

What Is Your Addiction?

by Lonnie Hendrix

International News Winter 2010

For many of us, an image of a drunkard or junkie comes to mind when the word “**addiction**” is mentioned, but the term suggests a phenomenon which encompasses a much broader range of activities than abuse of alcohol or drugs. This reality was brought home to me by an intensive study of the phenomenon, prompted by the addictions of two members of my extended family to drugs. In trying to understand their disease, I came to see that we are all susceptible to this disease. In fact, our very nature is prone to developing addictions of many different kinds and intensities, and the inability of most of us to see or accept this reality is a symptom of the disease!

After reviewing a great deal of literature on the subject, it quickly became apparent to me that a precise definition for the term “addiction” is difficult, even for the professionals who are most knowledgeable about it. However, **the two components of addiction** that appear to be almost universally agreed upon are:

- 1) Loss of control over the use of some substance or behavior, and**
- 2) Persisting in that use or behavior even in the face of negative consequences.**

Moreover, it is clear from reviewing what the professionals have to say about addiction that people engage in the behavior to experience pleasure or enjoyment, to escape from reality or problems, and/or to fill a void or replace something that is missing in their lives.

Hence, we begin to see that the phenomenon of addiction has a much wider application than a casual glance would suggest. Most professionals now realize that people are susceptible to a whole host of addictions: **alcohol, drugs, caffeine, nicotine, pathological gambling, sex, shopping, eating, dieting, bodybuilding, sports, work (workaholism), computer games, Internet, television, pornography, etc.** In fact, anything that so captivates our attention and consumes our energy and resources to the effective exclusion of other substances or activities could be described as an addiction. Now do you begin to understand why this article was entitled “What is Your Addiction?”

Another prominent feature of the phenomenon is the propensity for those of us who are addicted to something to **deny the reality of the problem**. The professionals involved in treating this disease frequently hear things like, “I can quit or stop whenever I want to quit or stop”—“I’m only doing this to escape the nagging and fighting at home”—“This is just harmless recreation; I’m not hurting anyone by engaging in this behavior,” etc. Do any of these statements sound familiar to you? They are called **denial**. They fly in the face of the reality of the enslavement that the addict has experienced. They contradict the reality that the addiction has interfered with the person’s relationship with God, relationships with family and friends, and the potential and development of the individual him/ herself. Such statements also ignore the fact that anyone who is associated with the addict has had to modify his or her behavior in some way to accommodate the addict’s behavior.

Now do we begin to realize how pervasive this problem is in our society? How did this happen? **How did so many of us become addicted?** Scientists and health care professionals have demonstrated that many of us have a genetic predisposition to addiction. We also live in a society where a large number of diversions are available to us. Many of us have other problems that make us more susceptible to addiction: self-esteem issues, traumas, anti-social tendencies, impulsiveness, depression, etc. Moreover, the properties or characteristics of the substance and/or behavior themselves sometimes contribute to their potential for abuse (i.e., the way it acts on our brains).

Hence, one might well ask: Are we talking **about a disease or a moral failure?** The answer is, we are talking about **both!** Science has demonstrated that the brain of the addict undergoes physiological and psychological

changes in the course of an addiction. Moreover, most, if not all, addictions have been observed to involve the pleasure center of our brains. Nevertheless, the fact remains that addiction is also a matter of personal will. We have clearly been given the choice of following what is right or what is wrong. Even the secular professionals who deal with addiction acknowledge there is a spiritual component to the phenomenon!

The Bible equates sin with disease. David wrote: “There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds [stripes] stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh” (Psalms 38:3–7).

Isaiah equated understanding, repentance, and conversion with being healed (Isaiah 6:10). When he prophesied about the Messiah, he wrote, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; AND WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED” (Isaiah 53:5). When the Pharisees rebuked Christ for eating and fellowshiping with sinners, He told them a physician is sent to attend to those who are sick, not those who are healthy (Matthew 9:10–13, Mark 2:16–17, Luke 5:29–32). Clearly, God regards sin as a sickness or a disease!

