

ADDICTION: BANQUET IN THE GRAVE 12-15-13
Proverbs 23:29-35

(Proverbs 26) 26:11 *Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.* His name is William Cope Moyers. He grew up a child of privilege. His father is TV journalist and former assistant to President Johnson, Bill Moyers. Wealthy, famous, and Christian. Cope grew up in a home with devoted parents, in a church that taught him right from wrong. In the train of his father's fame in the TV journalism industry, Cope was given a great job working at CNN. His productions were on national TV and he was respected by his peers. But, in 1990, Cope Moyers ended up spending weeks in an Atlanta Crack house, with homeless drug dealers and hookers. He wasn't doing a story; he was living a nightmare - the story of his own addiction to crack cocaine. His body wasted away, along with his mind. Oh, he had been there before. He had done this same thing in other American cities. He walked away from his beautiful home, his faithful wife, his caring family. They would come and get him. They would talk him into rehab. He would go; he would do better -- for a while, but like the dog returning to his vomit, he kept going back to crack. How did this happen? Where did Cope go wrong - if we can call this "wrong"? He tells the story of spending a summer in Aspen, at a camp in the Rockies, when he was sixteen. His dad was doing seminars and got Cope a job working on a camp maintenance crew. One day an older co-worker rolled himself a joint and started smoking. Then he offered it to Cope, and....Oh, he hesitated, but then he took it and he felt, sick, and dizzy, and then he felt free, unbounded, and at peace.

Proverbs 23:29-35 *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?30 Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things. 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. 35 "They struck me, but I did not become ill; They beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."* What's all this about? Is this about cocaine, or marijuana, or wine? Well, ultimately, it is about none of those things. It is about Jesus. It is about who will be your Master. It's about whether you will know life or death. But we will take a round-about way to get there. We have mentioned already various intoxicants - alcohol, marijuana, cocaine. Our passage speaks only of wine, a form of alcohol, which is the world's all-time #1 intoxicant. You see

how it is portrayed. It is attractive, enticing, feels good going down - but --- what's it say? 32 *At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.*

I have been reading and writing for a class I am taking in January on the problem of addictions. I have been up to my ears in this subject, reading books about addicts to liquor, crack, meth, food and pornography. My mind is overrun with thoughts on the subject and my heart is hot with passion about it as well. So, with one free Sunday before Christmas I will offer you the following thirty minutes on this theme, as I seek to pastorally speak from God's word on addiction in general and intoxicants especially. I will order my thoughts around four either/or propositions.

We begin with Disease or Choice? Disease or Choice? Is the addict a victim of a disease or the perpetrator of a destructive choice? On this, our society seems hopelessly confused. Almost everywhere you turn nowadays you read or hear someone saying that drug and alcohol addiction is a disease. In the books I read this was a major, major theme. We are told that we should not blame the addict. Alcoholics Anonymous has helped millions of people, but even they announce: *most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink... We are without defense against the first drink.* There is a strange puzzlement among so many as to how this occurs. Cope Moyers often repeats in his book the line: *Good man, bad problem. Good man, bad problem.* His addiction to crack, he implies, is not the result of anything wrong with him. It is just his bad luck or something. David Sheff writes: *Addiction is an equal-opportunity affliction -- affecting people without regard to their economic circumstances, their education, their race, their geography, their IQ, or any other factor.* Wow! My daughter contracted leukemia at age four and we have no idea why. The experts have no idea why. We are told that becoming an alcoholic or an addict to crack, meth or porn is just like that. Really!? Really!? Pardon my incredulity, but I am blown away that intelligent people can say this kind of stuff. I may risk being considered very uncharitable by some of you, but this notion that addiction strikes randomly and inexplicably like leukemia is utter nonsense.

