

Hot Topics

Alcohol and Gambling

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

Hot Topics: Alcohol and Gambling

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Romans 6:8-23 and others.

Introduction

Gambling is an activity which can and does become addictive for a significant number of people. Gambling changes the chemistry of the brain, and is one of the most difficult addictions to "cure". In communities with casinos and other gambling available, there are far more pathological gamblers than people afflicted with cancer. (*National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling White Paper, "Tide of Gambling Yields Backwash of Addiction,"* by Carl Bechtold)

One of four published papers resulting from the largest national study to date, this presentation unequivocally demonstrates the damage created by having casinos nearby. Data collected by Dr. John Welte and others shows, (1) A casino within 10 miles of home is associated with a 90% increase in the odds of being a pathological or problem gambler. (2) For every increase of one standard deviation in neighborhood disadvantage the odds of being a pathological or problem gambler increase by 69%. (3) For every additional form of legal gambling in his or her state, the respondent's odds of having gambled in the past year increase by 17%. ("The Relationship of Ecological and Geographic Factors to Gambling Behavior and Pathology," *Journal of Gambling Studies*, submitted for publication, September 19, 2003)

Gambling proponents excuse gambling addiction as simply one more symptom of addictive personalities. "It's not our fault – there's something wrong with the customers." The question is, why do we need to inflict one more illness on so many citizens who may not even know they have the tendency? This study shows the link between alcohol and gambling addiction. There is a link, and populations with high levels of alcohol problems can expect to have high gambling addiction as well, If gambling is allowed to proliferate. (Grant, Kushner and Kim, "Pathological Gambling and Alcohol Use Disorder," *Alcohol Research and Health*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2002, pp. 143-150)

The red flags raised about alcohol or gambling are not just matters with parochial interest for the church. As the sample quotes above suggest, addictions associated with these social practices have attracted numerous professional studies by scores of researchers. There are even studies showing linkage between the two. Our attention to this topic is, therefore, not unique to our Covenant of Christian Conduct, but reverberates within the larger culture.

Some of us grew up in households where the rules about such matters were strict and without exceptions. My father grew up in the heart of Midwest Methodism in a town where everybody knew everybody, including my great grandfather Brown who was an notorious drunkard. As a consequence, his offspring for at least two generations refused to touch alcohol because of terrifying memories of "mad drunks" and beating escapades which left emotional scars on my grandfather and his siblings. I still have the signed copy of the "temperance pledge" taken by my Dad's family. Considering the social impact of one man's intemperance, such a decision made good sense. Keeping Grandfather Brown away from the saloon was an art form in that household. If a game of poker by otherwise pious Methodists would dissuade him from a drinking binge, the apparent spiritual compromise seemed reasonable. Happily, his doctor's dire warnings in the wake of onset cirrhosis of the liver,

scared the devil out of him and led to sobriety and genuine Christian conversion, allowing him to live into his eighties.

When the church opposed alcohol use in those days, it wasn't just a matter of "prim-and-proper" morals or "holier-than-thou" religiosity. Such stories as the one I have related became commonplace. The impact on retaining employment, maintaining marriages, nurturing children, and preventing social violence was enormous. The close connections between women's rights and temperance societies revealed how badly wives and mothers were affected by the addictive influence of alcohol. The church stood fast in its opposition to abuse within families and fought its battles against "demon rum" on several fronts.

People living in the 19th century knew what an addiction was, even without formal professional studies. Grandfather Brown's family knew what an addiction was as they saw their patriarch reduced to fiery anger, day after day. And he eventually did as well, giving up the substance altogether.

During the pre-WWII period, in the wake of the great depression and national malaise, substance abuse was on the upswing, leading to the eventual emergence of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The AA movement had roots in the English Keswick revivals, but got its American flavor from Sam Shoemaker until the organization emerged under the leadership of Bill Wilson and Bob Smith. Summarized in *The Big Book*, the so-called "bible" of AA, the now-familiar Twelve Step program has found its way into over 150 countries:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Characterizing the Twelve Step Programs, one writer has observed that they

... symbolically represent human structure in three dimensions: physical, mental, and spiritual. The disorders and diseases the groups deal with are understood to manifest themselves in each dimension. For addicts and alcoholics the physical dimension is best described by the "allergy-like bodily reaction" resulting in the inability to stop using substances after the initial use. For groups not related to substance abuse the physical manifestation could be much more varied including, but not limited to: compulsive hoarding, distractibility, eating disorders, dysfunctional enabling, hyperactivity, hypomania, insomnia, irritability, lack of motivation, laziness, mania, panic attacks, psychosomatic illnesses, poor impulse control, procrastination, self-injury and suicide attempts. The mental obsession is described as the cognitive processes that cause the addict or alcoholic to continue using following the initial use, either knowing the result will be an inability to stop or operating under the delusion that the result will be different. The illness of the spiritual dimension, or "spiritual malady," is considered in all twelve-step groups to be self-centeredness. This model is not intended to be a scientific explanation, it is only a perspective that twelve-step organizations have found useful.