Moreover, we have already discussed how addiction captivates and enslaves an individual. This is the very thing that happened to the Israelites when they turned to idolatry. You will notice throughout the Old Testament that the Hebrew word “Abad” is used to describe their idolatry. The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible defines the word as “to work (in any sense); by impl. to serve...enslave...keep in bondage, be bondmen, bond-service, compel... (be, become) servant(s), do (use) service, etc.” So idolatry involved devotion to an idol by serving, working for, and becoming enslaved to the idol. Is that not part of the definition of addiction? That same Hebrew word was used in the Ten Commandments! God said, “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor SERVE them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9). Hence, addiction is the modern-day equivalent to idolatry, AND IDOLATRY IS A SIN!

In his letter to the saints at Rome, Paul made plain the fact that we have all suffered from an addiction to sin! He wrote: “Let not sin therefore reign [rule] in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts [desires, cravings] thereof. Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:12–14). He went on to show them that Christ had freed them from being the servants of sin and made them the servants of righteousness instead (Romans 6:18–22). Moreover, he went on to give a perfect illustration of sin as an addiction. He wrote: “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, SOLD UNDER SIN. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Romans 7:14–20). Paul realized that his sin had taken control, and that it was a part of his very nature. He concludes with thankfulness that Christ will deliver him from his diseased, sin-ridden body (Romans 7:24–25).

Our addictions may start out as something pleasurable and enjoyable, but they quickly become our masters! Christ told His followers that “no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). Moreover, Christ’s entire mission was about freeing us from the wrong master—about freeing us from our addictions. Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND THE OPENING OF THE PRISON TO THEM THAT ARE BOUND” (Isaiah 61:1). Moreover, so that there could be no mistake as to whom the prophet was referring to, Christ read this passage to the people

gathered in a synagogue during His earthly ministry (Luke 4:16–19). “And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE FULFILLED IN YOUR EARS” (Luke 4:20–21).

Christ told His followers that He had told them the things He shared with them so “that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Christ overcame the addictive nature we all possess, and He expects us to do the same! (1 John 5:4–5). In the book of Revelation, the promise of reward is given to the ones that “overcometh” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Christ gave us the formula for freeing ourselves from all of our addictions. He said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man [DENIAL]: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:31–34).

Brethren, Christ expects us to **overcome our addictions**. He does not want us to use lame excuses for our behaviors or deny that we have problems. Moreover, we cannot use our human nature as an excuse for our addictions. We read in the epistle of James: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:12–15). The professionals tell us that addiction can end in two ways: recovery or death. That truth is verified by Scripture.

One of the first **steps to recovery** is the **acknowledgement that there is a problem** on the part of the addict. Denial must be swept away. John wrote: “If we [Christians] say that we have no sin, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, and the truth is not in us. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS, AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10). **Will you take that first step toward recovery by admitting that you have a problem?**

Alcoholics Anonymous has developed a world-renowned “**Twelve Step Program**” to help those people recover who have been addicted to alcohol, but the principles can be applied to help those with other addictions as well. What follows is an adaptation of those principles for all of us who are facing an addiction of one kind or another:

- 1) **We must confess that we are powerless to deal with the addiction on our own.**
- 2) **We must believe that God can restore us to sanity.**
- 3) **We must decide to place our lives in God’s hands.**
- 4) **We must take a personal inventory of our lives and examine our habits and behaviors.**
- 5) **We must admit to God that we have sinned.**
- 6) **We must submit ourselves to God’s work in our lives.**
- 7) **We must ask Him to heal us of our disease.**
- 8) **We must think about how our addiction has affected those around us.**
- 9) **We must be willing to work at repairing damaged relationships.**
- 10) **We must continue to take personal inventory of our lives and repent when we find sin there.**
- 11) **We must seek to improve our relationship with God through prayer, study, and meditation.**
- 12) **We must be willing to share what God has done for us with others and be willing to help and support our brothers and sisters in Christ in their struggle to overcome.**

Another important component to recovery is that we must learn the wisdom contained in the old axiom of taking “**one day at a time.**” This, too, is scriptural. Christ said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34).

In this same vein, we must learn to cope with the probability of an occasional relapse, for this is also a prominent feature of addiction and recovery. We must learn to be like the Apostle Paul, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” and “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). **Failure is not an option. Remember, the only alternative to recovery is death!**

Therefore, let us accept Paul’s advice to us as Christians and recovering addicts: “That ye put off concerning the former conversation [life] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24). Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have work to do! We must surrender our addictions to God and Christ and overcome this pernicious nature of ours. Jesus Christ has given us the truth to set us free!