Now, does that mean that the disease model of addiction is utter nonsense? No. There are some truths that attach to that notion. Some people likely are genetically predisposed to certain addictions. Predisposed, not pre-determined. Some of us will have a harder time avoiding addiction, and overcoming addiction. A Biblical worldview has no problem with that idea. Nor does it have a problem with the idea that addictions do impact one's physical makeup. Addictions change brain chemistry. Substances that hold no natural appeal can become something approximating a "need." Look at our man in Proverbs 23. This apparent alcoholic has woe, has

complaints, has physical problems, has every reason to never drink again, but did you see how our passage ended? 35 *When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.* There is clearly a powerful compulsion, an almost irresistible urge for the addict. In a sense, the addict is a victim. He is certainly someone for whom I feel pity, but that pity is not so blind as to deny that the addict victimizes himself. The addiction is something he brings on himself through choices. And it is beyond me how that is even deniable. I think St. Augustine, 1600 years ago described it quite well, as a self-imposed bondage. He writes in his "Confessions:" *Bound, as I was, not with another man's irons, but by my own iron will. My will the enemy held, and thence had made a choice for me, and bound me. For of a stubborn will was lust made; and a lust served, became custom; and custom not disciplined became necessity.* Custom not disciplined became necessity.

So, is addiction a disease or a choice? God's word says in Ephesians 5:18 *Do not get drunk with wine.* Proverbs 20:1 *Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.* It certainly seems like a choice - even a sinful choice you are commanded not to make. I would say it is a choice that becomes like unto a disease. With practice it becomes harder and harder to say, "no." It is a self-constraining habit. Behind that habit though - and this is important - behind the habits of addiction there is the false worship of the heart which we call *idolatry*, which is rooted in the individual's agreement with the lies of our pernicious enemy, the devil. Sharon Hersh writes: *At the heart of every addiction are two jolts of charge; the belief that I deserve escape and the fact that I demand control.* Okay - this goes back to the primordial temptation in the garden. *Eve, you deserve deliverance from the restrictions and boredom of this place. And, you take my advice and you will have greater power.* When we buy the lie, we turn from the only One worthy of our devotion and we turn from ruling the plants of the field to being ruled by them. Jeremiah 2:13 *For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* Is it a disease or a choice? Clearly, it is a choice to spurn the truth, to follow the lie, to choose the idol, to develop the habit that leads to a real sickness which, if not met by redemption results in death.

We transition now to our second either/or proposition. Is the solution to the problem found in prevention or recovery? Prevention or recovery? In his book, *Addiction and Grace*, Gerald May says, *we are all addicts in every sense of the word.* Really? I would suggest Mr. May is addicted to hyperbole. I agree entirely that we are all addicts in some sense of the word. We are born enslaved to sin. I don't know anyone who lives into adulthood without facing some bad habit that was difficult to overcome. Some of these habits are far more destructive than others. Some far more

difficult to shake than others. There is a wide gulf between biting your nails and smoking crack cocaine. Some similarities exist to be sure, but the differences are far greater. For our discussion we will use the definition of addiction provided by Ed Welch in his book, *Addictions: Banquet in the Grave*. Welch writes: *Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God.* Take a look at that and ask yourself if you have ever overcome an addiction. Have you? Who among us would say, *Yes, I have overcome an addiction?* If you don't mind, please raise your hand. Now, how many of you have ever overcome a bad habit in your lifetime? Notice this - whether a full-blown addiction or a bad habit -- change is possible. Victory is available! And it seldom involves medication. It involves a re-training of the mind and a concerted effort to elevate other values over the bad habit. There is a ministry I appreciate called, *Celebrate Recovery*. A number of churches have *Celebrate Recovery* groups. That is great! There will always be a need for them. And in many cases, the struggle to overcome addiction is the gateway to the gospel. Men and women discover that sin is real and powerful and they need help that comes from outside of themselves. Thank God. Praise God! There is hope for the addict in Jesus Christ! When the Son of God sets you free, you are free indeed. We, in the church, love to hear stories of those who found deliverance through the gospel. We have great ministries devoted to recovery. We celebrate recovery. But, do we celebrate prevention? Prevention. Between recovery and prevention, prevention may be the less attractive sister, the less sexy strategy, but I am going to suggest to you that she gets more done.