The process is intended to replace self-centeredness with a growing moral consciousness and a willingness for self-sacrifice and unselfish constructive action. In twelve-step groups, this is known as a spiritual awakening or religious experience. This should not be confused with abreaction, which produces dramatic, but ephemeral,

changes. In twelve-step groups, "spiritual awakening" is believed to develop, most frequently, slowly over a period of time.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve-step_program].

In our time, the church supports efforts to "Celebrate Recovery." In keeping with the sound elements of the AA experience, the *Life Recovery Bible* was published directing the reader to the resources for recovery found in the Scriptures. Edited by Dr. David A. Stoop and Stephen Arterburn, it was first published using the *Living Bible* translation by Tyndale House in 1992 and was reprinted incorporating the *New Living Translation* in late 1998. *The Life Recovery Bible* includes several helpful features for people in recovery, through Alcoholics Anonymous or other recovery groups patterned after AA. User-friendly, with three devotional reading plans (Twelve-Step Plan, Recovery Principle Plan, and Serenity Prayer Plan) interspersed throughout the Bible text, its devotional readings are tied to those specific passages of Scripture related to recovery. Recovery profiles of Bible characters highlight the ways in which individuals have overcome significant life challenges. Other features include introductory materials for specific books of the Bible, recovery commentary notes, and an index. As a source of encouragement to individuals in recovery, the *Life Recovery Bible* serves as a constant reminder of God's presence, consequences, and the promise of forgiveness.

The resources found in this edition include:

- Recovery notes pinpoint passages and thoughts important to people in recovery.
- Twelve Step devotionals discuss the important truths of the Twelve Steps in the context of Scripture.
- Serenity Prayer devotionals reflect on principles from the Serenity Prayer illuminated by specific Bible passages.
- Recovery Profiles feature recovery lessons drawn from the lives of key Bible people.
- Recovery Principle devotionals show how the Bible addresses many specific concerns of people in recovery.

Defining Addiction in Biblical Terms

Some things are bad "in-themselves," while others only become that way through improper use. The New Testament often makes that careful distinction. On the one hand, "God richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17), a confident statement based on the following principle:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

Much of this teaching already existed in the ancient creation story found in *Genesis* where we read:

29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so (Genesis 1:29-30).

Later, the post-Flood world, God expanded His permissions:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Genesis 9:3).

Those are telling words: "I give you everything" (Hebrew: *nāthattî lākem 'eth-kōl*) — literally, "the everything."

However, without experience, human beings might well mishandle their use of "everything." If we read the subsequent account in Genesis 9, humanity in the post-Flood world was continuing to make new discoveries about how things worked and possible dangers which lurked in the misuse of "everything." One simple narrative illustrates this point:

²⁰ Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent (Genesis 9:20-21).

When we read the events which result from Noah's intoxication, they reveal a tale of twisted sexuality and familial dishonor at a time when the world of the Near East was putting its life back together after a major catastrophe. The object of criticism in this story is not Noah who seemingly lost his sobriety by accident, being unfamiliar with the fermentation of grape juice and its effects. Greater guilt rests on Ham who dishonored his father by subjecting him to ridicule rather than humbly leading him back to sobriety.

The New Testament addresses the need for wisdom in all such matters:

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The Greek word translated here as "powers of discernment" is actually the simple word for "senses" (*aisthētērion*), and this term is combined with the common expression for "exercise" (*gymnazō*). No doubt, Noah gained that discernment through the exercise of his senses. While we might be inclined to criticize him for making his mistake, we ought to acknowledge the likelihood that experience made Noah a more self-controlled human being. In so doing, he avoided what he commonly call *addiction* — in this case to wine.

Considering the meaning of the word "addiction," we take note of the following:

1. English dictionary definition:- "to surrender oneself to something obsessively or habitually."
2. From Gerald May's book, *Addiction and Grace*:¹ comes this succinct definition: "Compulsive, habitual behavior that limits freedom of human desire."

