



"Everyone must choose one of two pains: The pain of discipline or the pain of regret."

—Jim Rohn

14-Jun-19

Addiction and Self-Control

People [the world](#) over are plagued by addiction. Countless individuals struggle with their addictions to street drugs, pharmaceuticals, alcohol, and tobacco. Many will not admit it, but huge numbers of people in our fast-paced world believe they cannot live without caffeine, drinking copious amounts a coffee and caffeine-enhanced energy drinks. Then there are the millions who cannot seem to overcome their cravings for sugar, whether it is in the form of donuts, sodas, candy, ice cream, cookies, cakes, or some other sugar-laden product.

People can be addicted to things other than what they put into their bodies. Some of the worst addictions are to those things that we allow to enter our minds. For instance, young people these days seem to be especially susceptible to screen addictions—television shows, video games, phone apps—but such addictions are not confined just to the young. Show, game, and app designers know that, if they can stimulate a person's reward center in the brain, the viewer will come back for more. In this way, the person becomes hooked on the sensations that cause the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that reinforces pleasant feelings and behaviors by linking them to a desire to repeat them. This process creates a loop: The more often

the person is rewarded, the more he or she wants to watch, play, or interact, which repeats until addiction sets in.

Without a doubt, addiction is a significant problem in our world. Governments, charities, and corporations—not to mention private individuals and foundations—spend billions of dollars each year to combat the terrible consequences of the various major and minor dependencies to which human beings have enslaved themselves. Lives are ruined every day by mental illnesses, automobile crashes, murders, birth defects, diseases, and other horrible effects of addiction. The world would be a far better place if human beings had a better handle on their obsessive and destructive habits.

The Bible does not deal with our modern understanding of addiction—at least, not in so many words. "Addicted" appears only once in the King James Version of the Bible ([1 Corinthians 16:15](#)), but it carries an archaic sense that is mostly absent from the modern term (the New King James Version renders it as "devoted"). However, the Bible alludes to addiction in many places under the guise of its pronouncements about wine and strong drink and drunkenness. A survey of Scripture on these related subjects shows that, while [God](#) does not condemn the drinking of alcohol, He strongly advises healthy [self-control](#) so that we do not succumb to its effects, which includes addiction.

For instance, Solomon counsels in [Proverbs 20:1](#), "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." He writes in [Proverbs 23:19-21](#): "Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags." He spends seven verses at the end of the chapter describing the debilitating effects of alcohol ([Proverbs 23:29-35](#)).

In [Proverbs 31:4-5](#) he sounds another warning: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the [afflicted](#)." Those in positions of authority and responsibility need to have clear heads to fulfill their roles with integrity and accountability, and alcohol undermines those efforts. The principle applies especially to God's called-out ones, who are in training for similar positions in the [Kingdom of God](#).

In these and other scriptures, the Bible argues, not for total abstinence from alcohol, but for moderation governed by self-control. Those with little or weak self-control—or those who have a weakness or predisposition toward alcoholism—should abstain from alcohol to avoid addiction, but otherwise, God's people are free to enjoy it well-short of both drunkenness and dependence. Failure to exercise self-control in the consumption of alcohol—or any other similar substance—is considered a [sin](#). Paul writes in no uncertain terms in [1 Corinthians 6:10](#) that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and "drunkenness" appears in his list of the [works of the flesh](#) in [Galatians 5:21](#).

The Bible's view contradicts the modern declaration of addictions as "diseases" or "genetic predisposition," both of which absolve the individual of any responsibility for his condition. God, however, sees addictions like alcoholism or drug use as the result of a series of sinful choices toward self-destruction. While family history or genetic predisposition may be mitigating factors, the addict is still held responsible for his choice each time he downs another alcoholic beverage, pops a pill, snorts a line, or plunges a needle into his arm. The same applies to mental addictions like screen addictions, pornography, and the like.

The solution, already mentioned, is a difficult one: self-control. Immediately after listing the works of the flesh, Paul balances the ledger with the [fruit of the Spirit](#) ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). The final fruit—as if it is the one we should be working toward, the culmination of our efforts—is self-control. Through God's grace and forgiveness and Christ's work in us through the Holy Spirit, we can overcome addiction, no matter how strong a grip it seems to have on us.

Even so, *we* must make the seemingly impossible choice to say, "No!" to the intense cravings, suffer the symptoms of withdrawal, and set our wills never to surrender to the tempting allurements of the addiction—indeed, to flee from them as Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife ([Genesis 39:12](#)). God will supply the help to overcome if we supply the desire, the dedication, and the determination to [repent](#) of our poor choices. He will not wave a wand and

make the addiction disappear. *We* have to go through the arduous and painful process to build the character to control ourselves and our urges. He will provide support to help along the way.

The apostle Paul tells us in [II Timothy 1:7](#) that the Spirit that God gives us to change our character into the image of [Jesus Christ](#) is one, not "of fear, but of power and of [love](#) and of a sound [or controlled] mind." Each of these attributes will help an addict overcome his addiction. He needs *power* to be stronger than his addiction; he needs *love* to convince him of his worth; and he needs *a sound mind* to make proper decisions. God will provide these things to His people suffering from addiction if they will trust Him and meet Him halfway by making the right choices.

In response to the Corinthians' insistence that "all things are lawful for me," Paul writes in [I Corinthians 6:12](#), "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Even permissible things can get out of hand if misused, so God wants us to be in control of ourselves—our minds, our bodies, our speech, our behaviors—so we can reflect His nature and live the abundant life.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all the fruit of the Spirit, God may have left the most difficult for last! Has anyone, other than Jesus Christ, really exhibited self-control? In the end, however, this is the ultimate aim of growing in the character of Almighty God!

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