Okay -- I have been reading these books of late and they speak much of rehab and recovery, but I find myself screaming at them asking, "What about prevention!" If the pain of being an addict, of parenting an addict, of being in the family of an addict is as severe as it appears to be, why are we not more passionate about prevention? It's a funny thing. I find that Christians who devote themselves to recovery are looked at as heroes. You know what we often call Christians who focus on prevention? *Legalists*. Oh, we don't want to be party poopers. We don't want to be the ones always telling the young people, *don't do this, don't do that*. We don't want to be negative. We just want to point our young people to Jesus. Well, there is a ministry strategy for you. Just point them to Jesus. Just lift Him up. Don't pass judgment on things like drinking and drugs and sex. Hmm. What sayeth the Lord? Where does God's word lead us on this matter? It certainly lifts up Jesus. That we all agree on. But -- I will suggest to you that not only does God's word lift up Jesus, it also contains many, many warnings about the idols of this world, about the sins of the flesh, about the

things that can dominate and destroy one's life. We have read some of those today. But you just think of some of what God's word says about fleeing fornication and not spending time with drunkards. The book of Proverbs is loaded with warnings which are graciously dispensed from a father to a son. We celebrate the grace that lifts men from the gutter yes, but I propose to you that there is also a great grace and a mercy found in warning. The grace of warning.

Did God bless you with that grace as you grew up? From a parent? A teacher? A pastor? By the time I was fifteen, I had heard hundreds of warnings (so it seemed) about drinking and drugs. I had heard stories of addiction. I had the "advantage" of seeing up close what drinking could do in a family. But for me as a teenager, any offer of liquor or drugs would have set off sirens in my brain. It puzzles me that young people, like Cope Moyers, just so easily seem to decide to start smoking marijuana, or drinking hard liquor. Do you not realize the danger?! I wonder, *are kids hearing this today? Is the warning still out there?* What seems a growing acceptance of pot perplexes me. I am not speaking to the legalization question. I don't know if it should be legal or not, but I do know it is stupid and destructive. I have had conversations with teenagers who tell me it is not a problem at all - that there are no downsides and my head wants to explode when I hear that. Listen, Pastor Dan may be an old goody-two-shoes type, but he has known many people whose brains have never recovered from their pot-smoking days. And what is even more important, Pastor Dan knows that marijuana is not called *the gateway drug* for nothing. Talk to your heroin addicts, your crack addicts, your meth addicts and ask them how they started getting high. Here's the question: why start? Why that first marijuana cigarette? Why that first bottle of whiskey? Why? That is a very important question to answer and to understand. God warned us. Our mommas warned us. We were able to look around and see the highways of life strewn with the broken lives of alcohol and drug addicts. But so many of us have done it anyway. Why? What is the powerful attraction? There is no natural biological urge to drink and most find the first swig, the first joint to be distasteful. How do you get hooked? Where is the temptation? What are the reasons to try it? Basically two really. Number one is because it is part of the social fabric in which many of us grew up. As a Southern Baptist this wasn't true for me, but for many of you booze was a mark of all kinds of special occasion. It was there at weddings, Christmas, parties. It marked graduations and housewarmings and births and deaths, and victories and defeats. There is a certain mystique about it isn't there? And for many of us liquor is what the adults in your life were drinking and since it was only for adults, alcohol became for you an expression of maturity. You were curious and you wanted to copy the big people in your life - so you started to drink. In your world it is just what the adults did.

Reason #2 why people start to drink or do pot is peer pressure. You find yourself in a group where it is the norm, where it is expected, where it is a way of proving you are cool and adult and independent of parental authority. And to gain acceptance in the group you drink, you smoke. Nobody does it to become an addict; but for many this is where it leads. So then, love, speaking the truth in love demands that we not only engage in helping addicts recover, but that we also warn, with fervency, and reason and Scripture so that our children avoid the traps the enemy sets out before them. If I can say something here this morning that spares one family at North Park Church from going through what addiction puts families through, I am rewarded. So, young people listen up. Proverbs 22:3 *The wise see danger ahead and avoid it, but fools keep going and get into trouble.* Prevention or Recovery? Yes, Yes, Yes.

