

Fighting Addictions

“Fighting Addictions” is a very suitable title for this topic as it can be received from two different perspectives. The first that a person is likely to receive is the notion of a person who strives to fight against an addiction or addictions. The second is the perception that the addiction or addictions actually fight against the person, both in the effects and affects of the addiction as well as in the resistance to freedom from the addictions.

This matter cries out for and even demands that a working definition be given. *Psychology Today* provides a definition that is reasonably accurate entitled “What Is Addiction?” @ <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/addiction>>.

I will reproduce it here for ease of study:

What Is Addiction?

Addiction is a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (alcohol, cocaine, nicotine) or engages in an activity (gambling) that can be pleasurable but the continued use of which becomes compulsive and interferes with ordinary life responsibilities, such as work or relationships, even health. Users may not be aware that their behavior is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others.

The word addiction is used in several different ways. One definition describes physical addiction. This is a biological state in which the body adapts to the presence of a drug so that drug no longer has the same effect; this is known as tolerance. Because of tolerance, there is a biological reaction when the drug is withdrawn. Another form of physical addiction is the phenomenon of overreaction by the brain to drugs (or to cues associated with the drugs). An alcoholic walking into a bar, for instance, will feel an extra pull to have a drink because of these cues.

However, most addictive behavior is not related to either physical tolerance or exposure to cues. People compulsively use drugs, or gamble or shop, nearly always in reaction to being emotionally stressed, whether or not they have a physical addiction. Since these psychologically based addictions are not based on drug or brain effects, they can account for why people frequently switch addictive actions from one drug to a completely different kind of drug, or even to a non-drug behavior. The focus of the addiction isn't what matters; it's the need to take action under certain kinds of stress. To treat this kind of addiction requires understanding of how it works psychologically.

No matter which kind of addiction is meant, it is important to recognize that its cause is not a search for pleasure, and addiction has nothing to do with one's morality or strength of character. Experts debate whether addiction is a "disease" or a true mental illness, whether drug dependence and addiction mean the same thing, and many other aspects of addiction. Such debates are not likely to be resolved soon. But the lack of resolution does not preclude effective treatment.

This definition is as close as the pseudo-sciences will allow. Psychology as it currently functions is entirely bogus as those who practice it do not even acknowledge what the name teaches. Psychology means *Soul-knowledge*. Yet psychologists and psychiatrists do not even count the soul in their attempts to "help" people with their *soul-knowledge* issues.

Nevertheless, this definition does give a good starting point for understanding addiction. The third paragraph is perhaps the most helpful. It comes very close to the real issue for people and their addictions. The term *addictive behavior* draws very near to the truth, but still falls short. This is because psychologists are unable to deal with the fact that our addictions are our fault.

We are responsible for the choices that we make. Addictive behavior is a choice. In many cases this choice may be made without understanding the "why" of the choice, but it is nevertheless a choice. Moreover, it is a conscious choice. It may become so habitual that it appears to be an unconscious choice, but it is a conscious choice nevertheless.

The above definition in the third paragraph comes amazingly close to the truth in saying, **"People compulsively use drugs, or gamble or shop, nearly always in reaction to being emotionally stressed, whether or not they have a physical addiction."** This comes very close, so close in fact, that some of the benefits of the truth are actually experienced in limited ways. But the freedom of the truth resides in the truth.

The following statement shows where this understanding falls short:

The focus of the addiction isn't what matters; it's the need to take action under certain kinds of stress. To treat this kind of addiction requires understanding of how it works psychologically.

The focus of the addiction IS what matters. The problem with psychology is that it has divorced itself from that which has need of healing. Without addressing the needs of the soul, freedom from addiction cannot be achieved. Without addressing the needs of the soul, the problem cannot even be rightly understood.

These psychologists rightly identify emotional stress as a stimulus that triggers a response. But emotional stress is not the real cause of compulsive behavior and addiction. Neither is the focus of addiction "the need to take action under certain kinds of stress." The

focus of addiction is the perception of a need to take action to satisfy a sense of a need that is not understood.

