



## The Nature of Addiction

**Key Passage:** *Romans 8*

*Addiction* is an elusive term. At the heart of the matter, we all understand where addiction can lead. However, in the practical usage of the term, we don't necessarily understand where the addiction begins. Does it begin with the first drink? Does it begin with the third pornographic picture? Does it begin with the idea that pops into our minds; "I'll have a second dessert. . . just for tonight?"

In addition, when does the sin begin that causes the addiction? Or, does the addiction cause the sin? In a review of the book, *Sober Mercies*, Laura Leonard writes, "Substance abuse is a physical manifestation of a spiritual addiction to sin. And everyone, it turns out, is an addict." We are all "addicted" to sin.

The *Mirriam-Webster* dictionary defines addiction as "a strong and

harmful need to regularly have something (such as a drug) or do something (such as gamble)." *Dictionary.com* goes a step further, using this definition: "The state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma."

How do Christians define addiction? How do addiction and faith live together in the same person? Does sin cause addiction? Does addiction cause sin? These, and many other questions have been the subject of articles and debates for many years.

### Sin Causing Addiction

Does everyone have some kind of addiction? Probably. Addiction has been around as long as sin has been around. If you think about the old biblical words for addictions, drunkenness, gluttony, perversion, and many others, you soon realize that addictions have plagued the human race since the first sin caused Adam and Eve to be removed from the perfection of the Garden of Eden.

Anytime we let the desire or need to do one thing control us, even when we know we need to be doing other things, we are on the verge of addiction (or already addicted). So, what are my greatest sins? Maybe the question should be, what are my addictions?

I am a reader. While I try to be discerning in choosing authors that don't disparage my morals and Christianity, sometimes, I still choose to read instead of doing my work. I choose to read instead of facing my problems and praying about them. Sometimes, I choose to read over fellowshiping with other believers.

When I do the things I want to do over those things that are needful or best, I have sinned. There is no sin and shame in reading; there is sin and shame when I am so caught up in the story that I neglect those things that I need to do.

When does the addiction begin? Sometimes it begins with the first word of the book. Sometimes I can't tell where it began, but I suddenly look up from the last sentence and look around me: my house is a mess, there are people I need to call, things I need to do, and now I only have a

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short amount of time in which to do them.

In this illustration of an addiction that is real but not destructive to human life, I have identified lack of self-control as the sin that causes this problem in my life. What about those addictions that are much, much bigger and more destructive? Think about the mother who abuses prescription drugs and neglects her children. Think about the father who comes home drunk and beats his family. These are real stories of addiction, and they happen in typical families.

Read Romans 8:1-8. Why are those of us who know Christ not condemned for our sins (verse 1)? Does that mean we are free to sin?

Describe how the law of sin and death is trumped by the law of the Spirit of life given by Jesus (verse 2).

Describe the differences in a life controlled by a sinful nature and a life controlled by Christ (verse 5)?

### **Addiction Leads to Sin**

In many instances, addiction leads to more sin. Think of the person who is a drug abuser and then begins stealing to support the habit. What about that person who becomes addicted to pornography and then lashes out to others in anger? Pornography portrays people as objects, and if people are objects then we can justify treating them badly.

We have heard the testimony of person after person, whether on the witness stand or in the news, or in the church say, "I don't know why I did that. I was high, I was drunk, or I was not paying attention because I needed a fix." Just as sin is apt to do, once we give in to it, it desensitizes our hearts and minds. We do not think twice about participating in things we never would have dreamed of participating in a year before or maybe even a week earlier.

## Is There Hope?

God's mercy and grace is the only remedy for sin, and for that matter, addiction. It is because of His grace that each time we sin we are not caught up further and further into sin. It is because of His mercy we do not receive the just punishment for sin.

Every person sins. Recently, I heard someone say, "As long as there are slow drivers in the left lane, I will always have trouble with sin." Temptation to sin either sneaks up or comes in like a roaring lion, but it is no secret that God's people are tempted to sin. Sin is real, and isn't likely to go away soon, even though we strive to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 11:45).