Our next either/or proposition is Purpose or Pleasure. Purpose or Pleasure. I will explain. In his play, *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare wrote: *O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasance, revel and applause, transform ourselves into beasts.* Wow! The bard puts it graphically doesn't he? But accurately. This is what we do. We put enemies in our mouths that steal away our brains, just as Proverbs 23 describes it. And we do it with relish, with delight because we are driven by our lusts. We all get the pleasure dimension of the addiction problem. Dallas Willard says: *Addiction is a feeling phenomenon. The addict is one who, in one way or another, has given in to feeling of one kind or another and has placed it in the position of ultimate value in his or her life... in their heart of hearts they have accepted the rule of the feelings and have conceded its right to satisfaction.* Persons engage in behaviors that have an immediate, positive reward. The food tastes good. The drink melts my inhibitions, the drugs give me a euphoric, carefree feeling, the pornography gets my adrenaline flowing. There is a buzz, a high, a thrill or a release that is sought by the addict. And once that addict has experienced the pleasure repeatedly it becomes a craving - almost a need. So, how does one overcome such a craving? How do you fight against this pleasure? What is the corresponding weight or value? That is purpose. Why does the athlete or the soldier not drink the beer, smoke the pot, eat the cake? Because these interfere with his or her reaching a certain desired goal. There is a purpose in life that is larger in his soul than the momentary pleasure. You think of your own struggles and how you have mastered your cravings. You didn't follow the lusts of the flesh because there was something else you wanted more - the approval of your parents, or your spouse, or God. You wanted a healthy body, a successful career, a clear conscience. That is what

makes up purpose. And my suggestion today is that your purposes in life enter into a tug-of-war with your pleasures. They are not always at odds, but often they are.

Once we understand this dynamic we can see that one way to defeat an addiction or prevent an addiction is to continually strengthen the purpose element of our lives. The most interesting book I have read in the last two months is entitled *Addiction and Virtue*. It is written by a philosophy professor named Kent Dunnington, who goes right at this issue of purpose and argues persuasively that contemporary American society is a breeding ground for addictions because our wealth produces lots of leisure time and our secular world-view has drained us of purpose. Indeed, most moderners have no sense of why they are here or what they are to be doing. Dunnington writes: *Modern persons are not so much desperate as cynical or bored*. I think he is on to something. We don't think of boredom as a big problem, but it is, because it flows out of a lack of purpose and meaning. This is what leads to gangs and the killing of innocents just for kicks. The brilliant Dane, Soren Kierkegaard, identified this long ago when he wrote: *Evil is gaining ground more and more since boredom is on the increase and boredom is a root of all evil*. William Burroughs, a former junky writes: *You become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivation in any other direction. Junk wins by default. I tried it as a matter of curiosity*. In other words, where there is no purpose, pleasure is the only value. Where there is no purpose, pleasure is the only value. I find it interesting to see the reactions of non-Christian people to certain Christian choices. There is total perplexity regarding the choice to tithe or abstain from sex outside of marriage, or avoid intoxication or resist pornography. Why would you do such things? Because we live for a purpose that is bigger than our pleasures, that is why. The same reason men, for generations, have laid down their lives in war. War is an interesting thing - as awful as it is, in the absence of God it is about the only thing that gives people a sense of meaning and purpose for their lives. It has a way of creating grown-ups that peace-time just does not supply.

Now, where is purpose to be found? It is found surely in metaphysical truths - spiritual truths that speak to the meaning of life. But the primary place we find it is in relationships. In relationships. One of the primary factors that leads to addiction is the lack of relationships. What we find helps people overcome addictions is getting into relationships, especially in intentional community. In the context of community we find not only encouragement and hope but purpose. We live with purpose for our spouse, for our friends, for our children, for our country, for our God. Soldiers fight with great honor and bravery for why? For some political cause? Not usually. It is for their fellow soldiers, or for God, or for their children. Purpose trumps pleasure and it is the only thing that will.

