



Christian "Addictaholics"
I Corinthians 6:12-20
(A sermon by Rev. David Busker)

Addictions of every variety and vintage are the hallmark of twenty-first century culture. We live in an excess of excesses. And we love it.

- We are addicted to work—and we have the laptops, cell phones, pagers, home offices, car offices, plane offices to prove it.
- We are addicted to leisure—and we have the satellite dishes, the remote controls, the multi-million dollar stadiums, and the casino strips to prove it.
- We are addicted to adrenaline—and we have extreme sports from snowboarding to sky-diving, BASE jumping to shark feeding to prove it.
- We are addicted to voyeurism and violence—and we have the gangs, the school-murders, the “action-adventure” movies, the road-rage to prove it.
- We are addicted to fantasy—and we have the alcoholics, the drug addicts, the sex addicts, the gambling addicts, the nicotine addicts, to prove it.

Ours is a “Want more? Get more!” society. As a result we are generally over-weight, out-of-shape, over-worked, in debt, un-happy, unsatisfied, and stressed-out. Despite an expensive, long-waged “war on drugs,” addictions to mind-altering, mind-numbing substances are higher than ever.

Old drugs like heroin and LSD as well as new enticements like Ecstasy are popular among kids at younger and younger ages. Alcohol continues to destroy people of all ages and socio-economic groups, either directly or indirectly as the decisive factor behind so many of our fatal traffic accidents.

Want to take a guess at what percentage of cigarette smokers continue to smoke even after a cancerous lung is removed?

- A. 15 percent
- B. 25 percent
- C. 50 percent

And the answer is . . .

C. 50 percent.

And while 80 percent of smokers want to stop, fewer than 10 percent of smokers quit per year.

What can we say to the addict on the street, the addict in our work place, the addict in our bedroom, the addict in our shoes? What can we offer as an alternative to the momentary pleasure/monumental payment that chemical, psychic, and technological addictions offer/cost?

Bill Easum and Thomas Bandy, in their jaw-dropping book *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (1997), talk about “The Addiction-Free Jesus” as an image of Christ this culture needs to hear.

“Unbind him! And let him go free!” (John 11:44) With these words, the Addiction-Free Jesus, who is absolutely unfettered by any habitually destructive behavior patterns, addresses the spiritual yearnings of the 21st Century public. Like Lazarus and his sisters, they are trapped by addictions: co-dependent relationships, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, materialism, work, and any number of other debilitating habits as yet un-named. Modern people may have no sense of sin, but they know very well the meaning of addiction. It is a bondage which cannot be escaped by human knowledge or effort, and it is inevitable death.

The Addiction-Free Jesus has an authenticity which is unique in all the world. Using the metaphors of St. Paul, the Addiction-Free Christ is like a ‘New Adam,’ the epitome of every man or woman, the very essence of humanity . . . but with all the corruptibility removed.

Among the 21st Century public, authenticity is the *only* grounds for authority. Office holding, titles, and bureaucratic status mean nothing. Authenticity is everything. Only the Addiction-Free Jesus can have power over addiction. When St. Paul complains that ‘the good he wants to do, he cannot do; while the evil he does not want to do, is in fact what he always ends up doing,’ he simply repeats the lament of the addicted public. Who will save us from ‘this body of death’?
The Addiction-Free Jesus. (p. 32)

The Church has before it a bigger pool of addicted, needy, aching-for-fulfillment, longing-for-freedom, souls than has ever before faced it. The de-tox program of Christ’s church is not a 10-Step Program or a 12-Step Program. The glory and wonder of our message is a true one-step wonder.

Jesus accomplished it all on the cross. The ultimate answer to an addiction-free life is found in the redemptive love of Christ, the merciful over-flowing measure of God’s love.

A newspaper was a running a competition to find the most high-principled, sober, well-behaved person in the community. Among the entries was a one that said the following:

"I don't smoke, drink booze or gamble. I am faithful to my wife. I am hard working, quiet and obedient. I do not go to the movies or the theater, and I go to bed early every night and rise with the dawn. I regularly attend church every Sunday without fail. I've been like this for the past three years but just wait until spring when they let me out of jail!"