There are both *attraction additions* and *aversion addictions* (indulgence and denial). General characteristics include using language like: "must have," "want more," "no problem," "can't stop." Patterns of behavior are usually identified as weaknesses, vulnerabilities, character faults, neuroses, "flesh," besetting sins, life-dominating sins, strongholds of sins, demons, and idolatry. Variations in addiction patterns are due to differing personalities and tendencies to obsess. These can be shaped by aspects of the *self*: Success, significance, freedom, leader, competition, excitement, approval, social, popularity, talk, relationship, love, security, attachment, tradition, belonging, status quo, knowledge, accuracy, structure, organization, perfection.

Key Biblical Passages Addressing Addictions

1. Direct Scripture references pertaining to "addiction": the linkage to *wine* as a primary example.
 - a. "not addicted to wine" (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
 - b. "not addicted to much wine" (I Timothy 3:8)
 - c. "not enslaved to much wine" (Titus 2:3)
2. Correlation with the Biblical word "flesh" (*sarx*)
 - a. "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its desires" (Romans 13:14)
 - b. "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24)
 - c. "formerly walked in the desires of our flesh indulging the desires (Ephesians 2:3)
 - d. "abstain from fleshly desires, which wage war against soul" (I Peter 2:11)
 - e. "carried away, seduced by tempter, under our desires" (James 1:13)
3. Correlation with Biblical idea of "besetting sins"
 - a. "the sin that so easily entangles us" (Hebrews 12:1)
 - b. "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23)
4. Correlation with Biblical concept of "idolatry"
 - a. "god is their appetite ... set minds on earthly things" (Philippians 3:19)
 - b. Gerald May - "addictions make idolaters of us all"²
 - c. Philip Yancey - "what the Old Testament calls idolatry, enlightened Westerners call 'addictions'."³

¹ Published by HarperOne, 2007. *Addiction and Grace* offers an inspiring and hope-filled vision for those who desire to explore the mystery of who and what they really are. May examines the "processes of attachment" that lead to addiction and describes the relationship between addiction and spiritual awareness. He also details the various addictions from which we can suffer, not only to substances like alcohol and drugs, but to work, sex, performance, responsibility, and intimacy. Drawing on his experience as a psychiatrist working with the chemically dependent, May emphasizes that addiction represents an attempt to assert complete control over our lives. *Addiction and Grace* is a compassionate and wise treatment of a topic of major concern in these most addictive of times, one that can provide a critical yet hopeful guide to a place of freedom based on contemplative spirituality.

² *Addiction and Grace*, p. 268.

5. Addictive patterns
 - a. "God shall supply all your needs...in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19)
 - b. "the righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite" (Proverbs 13:25)
 - c. "the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32, 36)
 - d. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free" (Galatians 5:1)
 - e. "not adequate in ourselves...adequacy is from God" (II Corinthians 3:5)
 - f. "battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15)
 - g. "I will not drive them out in a single year" (Exodus 23:29-33)

A Theology of Addiction

A group of scholars have written thoughtful essays on what has been termed a *theology of addiction and recovery*.⁴

Some of the key themes for developing a pastoral theology of addiction and recovery are summarized below. The readers of these notes are encouraged to explore this book in greater detail (see footnote below).

1. The human condition
 - a. All of us swim in an ocean of grace.
 - b. All of us are created in the image of God.
 - c. All of us are embedded in a world of creatures.
 - d. All of us live in a context of finitude.
 - e. All of us struggle with self.

2. The addictive path: A Way to Cope

Underneath the addict's struggle is a dark and commanding perspective on life. The addict "forgets" (or because of crippling experiences during the course of development, has never known, or has rejected in the face of life's troubles) the pervasiveness of loving grace and the sense of connectedness with living as part of creation. Rather, the addict experiences a sense of alienation, estrangement, loneliness, unloveability, and hopelessness, often felt as a sense of being "different from" or "less than" others. In the face of this "pain of living," the addict accepts a host of false and negative beliefs about the self, about the world, and about God.

This Week's Main Text: Romans 6:8-23

8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,

18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. 20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ *Finding God in Unexpected Places*, Doubleday Religion, 2005, p.15.

⁴ Oliver J. Morgan and Merle Jordan, Editors, *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*, Chalice Press, 1999.

Background to Passage

The chosen passage for this week's study belongs to a much larger block of material in the book of *Romans* which encompasses 5:1-8:39. Its central focus is God's people as the New Humanity. Of special interest in this respect is the canvass of 5:12-21 where we are brought face to face with our connection to "Adam," the representative head of the Old Humanity. Through Adam, human beings fall under the reign of Sin and their consequential death. However, the way forward is through the Messiah ("Christ") whose offer includes the gift of forgiveness from our sins, and the hopeful release from eternal death. In this depiction of the human condition, vis-à-vis Adam and the Fall, we come to see the overwhelming grace of God expressed in the undeserved offer of eternal life (5:15, 17,20). We encounter the phrase "how much more" when comparing sin with God's gift in Jesus Christ.

