

Freedom From Addiction

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SIN

GIL RUGH

Freedom From Addiction, Breaking the Cycle of Sin

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FAX: (402) 483-6716

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Freedom From Addiction

Every human being grapples with the basic problem of sin. Even unbelievers struggle with it, though they know it by another name. The hot word for today is *addiction*, but there are many others. People don't wrestle with sin anymore—now they struggle with “addiction” or “disease” or “weaknesses”:

When District of Columbia Mayor Marian Barry tearfully announced that he had ‘weaknesses’ and entered a Florida treatment program last week, he and his aides were also launching a political and legal strategy to portray his addiction problems as a disease—something beyond his control and thus politically less damaging.¹

I grew up near a large city—Philadelphia. Often, when we went into town we would see men passed out on the sidewalk. We called them drunks back then, but I cannot recall the last time I heard anyone talk about someone being a “drunk.” Now they are called “alcoholics.” It has a different ring to it, doesn't it? If I walked up to you and said, “Hi, I'm a drunk!” you would say, “Well, straighten up!” But if I said “I'm an *alcoholic*,” you would say, “Oh, that is too bad!”

Disease or Defiance?

Now we have moved from calling these activities sins to the more acceptable “disease” or “addiction”:

Most medical experts today view alcoholism and drug addiction as chronic diseases with biological, and perhaps genetic, underpinnings. But it was not that long ago that even these

excesses were seen as evidence of moral turpitude rather than medical conditions.²

Perhaps we have jumped the gun. There is now some evidence to support the contention that even drug addiction is not the physical, biological problem many would have us believe:

Addiction was once seen primarily as a physical dependence on a drug that created severe physical symptoms when the drug was withdrawn. But that view is changing. “The drug is necessary but not sufficient to cause addiction,” notes Jack Henningfield, chief of the clinical pharmacology branch of the National Institute of Drug Abuse. He and others point to the clear effects of social conditions on drug use: for example, the ability of 90 percent of addicted Vietnam veterans to kick their heroin habits once free of the stress of battle. By contrast, three quarters of other heroin addicts who try to quit fail.³

Yet, regardless of this evidence, the world is “addicted to addictions.” Even in the article I am quoting, there is concern that *everything*—every behavior that gets out of hand or begins to control someone—could be considered an addiction. And there are additional problems with these euphemisms:

Furthermore, they argue, the disease model sends a harmful message to abusers. It not only excuses irresponsibility but “indoctrinates them with the idea that they’re helpless and sick,” says Herbert Fingarette, an addiction expert at the University of California at Santa Barbara.⁴

Can the Bible Help?

I agree that addiction *exists*—but then the Bible tells us that sin is always addictive. The issue is not, *Is it addictive?* but *Are we dealing with sin or something else?*

The world does not understand the issue of sin—it has rejected that concept. I can understand that—the world has rejected the Word of God as well. But *believers* are also confused on the issue of sin and how they are to deal with it. That causes me to be concerned.

Though Christians have experienced forgiveness and cleansing, we still struggle, day by day, with sin and its control in our lives. I believe part of our problem is that we have adopted the world’s procedure of categorizing our sins. We think that every sin is unique

and must be dealt with in a special way. The sin of drunkenness must be handled in one way. The sin of homosexuality—well, that must be handled differently. The sin of bulimia is another thing altogether.

When we were going through some of our battles over the issue of psychology and its part in the ministry of the Word of God, I was told repeatedly that I could not deal with some of the real problems that people face today armed with just the Bible. Inevitably, when I confronted these people with the question “Are we talking about *sin*? Is this activity *sin*?” the final conclusion was, “Well, yes, I guess you would have to say it is sin.” As soon as you say the Bible is not sufficient to deal with sin—of any kind—then you have a problem! *To say the Bible is not adequate to deal with sin is to say that the Bible is inadequate for the very purpose it exists—to liberate man from his fallen, sinful condition!*

In His Word, God does not establish a different pattern for dealing with each sin. He deals with the sin of drunkenness the same way He deals with the sin of homosexuality. We have complicated the simplicity of the Bible and in the process we have created confusion in the lives of believers. We say, “Well, first we have to find out what the sin is. Then we have to trace back and find out what might have influenced that sin, because every sin has a different set of circumstances that promoted its development in the life. When we find this pattern, we can correct it.”