Does each person become addicted to each sin? If that were the case, we would be in very deep trouble. No, we don't become addicted to a new thing each time we sin. However, giving in to temptation opens the door a little wider for addiction to gain a foothold, and this is why it is imperative to choose to ask for forgiveness and cleansing on a daily basis.

The Apostle Paul struggled with sin (1 Corinthians 9:27). Sin, and therefore the tendency toward addiction, is real, and we should put on the whole of God's armor in order to avoid it.

Read Romans 8:9-15. From whom does the Christian receive his or her power?

How strong is that power (verse 9-11)?

Sin controls many people. What is it that frees us from this type of control in our lives (verse 13)?

## What Can We Do?

As we face the addictions prevalent in our society, in our lives, and yes, in the lives of the people in our churches, how do we deal with them? More importantly, how do we deal with ourselves, or with friends caught up in the myriad of addictions?

- **Romans 8:1-17 is an important passage in the lives of Christians.**

It reminds us that when we live in the power of the Spirit, we can be free from the power of sin in our lives. It is amazing that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to me. I try to live in that power; I strive to remind myself of that power when temptation threatens or trouble comes; but it is so easy to rely on ourselves that we forget

from whom our power comes. We forget that the Spirit, who lives in the believer, is able and willing to help us resist temptation and bring us through addictions.

- **Prayer is the next plan of attack.**

It is easy to say, "I'll pray for you" or even, "I'll pray about this in my life" and leave it there.

However, the ongoing prayers of the committed Christian will produce results (James 5:16).

- **Christian 12-Step Programs.**

Many people have been through Alcoholics Anonymous, and it has helped them tremendously. However, this program encourages people to call on a "higher power" instead of naming that higher power.

That is not to say we shouldn't encourage people to stay involved in AA and its many affiliate programs, but, there are also some amazing Christian 12-step programs that have come to the forefront in recent years. In these programs, God is acknowledged, and prayers are made to Him.

Encourage people to enter these programs. Going a step further, sponsor one in your church.

You might consider these:

<http://www.celebraterecovery.com/>

<http://www.nacr.org/>

<http://www.blazinggrace.org/><http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com/>

[www.settingcaptivesfree.com/](http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com/)

- **Accountability with friends.**

Do not hide the addiction but let others know of your need for healing and freedom from the sin that underlies the addiction. Remove pride and let others see the real you. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16) and gain their help in the fight.

- **Realize that addictions and the inclination to sin are bigger than you.**

Claim the power that God gives. His Spirit, the same that raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. That same power lives in you. Therefore, sin, addiction, and self do not have to control. You are not obligated to do what your body tells you to do. It takes work, but you can overcome.

Read Romans 8:15-17. What kind of spirit did we have before Christ?

What kind of Spirit do we have after receiving Christ (verse 15)?

In whose family do we now live (verse 16-17)?

How does this family help us avoid sin and addiction?

About three-and-a-half years ago, our lives took a drastic turn for the worse. I did no growing spiritually during that time, and I held on to my faith only because of a firm foundation that had been built over the years and the prayers of others. It was during this time that my propensity for addiction became real.

My addictions did not cause the hurt and destruction that many addictions cause, but they were real. I played games on my phone and computer for hours instead of doing my work. I finally had to take the games off these conveniences to conquer the habit. Then I turned to reading. I would read book after book for days, only stopping when I was at

a deadline, or I had to go somewhere. I finally decided to take a sabbatical from books for a while. I only read the Bible, or Bible study books, or books that helped me do my job. After about a year, God gave me permission to read for fun again.

Again, these probably seem minor to you who struggle with alcoholism, gambling, pornography, perversion, drug abuse, or some other form of addiction in yourself or in your family. But we have an amazing God who is real in our lives. Take Him at His word and begin the work of conquering instead of succumbing.

— Anonymous

# CONSEQUENCES

— Anonymous

The mom really didn't feel well. Everything hurt. Her back. Her legs. How was she to get anything done if everything hurt all the time? She decided to take one more pill. After all, the doctor prescribed them for her pain...and she was definitely in pain.