Unlike the person from jail, many of us live in families that have problems with addictive or compulsive behaviors.

An addict is a slave to a habit. The word comes from the Latin "addictus", which in Roman law meant a debtor awarded as a slave to his creditor.

There are people who are slaves to alcohol, drugs, smoking, gambling, eating, work, and even TV.

A compulsive person carries to excess a behavior that otherwise would be very normal. Some people are compulsive about cleaning their house or washing their hands.

Others may talk too much or worry too much. Others are constantly late or always do the same things over and over again and are upset when their pattern is disturbed.

We all know people who are addicted to something or compulsive about something. Most of us have people like that in our families or we do it ourselves.

The problem comes in when we are not doing anything about our addictions or problems. If we refuse to do anything then our lives and the lives of those around us are hurt and that is not healthy.

Those same addictions and compulsions are many times passed on to the next generation because that is all they know.

Remember the biblical account of Abraham's habit of lying about his wife when they traveled? Sarah was beautiful and Abraham was afraid he would be killed by someone who wanted Sarah.

So he told everybody Sarah was his sister and that caused even more problems.

Abraham's son, Issac, copied his father's pattern. Lies also marked the lives of Issac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

And would you believe that the whole story of Joseph, son of Jacob, was filled with lies made by Joseph's brothers? So often sins are passed on to the next generation.

The problem for the church comes when addictive and compulsive people become members of the church, they bring to the church the same problems they have in their lives.

As Charles Lake puts it- we are Christian Addictaholics. Those are people in church who through their addictions and compulsions have a negative impact on the life of the church.

But the good news is it doesn't have to be that way. There is a way out for those who are addicted or have compulsions so that the church can be the church God wants it to be. But that way is not easy.

Paul knew about addictive/compulsive behaviors. He says in I Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me but I will not be enslaved by anything."

Many of us are enslaved to things that hurt our Christian witness and hurt those near and dear to us.

It is not illegal to do a lot of the things we do such as smoke, drink, overeat, gossip, lie but those things hurt our bodies and those around us.

Paul feels so strongly about the hurt we do with our addictions and compulsions that he says in chapter nine, "I will discipline my body that rather than becoming a slave to my body, I will make my body my slave. It will do what I tell it to do. For with God's help I will bring it under the control of His Spirit and use it to glorify the Lord."

In verses 19 and 20 of today's reading it says that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not our own, we were bought with a price. Therefore we should honor God with our body.

I want to suggest four steps to help us through our addictions and compulsive behavior. They all begin with A.

First we need to **Analyze the behavior**. Behind our problems lies the problem of guilt, inferiority and insecurity. Why do I do what I do and feel so bad doing it?

Is it because I'm trying to cover up some guilt that I have never resolved?
Is it because I do not feel good about myself and am seeking the attention and approval of other people?

Is it because I am so insecure, the behavior helps me to feel more secure?
If you have deep problems you may need counseling to help get through this part.

Second, once we know the problem we need to **Adjust or Abstain from the behavior**. That doesn't mean we quit eating if overeating is a problem. We adjust and learn to eat differently.

We don't eat between meals. We don't take seconds. We eat better food. If you have a problem with what you read-- pornography or whatever-- get rid of what you know is wrong. We need to flee temptation.

Thirdly, we need to **hold ourselves Accountable**.

This is where prayer partners help. This is where small groups and supports groups are of great help. We need to be accountable to someone else.

Lastly, we need to **Ask the Lord to heal us and to deliver us with His power**.

Again, all that is easier said than done. One thing we do know is that very few people can ever change through their own will power. We don't have enough strength by ourselves.

Trying to do it by ourselves is like the mythical Isle of Sirens. If you remember, it was a place where the singing was so beautiful that sailors would be drawn to it and their boats would be smashed on the shores.