Where in the Word of God do you find *any* sin ever dealt with on that basis? And yet, Christian after Christian is turning to the world’s guidelines for dealing with sin. And then we wonder why there is such confusion in the life of believers.

Clearing the Confusion

The basic issues of sin and forgiveness—man’s alienation from God, his rejection of Him and His authority in life—have already been dealt with in the first five chapters of the Book of Romans. Through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are set free from the guilt, penalty and the slavery of sin. You cannot proceed any further until you have dealt with this issue.

But for those who are believers, the question remains: How do we go about living lives that are free from sin? Paul shows us, beginning with Romans chapter 6. Every battle with sin that a

believer ever faces can and *must* be dealt with on the basis of this single chapter. If this passage were all we had as a guideline for believers, it would be sufficient to deal with any sin that ever came up in the life of one who has come to trust Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Answers From Romans

In the first seven verses of Romans 6, Paul shows that when a person places his faith in Jesus Christ as personal Savior, that person is identified with Christ in His death, His burial and in His resurrection to new life. At the moment of conversion, a spiritual transaction takes place called the *baptism of the Holy Spirit*. (For more on the baptism of the Holy Spirit—what it is and what it *isn't*—see *Baptism: Truth or Tradition*, available through Sound Words.)

What is the purpose of this transaction? “So we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Paul continues, “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that *our old self was crucified with Him*, that our body of sin might be *done away with*, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:5,6, emphasis added).

You see? The addiction to sin has been broken. Our slavery to sin has been nullified. That is what happens when a person trusts Jesus Christ as personal Savior. In the forgiveness and cleansing, the power of sin is broken.

What About the “Old Man?”

Earlier in our study of Romans, we talked about the “old man”—referring to Romans 5, where we find the comparison between Adam and Christ. The “first Adam” or “old man” was our representative. When he sinned, we sinned. When he fell, we fell. When he came under condemnation, we came under condemnation. In the same way, when we came to trust in Christ, we were identified with Him. He was our representative on that cross. We were identified with Him when He died, when He was buried and when He was raised from the dead.

In Romans 6 we are told that the old self was crucified “that our body of sin might be done away with” (v. 6). Much discussion has

centered around what it means when it says the old self was crucified. Has our old self been destroyed or annihilated, as some teach?

The expression “done away with” does not mean that our old man no longer exists. The phrase could also be translated *to nullify*, *cancel* or *to render inoperative*. The idea Paul is expressing is that the power of the old man has been broken. All that we were in Adam as fallen, sinful beings—and the condemnation that follows—has been dealt with. The hold that sin had over us has been broken, but that does not necessarily mean that the old man no longer exists.

For example, Hebrews 2:14 reads: “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” The expression “render powerless” is the same word translated “done away with” in Romans 6:6. We know that Satan has not been annihilated, because he still functions. Satan still attempts to exert his influence in the lives of the children of God. But he has been rendered powerless, just as the power of our old man has been broken.

You say, “Well, I sometimes think that the devil *does* influence me because I still sin.” Yes, that is true, but you never *have* to. That is the difference! You used to live in that realm, controlled by sin. You were once under the authority of Satan himself. But Jesus Christ set you free, and you never *have* to obey the Devil again.

Our New Life

In Romans 6:7,8 Paul writes, “For he who has died is freed [lit. “justified”] from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” This repeats what Paul has said in verses 3 and 5. We have died with Christ; we also live with Christ. It is repeatedly stressed that anyone who is identified with Christ in His death is identified with Christ in His resurrection to newness of life.

The penalty for sin is paid in our identification with His death, “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). If that were all the further it had gone, we could still have been annihilated. But the new life we live in our relationship with God is a result of our identification with Christ *in His resurrection*. God has given us new life in Christ—a life free from the power and domination of sin.

It is important to note that when Paul says, “We believe that we shall also live with Him,” he is not speaking primarily of our life in eternity to come. He is referring to our new life that begins at the point of our dying with Christ. Those who are identified with Him in His death shall live with Him *now*—today.

Once for All and All at Once

“Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him” (Rom. 6:9).

Most evangelicals are clear on what happened to Christ. He died, was buried and was raised to newness of life. If you do not believe that, you are not a born-again Christian.