So what really is the focus of addiction? The focus of addiction is fulfillment. Because of our sinful nature and the inescapable awareness of our incomplete and corrupted image, we feel empty. The true image in which God created us is no longer ours. The holiness of God is vacant. In times of emotional stress we feel this emptiness to such a degree that we become desperate for relief and so we seek to fill the vacuum with something, anything.

Alcohol and other drugs, sexual activity, sexual experimentation, alternative sexuality, horror movies, thrill seeking and extreme sports, exercise, working for success, hoarding, sadism, abuse of self or others, dieting, overindulging, all of these and many others have been used and abused in attempts to fill the emptiness that sinful humans feel in their souls. The list is as vast as the human imagination. Anything that a person imagines to have satiating value may be pursued.

It seems that of the most powerful are the sexual addictions. Sexual addictions are expressions of our perverted perspective. Since Adam cut us off from the image of God, which is Christ, we continually search for ways to restore this wholeness. Our perception of self has been perverted so that we cannot see the person whom God created us to be. What we most long for is to be restored to the holy communion of God with Man and Man with fellow Man.

God created mankind with a holy desire for this communion, this interconnectedness, this unity of being. But sin divorced us from God and the Life that is only in Him. This separation is felt in our very being, in our soul. This is how the Scriptures speak of our existence.

**And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.**
(Genesis 2:7)

God created us to be full of His presence, that we should live in Him. He created us in His image, in His unity, with His own holy desires and will. And the need for this fullness is felt in our soul. We still feel the attractions to God and to one another, although those have become corrupted and perverted. Moreover, these attractions in some ways may actually be felt more powerfully since we cannot find their fulfillment or complete satisfaction.

Furthermore, we no longer rightly understand the attractions that we have. We were created as sexual beings, to have attractions that would lead to being united in the flesh with another person, that a man and a woman should be joined as one flesh. This is a powerful attraction. And since our understanding of this has been corrupted, we do not rightly understand what we feel. But it is part of who we are. It is who we are. That is why we feel it so strongly. Ignoring it does not make it go away.

But our attractions to others are not limited to our sexuality. We are designed to desire to be one with all of mankind. And so we feel attraction to all other people. But since sexual attraction develops to such a powerful level as we grow, it becomes our default attraction. And

so, when we feel attracted to others, we often become confused and imagine that all attraction is sexual attraction. This is even more pronounced when we prolong singleness unnaturally. God designed us to marry quite young. Our bodies develop and the hormonal activity develops and we feel the powerful drives of these hormones. When these are ignored or suppressed, a person can become obsessed with them. Except for a very few people, God designed us to be united with someone in marriage.

This being core to our existence, when we feel attractions to others, we can confuse these with our sexual feelings. A man will naturally feel attracted to another man, even feeling a strong desire to express connectedness with that man, and this can be misinterpreted as a desire for sexual interaction. The two attractions are very closely related and thus in our perverted sinful existence we sometimes confuse them. This is why some people think that homosexuality is a genetic condition. And it actually is, because we all are born with it. We all have these attractions and we all have the tendency to confuse them and misinterpret them.

And this is true with alcohol and drugs and work and play and thrill seeking and anything else that we may choose to utilize in an attempt to fill the emptiness that we feel on account of our sin-separation from God's holy communion with Him and with the rest of mankind.

This leads us to consider the answer to this dilemma.

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:17-21)

This is the answer. This is the solution. It is the only solution.

But this solution is only available in God's Holy Communion. The world naturally scoffs at this because this answer is spiritually discerned. The worldling's are dead and are unable to discern these things. Apart from being regenerated through water and spirit into the kingdom of God, apart from the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, the solution to our emptiness and resultant addictions cannot be perceived.

