice we are to “stir up one another”
- we have to lovingly push each other, actively encourage each other

Notice that “not walking in drunkenness” is plural

- we do it together in community