But it is just as true that everyone who has believed in Christ has died *with* Christ and has been raised *with* Christ. These are settled events, never to be repeated again: “For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God” (Rom. 6:10).

The same expression “He died to sin” is used of all believers in Romans 6:2: “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” So just as Christ died with reference to sin, we too are dead to sin.

Moment of Reckoning

The difficult part comes when we begin to apply this to ourselves, and verse 11 does just that: “Even so” (in the same way that Christ died to sin) “consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

When you were in Adam, you were alive to sin. You lived your life in reference to sin as its slave. But now you have died with Christ. That death is *final*. It is just as real, spiritually, as His death. When you trusted Christ, you died with Him. As Christians we are to consider that as a reality, and to organize our lives accordingly.

Paul is not encouraging us to function irrationally—to “pretend” that we have died. *He is telling us to live in light of reality!* To take into account that we have died to sin. I can watch a bird take off from the roof of a twenty-story building, but I would not think to jump off after him. I am not a bird! That is being realistic; that is reckoning the facts. And the fact is, I have died to sin.

So when we are confronted with sin, we have to stop and think, “Wait a minute! I have died to that realm. I am no longer to function in that way. I have been freed from sin, and I do not have to take part in those things anymore.”

It Is a New You!

I am living in a new realm, but I am still *me*. After His resurrection, Jesus was still the same Christ who was crucified. But His dealing with sin was accomplished and settled. In the same way, my dealing with sin is over. I function in a new realm now, with a new power and a new ability by virtue of what the Spirit of God has done and is doing in my life.

I sometimes talk to Christians who say to me, “I am an alcoholic,” or “I am a homosexual,” or something like that. Occasionally (not as often as I should), I correct them and say, “No you are not. You died. You are not what you used to be!”

It is so important that we understand that. We must see ourselves as we are in Christ. If we do not, it becomes *the* major stumbling block in living the Christian life.

First Corinthians 6:9,10 reads, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

If you were to stand up and say, “I am a homosexual,” I would have to take you to 1 Corinthians 6 and say, “If that is what you are, you are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. You are destined for Hell. ”

“But I cannot help it—that is what I am!” Well, that is what you are in Adam, but that is *not* what you are in Christ! That is what salvation is all about! For what does Paul say in verse 11? Does he say these kind of people can never be saved? No! These are the kind of people who *do* get saved! “And such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11). Isn’t that beautiful! You may say, “I *used* to be a homosexual,” or “I *used* to be a drunk—but praise God that is what I *was* and not what I am. ”

It is a terrible affront to our Living God and to the salvation He has provided to say, “Yes, I have trusted Christ. I have been cleansed

and forgiven, but I am a homosexual.” You might as well say, “I am a liar. ”

The danger with this is that people are inadvertently saying that nothing has changed: “I was enslaved to alcohol ten years ago. I trusted Christ and I have not been drinking, but I am still enslaved.” No. You are a new person. The old man died, drunk that he was, immoral as he was. That does not mean that you will never sin. Paul deals with that in a later passage.

It is not necessary to relive your childhood. It is not necessary to go back and see how somebody treated you, and how that affected the “old man.” It is irrelevant, because he is dead. He was crucified.

The Bible never asks you to crucify him, it tells you he *has been* crucified. Some have the idea that the way a Christian is to deal with sin is to crucify himself again. No! Is Christ ever going to be crucified again? *Never!* Must we crucify ourselves again? *Never.*

It is the deficient understanding of the finished work of Christ and our identification with Him that causes all the problems in Christian living. That is why people who call themselves Christians are running to psychologists and counselors to get help in living the Christian life. They do not understand the basic, simple, clear truth of Romans 6.

Holding Back the Reign

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts” (Rom. 6:12).

“Oops. I thought we just took care of the reign of sin and death! And now I have to be commanded not to let it reign in my body?”

Yes, but note the *unbeliever* is never commanded not to let sin reign in his body. This is why some Christians are out chasing rainbows, trying to get the unbeliever to change his sinful ways. Sin *reigns* in the life of the unredeemed. The only thing which can change that is the redemption in Christ. But for us, we have been set free.