Two Greek heroes, Ulysses and Orpheus, had to sail by the Isle of Sirens and each did it in a different way.

Ulysses ordered his sailors to put wax in their ears and he ordered them to tie him to the mast. During the time when the ship sailed past the song of the sirens Ulysses had to be bound by even stronger ropes because his soul craved for the song of the sirens.

It was torture for Ulysses and his crew because they tried to overcome evil with their strong wills.

Orpheus and his crew were saved in a different way. Orpheus used his gifts of poetry and song to keep the minds of his crew away from the sirens.

His music was so splendid that the sailors paid no attention to the sirens. The ship passed without losing a man and without the trauma of a contest of wills.

The appearance of loveliness in the siren's songs was overcome by the reality of the beauty of Orpheus' music.

The superficial appeal of evil was overcome by the purity of the good and beautiful.

I think the same thing applies to those who have problems with addictions or compulsive behavior. One way we can fight the evil in our lives is to rely on our wills.

The better way is to replace the evil with something good so we are not attracted to the evil. We need to look to God to find the strength we need to overcome the evil of our addictions.

Emerson Fostick said that evil passions are overcome by stronger passions and the soul unoccupied by a positive devotion is sure to be occupied by spiritual demons.

As goodness becomes more and more reflected in the way we live then we will want to tell others about what God has done in our lives.

This all means we have to keep in step with God's Spirit working in our lives.

Did you ever play in a marching band? I never have but I have watched a lot of them. It is interesting to watch them at a halftime of a football game or at a parade.

Parades had to be a lot of work and practice. I remember at one of the churches I served the high school was about two blocks away and the band would practice marching on the street in front of the parsonage.

It was interesting to watch them look so bad at first and then as they practiced to become so good they could turn the corners without a problem.

But you realize that band members not only have to watch their step and their music they had to be on the lookout if any horses had gone before them.

But have you seen a band where just one member is out of step? It makes the whole band look bad.

Good marching bands know how to keep in step. In Galatians 5:25 when Paul talks about keeping in step with the Spirit, he is talking about the church as well as individual Christians.

We need to keep in step with the Spirit. We need to overcome bad habits, addictions or compulsive behavior. We need to concentrate on what God thinks.

And before long we begin to see a change in our lives and in the lives of those we touch. We will be in step with God.

It is not easy but it is not impossible. Many of you are proof of that. Many of you have faced your problems and with God's help you are in step with the Spirit of God.

But too many of us are like the man who went for counseling. The counselor asked him what the problem was all about.

The man said, "I don't have the will power to resist temptation and my conscience is uneasy."

The counselor replied, "Then you would like to strengthen your will power, is that right?"

The patient paused, dropped his head and answered, "Well, not exactly. If it's all right with you, sir, I'd like to have my conscience weakened!"

Can we be open and honest with God and let God deal with us in any of those areas where healing is needed?

As loved, forgiven and reborn people, we should learn to be the kind of people that God wants us to be. We should spread love, not hate; forgiveness not bitterness; and joy not despair.

Do you have that kind of vision about your future? Are you willing to let go, and let God? Are you willing to say: "Change me, Lord. Go ahead, do it!"

I want to be part of a church where through the spirit of Christ believers are set free from bad habits, compulsive behavior, and even addictions.

When that happens we will be the best family of God in the world. Lord, make us new people.

(End your sermon with a demonstration: Fill a glass full to the brim with milk. Fill an adjoining glass of the same size with popcorn. Fill a third glass of the same size with bread. Try putting the bread into the glass of milk.

It overflows. Now refill the glass with milk and try putting the popcorn, kernel by kernel, into the glass of milk. The milk will not run over. You can put an entire glass of popcorn into a glass of milk with no spillage. It's the only two things you can mix that will go into the same space.)

There's only one thing that can fill your life that won't empty your self. There's only one thing that your whole being was made to receive without disrupting and deranging and upsetting your life.

That is Jesus. The more you let Jesus into your life, the more You you become and the stronger you become.

Let us pray!