She went to the medicine cabinet and picked up the bottle. When she looked in, those little wonders were almost gone. She couldn't afford to be without them. A trip to the pharmacy would fix that. As she took the pill and pocketed the bottle, she realized her husband was getting suspicious. She forgot the most mundane, everyday things. When it happened, he looked at her strangely. That day, she added too much salt to the soup. She couldn't remember for sure, so she must have added again and again. That certainly had him worried because, really, she was a good cook.

And what did it matter if the pills also helped her forget the other kind of

pain...the guilt; the depression after having loved a child who walked away and didn't look back; the idea that just maybe, she wasn't good enough to merit the love of her husband and her children.

When she brought the bottle home, she hid it in the garage behind the boxes of extra light bulbs. "Let him count the ones in the medicine cabinet," she thought. I can get to these any time I need.

However, when he said she had to leave because she was taking too many pills, she knew he had seen through her attempts to disguise the problem. As she left, they were all crying... and he told her she could come back when she was clean and sober, no longer dependent on the pills. Was she strong enough to do that? Would she be able to come home?

• Fact: Addiction to prescription pain pills is on the rise in the United States. Addiction to pills brings depression, which the high

from the pills seems to help for a while. Until they wear off again. The physical pain is also gone for a little while, but it takes more and more pills to make the pain stay gone. Addiction to prescription pain pills leads to loneliness, divorce, estrangement from family and friends, and even death.

The boy had lived with it a long time. It was insidious, this desire. It started when he was young and the Internet was new. Those little pictures that popped up from time to time got his attention, and the desire to see them again did not let go. Even after his dad found one he had mistakenly left open. He knew his dad was right; he shouldn't see those. But how could he help it?

He didn't know that the depression that stayed with him as he grew to manhood was caused by the pictures. He thought no one knew. But the continual conviction proved that God knew.

His attitudes were bad, and he couldn't figure out why. His family loved him—he knew they did. Somehow, their love couldn't reach him.

One day, when the loneliness was acute, he clicked the next one. It was a place he knew he shouldn't go. The girls in the picture were younger. They weren't

little kids, but they were younger, and he was enticed.

Until the day the FBI showed up and took his computer. And his bright future diminished as he faced a prison sentence brought on by his addiction to pornography.

• **Fact:** The advent of the Internet to the general population pushed the pornography industry to a new level. All of a sudden, pictures were easily available, and not only young men became addicted. Men of all ages, and even women are addicted to Internet pornography. It causes a disconnect in how a person relates to the world outside the computer: loneliness, depression, and addiction to alcohol, drugs, and/or pills. A family can be torn apart and careers ruined by this addiction, not to mention the pain of those posing or being forced to pose for the pictures and videos.

Just one more drink. That will make the pain stop. The pain of remembering a father who seemed to hate her and a mother who spent all her time shopping, not paying attention to her own daughter's needs.

She remembered going to school in dirty clothes, because no one had seen fit to do the laundry. She remembered the mother/daughter events at school that her mother couldn't be both-




ered with. She remembered the promises made by her father but never kept.

This drink, it helped her forget. No matter that she would be sick all tomorrow. No matter that she looked a mess. All that mattered was forgetting.

As she got in the car, she also forgot how cloudy her brain was; she forgot that she couldn't quite make her hands work, and her feet seemed to have a mind of their own. But as soon as she hit the car with the little boy in the back seat, she remembered. And the pain from the past met the pain of the present when she went to prison for vehicular manslaughter.

• **Fact:** Alcoholism in the United States is soaring. Alcoholics think they can stop drinking any time they want. They believe they are in charge when really the drink is. Alcoholism also causes depression, fear, and estrangement from family and at the extreme, harm to themselves and/or others.



**Addictions happen because we give in to temptation. One sin leads to another, and the pattern is set. It doesn't matter what the temptation is, it can lead to us doing that thing, that sin, again and again. Scripture reminds us to keep our way pure, to follow the light of life, to let the Lord shepherd us. When we stray from those precepts, we open ourselves to sin. We open ourselves to addiction.**

*“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”*

*— Ephesians 5:15-17*