And yet, there is certainly pleasure in sin. This body does find delight in sinful practices, and is tempted to indulge in them again. This is why Paul writes, “Do not let sin reign.” And it does not have to, because the power of sin over us (unlike the unbeliever) has been broken.

“That you should obey its lusts” (Rom. 6:12).

“Uh, uh—wait a minute! This is nice and general, but let’s get down to specifics. How am I supposed to avoid adultery, fornication, lying, bulimia, and all those sins? I need *details!*”

Well, God does not break it down! His pattern is the same for all sin.

“But you do not know the struggle with sin that I have!”

And you do not know the struggle *I* have. I am convinced, after twenty-some years in the ministry and thirty-some as a believer, that every Christian has what one of the Puritan writers called his “bosom sin”—that sin which is especially lovely and desirable. It is so easy to look down on someone else because we do not have *that* problem. You could set a glass of whiskey in front of me, for example, and I would not sweat a drop over it.

Ah, but there are other sins that put their arms around me, and I want to put my arms around them. I find the attraction almost unbearable. So we think we are all unique, but the principle is just the same. God has set us free from sin.

That does not mean I am not beckoned to come and enjoy it. I am married to a wonderful woman. That does not mean that there might not be another woman who sees how attractive and desirable I am! But it doesn’t change reality. I am married and committed to *this* woman, and I am to say *no* to any other potential relationship.

That is just what Paul is referring to here. We have been brought into a new, exclusive relationship. We are never again to open ourselves up to the authority and reign of sin. Before I was married, I could date other girls—a different one every week, if I wanted! But when I got married, I entered a new relationship with new responsibilities and new obligations.

Who Owns the Body?

“And do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness” (Rom. 6:13). The body becomes the vehicle or weapon through which sin manifests itself. Would it make any sense for those who have been set free from the slavery of sin to continue offering their bodies to sinful acts? On the contrary, we are to “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead,

and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13).

You have been raised to newness of life! You now live for God, so offer your body—all of its parts—to God. It is His instrument of righteousness. If it does not accomplish righteousness, it is not a proper use of a body that has been given to God to be used by Him.

Paul puts this very strongly in writing to the Corinthians. He tells them to “flee immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). Why? Because your body has become Christ’s body. Would you take Christ’s body and join it to a whore in an immoral relationship? The very concept is blasphemous.

The Power of Grace

“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

The Law gives commands, but it does not provide enablement. Grace provides deliverance from sin’s penalty and from sin’s power. In grace, God has provided salvation to deliver us from the slavery to sin.

This explains why it is an exercise in futility to try to explain to unbelievers why they should not commit abortion, or why they should not live together before marriage, or why they should not do sinful things. People under law have no freedom! There is no power to stop it. They are slaves to sin. You may confront them with their sin, of course, but you have to point out to them that there is no hope for freedom apart from the plan that God provided in His Son, Jesus Christ. To give them any other idea is an attack on the Gospel itself.

Do you understand the foundation for Christian living? It is the once-for-all death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the new life He now lives to God. When you trust Him as Savior, a miraculous spiritual transaction occurs that no one understands fully. The old person is crucified and buried. You are identified with Christ as a new person. All the authority and power of sin over your life is taken away.

And now we are to live in light of that truth. You never have to sin again. You never have to fail to treat your wife as a man manifesting righteousness would treat his wife. You never have to fail to be a righteous, godly father to your children. That does not mean you will never fail—but you never *have* to. And there is never

an excuse for it. You are accountable. You have been set free.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you face battles. If you are not a believer, you face battles too, but there is no hope for you to win the battle with sin. Oh, you can replace one sin with another. There are glorious testimonies of people who have broken the power of alcohol in their lives and they are proud to heaven about it. But they have just exchanged one sin for another. They still live in the same realm, nothing has changed.

When you come to believe in Jesus Christ, you are washed. You are clean, pure and holy before God. Before, you were a slave to sin. Now, when you sin, it is because you *choose* to live that way.

“I do not know if I can do it” you say? Well, I hate to think the Word of God has failed—that the death of Christ on the cross was insufficient. You have to view it as final. The allurements can be strong and the enticements are strong. But the power of God is more than enough.

E N D N O T E S

- ¹ Art Levine, "America's Addiction to Addictions," *U. S. News*, Feb. 5, 1990, p. 62.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.

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