But for those who are in Christ, those whom God has brought again into the reconciliation that He accomplished in the body of Christ, this makes perfect sense and provides the fulfillment that is needed. This is the answer to our addictions. We need to recognize our addictions for what they are, foolish attempts to take action for ourselves rather than turning to the One who has the power to take action for us.

God has provided the means for our salvation and justification and sanctification. He has provided the means by which He promises to fulfill our needs of body and soul. This is what St. Paul explains in the quotation above. If we acknowledge our emptiness we can then also acknowledge the source of our fulfillment. If we acknowledge our emptiness, we will turn to God and hear His Word of promise and be filled by the Spirit who answers our pleas and

comforts us and restores us to wholeness again. Being filled with the Spirit begins in our baptism. Once the Spirit has been given to us and has taken up residence in us, He continually calls to us to be gathered into the Holy Communion to partake of the Supper of God's Communion. This refreshes us and renews us in the true faith and in the forgiveness of our sins and in the new life that is in the image of God, that is, in Christ.

Then, having been so refreshed and renewed, we go forth into our daily activities, carrying with us the divine liturgy by which we were refreshed and renewed together. We continue, being filled with the Spirit we continue to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of God.

This is the answer. We need to ask ourselves: **“With what are we seeking to be filled?”**

When we feel the emptiness and the urge for fulfilment, where do we turn?

Have you ever tried to think of doing what you know to be wrong while engaging the Lord through prayer and psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? It is not possible. Now it is possible for hypocrites to do this, but not for one who is filled with the Spirit. This is why St. Paul concludes this by bringing it all together with **“submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”**

This is not merely what is commonly understood as fellowship. This is communion, and not a communion of men, but the communion of God into which the Holy Spirit carries us and unites us. This means that we are in a communion where the means of grace are rightly administered in conjunction with the preaching of the pure Gospel. God's communion is not like the fellowships of men. God's communion is built upon the purity of the Holy Trinity and the means of grace that He administers. He administers His means of grace in perfect purity and they have the effects that He has ordained.

So, when we find ourselves enticed toward one of our addictions, what is the answer? Our immediate response will be to turn to the Lord in prayer. Additionally we will begin reciting the liturgy, with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. These will keep us looking to the Lord until He brings us safely to the gathering of the saints where we submit to one another in the fear of God and receive again the refreshment of the Holy Communion.

It works just as God has promised.

One more thing needs to be stated. God's complete answer, even as St. Paul states it, is even better yet. God's answer is not that we react to our addictions in this way, but that we continue in this way always. But temptations do come. The Lord assures us that they will come until the Last Day. And thus we will stray from the continual use of the liturgy and will need to be called back to it again. And God promises so to do. Thanks be to God that our salvation does not depend upon our faithfulness, but upon God's faithfulness! And He cannot be otherwise.

† † †

An additional note:

Included in St. Paul's admonition to submit to one another in love is the great and wonderful blessing of Confession and Absolution. God has provided that we can confess our sins to one another in the body of Christ and hear from the lips of another baptized believer that our sins are forgiven. Moreover, God has especially attached this to the Office of the Public Ministry so that we can confess our sins openly to the called and ordained servant of the Word and hear from him the Lord's absolution. Certainly we can hear this from any baptized member of the body of Christ, but the pastor has been given by Christ to stand in His place in the holy office that Christ has ordained for this purpose. Proclamation of God's forgiveness and administering God's forgiveness to hurting sinners is the very purpose of the pastoral office. God has provided this for the special comfort of consciences that are troubled over specific sins. This is why the Lord Jesus declares in Matthew 18:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:18-20)

This is the life of the Church. Forgiveness and restoration into the comfort and safety of God's Holy Communion is the life of the Church, wherever two or three are gathered by the Holy Spirit into the name of Jesus and all that His name is and means.

James repeats this in his epistle, saying:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:13-20)

† † †

*Published by Pastor Paul A. Siems
www.brideofchristelc.com*