What are you living for? The Bible tells us Jesus came to set us free, to give us an abundant life. And he does that by ripping us out of our self-absorbed, pleasure-centric world. II Corinthians 5:**14a** *the love of Christ controls us*. Not our addictions. Not our lusts. The love of Christ controls us. Read on. **14-15** *the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf*. Christ died that we might find abundant life, purposeful life, life with meaning because it is a life centered on Jesus Himself, a life that finds its purpose in pleasing the One who has given His all on our behalf.

Ohh, there is so much I don't have time to get to in this message today. I will limit myself to one more brief point, our final either/or proposition, which is Master or Master. Master or Master. You say, that isn't an option. Well - right. The point is that you will have a master. The option is who or what will it be? As Bob Dylan put it, "you gotta serve somebody." And you will. Those who make the choice to indulge in addictive substances and practices ironically think they are expressing their freedom as they do when, in fact, they are placing themselves in a bondage they can hardly imagine. Proverbs 23:**29-30** *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger long over wine*. God's word doesn't ask, *who is really free?* It is, *who is miserable?* It ends with that pitiful verse **35** *When shall I awake? I will seek another drink*. Does that sound like freedom? Anything but. It is bondage. Addiction. It destroys bodies, souls, families. It lands more people in prison than anything else. Addiction is our #1 social problem. Some things are more addictive than others, but the major ones are alcohol, narcotics and pornography. Most of what I say here focuses on the first two. Young people, listen to me! As the Proverb says, you are playing with poisonous snakes here. These substances are addictive. They bring you under their power. They will dominate your life. Addiction to drugs and booze can be more powerful than the strongest conscience and the strongest bonds of family love. The one so enslaved becomes like a spectator to his own life, watching the devil of addiction demolish his career, and his reputation and his family. Is it any wonder God warns us in Proverbs and warns us in Ephesians to never let ourselves fall into the sin of intoxication? God isn't trying to keep you from something good. Oh, young people, God forbid that you should have that view of your heavenly Father. God is not trying to keep you from something good but from one of the most powerful schemes and enslaving traps the enemy of your soul has ever devised. I don't know what you teens have heard in your lifetime, but I would like to

grab everyone of you and shake you and scream: *DO NOT GO NEAR THIS STUFF! RUN FROM THESE TEMPTATIONS!* For in so running, you are running for your life.

In the final analysis however, I don't think I am really preaching today about drugs, alcohol or any of the other popular addictions. I am preaching about Jesus and commending Him to you as the One good Master. And you will remember what the good Master said. No one can serve two masters. No one can serve two. And the reality is that if you allow booze or drugs or porn or food or any such thing to master you, you have lost Jesus. Paul makes mention of this in I Corinthians 6:12 *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.* Is that a personal commitment you can make? To say, out of devotion to Jesus, "Lord, You only are my Master and I will not allow any substance, any bad habit to take over as the central commitment of my life." You see, you will serve what feeds you. You will serve what feeds you. If your soul is fed, if your needs are met, if your refuge and salvation is a six-pack or a cocaine pipe or a website. If that is what is filling you and thrilling you and capturing your affection, then you will likewise live for that. But, if you are looking to Jesus to fill your heart, to satisfy your hungers, to direct your life. If Jesus is the center and source and end of your passions then you will know Him as Master and knowing Him as Master you will know Him as well as Savior. Bondage to Jesus is freedom. Bondage to Jesus is freedom. What the world holds out as freedom is a fraud.

Well, pastor, I just think you can do both. You can love Jesus and pot. You can love Jesus and porn. You can love Jesus and get high on other stuff. So you say. Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. He also says that the drunkard along with adulterers and homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God. When you try to serve two masters you end up miserable. Nothing is more pitiful than someone trying to be a Christian addict. Serve one master and forget the other. Quit the delusion. You will be happier in this life. And if you want to be happy in the life to come. Choose Jesus. If Jesus is Lord then determine right now that you will allow nothing in your life that will threaten his crown rights, that you will allow yourself to be mastered by nothing Can you say this today? *Jesus is my Master today, and by His grace and my decision, He will be so tomorrow.* Let's say it together. *Jesus is my Master today, and by His grace and my decision, He will be so tomorrow.*