

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION Part 1 of 2

Hopefully this topic is not at the forefront of most people's minds. Yet it is an increasing problem in families and with those we love. In this two part series of articles, the foundations of "Addiction" will be explained, as well as ways these are treated.

I. Definitions

A. "Addiction" is a compulsive or physical dependence upon a substance, person, or behavior that provides a temporary release from pain or discomfort. There are various addictions.

B. A "drug addiction" is characterized by drug seeking and using, despite harmful consequences. Although the first use of a drug does not typically happen because the person has a disease, with repeated use there are changes in the brain that drive the user to further using. The drug changes the structure of the brain and how it works, thus drug addiction is classified as "brain disease." This can make stopping the use of the drug nearly impossible, but the believer holds to the promise in *Matthew 19:26*, "...but with God, all things are possible."

C. There are also "process addictions," in which the individual is dependent on some kind of behavior, as opposed to being dependent on some kind of substance. Process addictions include sex addiction, addictions involving gambling, internet use, shopping, and even work.

D. With the advances in brain chemistry, it is now apparent that even in process addictions, similar things happen in the brain as in drug addiction, and such changes increase the difficulty in stopping.

E. Addiction results in harm to the person's health, relationships, spiritual life, vocation, emotional well-being, and/or finances.

F. The addiction cycle can be illustrated by the diagram to the right going clockwise from the top. Through the addict's willingness to do whatever it takes to heal, God's intervention, and those God chooses to use as helpers in the process, the addict must break loose from this cycle at some point.

G. There certainly are differences in the degree of severity of an addiction, and professionals will classify an addiction as "mild, moderate, or severe," depending to what degree the individual's life is affected.



1. "Tolerance" occurs when one needs an increased amount of a substance/behavior in order to achieve the desired effects. Another sign of tolerance is when a person obtains a diminished effect from

using the same amount of a substance/behavior over time.

2. “Withdrawal” effects occur when the addicted person stops using the addictive agent. Withdrawal effects are specific to the addictive agent and cause distress physically and emotionally.

H. When individuals are trying to overcome addictions, periodic setbacks are common.

1. A “slip” or “lapse” occurs when a person is making progress, falls back into his or her old ways for a short period, but then quickly returns back to doing what is necessary to live the overcoming life.

2. A “relapse” occurs when someone slides back into his or her old ways and isn’t immediately willing to return to doing what is necessary to overcome.

B. Commentary on the Definition of Addiction

1. Using the term “addiction” **does not** excuse sin. Rather, the term describes the process Satan uses to hook someone into sin. *John 8: 34 “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”*

James 1: 13-15 “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.”

2. Some addictions do not occur to a degree that is overtly damaging. Because of this we don’t choose to invest the energy necessary to overcome them. Certain eating habits are an example. Many people do not correct their eating until a heart attack, diabetes, or other condition forces them to invest the effort.

3. Some addictions are so powerful they are life-threatening.

4. Some addictions create a dependency which makes withdrawal life-threatening. Withdrawal symptoms to this degree can require hospitalization. Some alcoholics and drug addicts actually die from the withdrawal.

5. Some addictions alter a person’s physiology in ways that make him/her very vulnerable in the future. Many drugs can reduce the chemicals in the body which give the person the experience of pleasure. When he/she stops taking the drug, an addict may be incapable of experiencing pleasure for a long period of time. This creates a significant period of vulnerability because the drug is the only agent that can bring pleasure when he/she is trying to cope with the realities of life.

6. Some addictions are powerful because they help to mask pain or hurt in someone’s life. When the person feels the pain of life or is under significant stress, the temptation and memory of escape by using the drug is very powerful and may lead to a fall.

C. Addiction and Sin

1. Because of the scriptural instruction to keep our bodies under subjection, all addiction leads to some level of sin. *Romans 6:16 “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”*

2. Certain addictions lead to clearly sinful behavior. For example, getting drunk, gambling, taking illegal drugs, or doing sexually immoral things violate scripture and are clearly sinful. *Colossians 3:5* “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”
3. Refusal to get help may also be a sin even in cases where the behavior itself is not a sin (e.g., workaholism) because we are not bringing ourselves under subjection. *1 Corinthians 6:12* “. . . I will not be brought under the power of any.”
4. When an addict’s behavior affects the lives of others and he/she refuses help, this attitude is clearly sinful. *Proverbs 28: 13* “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”
5. An addict is responsible for finding some way to not sin (e.g., treatment, environmental control, accountability, etc.). *Isaiah 55:7* “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”
6. Overcoming addiction involves a spiritual battle. “*Ephesians 6:12-13* “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”
7. While Paul’s writings in *Romans 7:14-25* certainly applies to sin of all kinds, people struggling with addiction can particularly relate well to his description of the battle with sin. *Romans 7:14-25* “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. . . .O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

In the article next month, we will look at some methods used in the treatment of addictions.

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