Adam's misbehavin' left the world under Sin's rule and the cruel consequences Sin imposes: death. Human beings need not remain in the dark and gloomy world where Sin reigns, Paul tells his audience in the opening verses of Romans 6. That means they need not remain in the world where addictions have the last word. To dramatize that departure from the old kingdom and entrance into the new, baptism has been given to the church. In dramatic and decisive ways, those who place their full weight on the achievement of Jesus at the cross, demonstrate that achievement *in their own lives* by passing through the waters of baptism in much the same way as ancient Israel passed through the Red Sea during the Exodus from Egypt. Indeed, the change of situation is even more dramatic in the case of the Christian. Whereas Israel left Egypt behind, they soon discovered Egypt had not left them far behind at all. Though Pharaoh failed to overtake them before the sea waters overtook him, another more sinister form of oppression followed the Israelites into the wilderness, namely, their own desires and addictions to the life of Egypt (see Exodus 16:1-3). At first they complained about the lack of food, lusting for the foods of Egypt, while all the time forgetting the slavery which having those foods would require. Eventually they made the Golden Calf, the quintessential symbol of pagan religion. When questioned about these shenanigans, Aaron, Moses' brother demurred that the Golden Calf simply leaped out the fire, as if he couldn't help himself in allowing this transgression to take hold in the camp of the Israelites. Such is the nature of addictions.

But from such things, Paul tells us, the death and resurrection of Christ delivers us, and nothing tells that story more vividly than the baptism we undergo following conversion.

In light of that, Paul makes the following definitive statement:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin (Romans 6:6-7).

The cross entailed the crucifixion of Jesus, but it also meant our own crucifixion. Something about us died when Christ died. To describe this "something" Paul uses the phrase "the body of sin": *to sōma tēs hamartias*. Usually the word *sōma*, "body," is a morally neutral way of talking about the mental/physical dimension of human beings. It is a short-hand way of speaking about the *whole person*. By contrast, *sarx*, "flesh," carries a negative connotation of human weakness and sinfulness. "Body" implies that which has a physical being. What Christ destroys is "the body of sin." How are we to understand this expression? Part of the answer lies with the genitive case of the noun "sin". Here are some options:

1. If this is a subjective genitive, then we would read this as that which "sin embodies — all that it stands for or represents.
2. If this is an objective genitive, then it means that which embodies sin — the form that sin takes.
3. If this is a simple possessive, it refers to the body which belongs to sin or its nature — that which is the nature of sin ("sin nature"). In this case, *we* belong to sin until Christ breaks the ownership bond connecting us to sin.

Sin owns us as the fallen offspring of Adam, the one who allowed sin to enter the world and reign over it (see Romans 5). Sin owns *embodied* humanity, exercising its authority in and through the mental/physical aspect of

human life. This is, of course, the realm where addictions take a foothold. Addictions seize upon the already enslaved condition of human beings, exploiting their bondage to sin and death. However, the cross severs the servitude and breaks us free from alien domination. What dies is called "the old self" or, as the Greek has it, *ho palaios hēmōn anthrōpos*, "the old human one." The word *anthrōpos* is usually translated "man," but used in contexts where both men and women are included, the word comes closer to the Hebrew *Adam* which includes both genders. We prefer the rendering "humanity." Because of Christ, God has brought into a being a New Humanity, having dealt a death blow to the old one. Our new condition involves "no longer" being enslaved to sin, but instead, being set free from sin.

In summary, *Romans* teaches how the basis for human liberation, in all forms, is found in Christ and the cross. This "liberation theology" becomes an excellent starting point for discussing God's provision for liberation from human *addictions*.

We now consider how this unfolds in Romans 6:8-23.

Indicative and Imperative

The Greek language supports several verb moods, among them is the *indicative* which expresses things as facts — declares them as facts (from the Latin *indicare*, "to declare"). They might belong to the past, present or future, but they are still considered in relationship to their factual nature. In addition, there is the *imperative* mood which issues a command or instruction.

Romans 6:8-10 contains a series of indicative verb forms which assert several facts about our relationship to sin:

We have died with Christ
We will also live with him
Christ, raised from the dead, will never die again
Death no longer has dominion over him.
He died to sin once for all
The life he lives he lives to God.

Each of these factual statements has to do with Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection. But they are simultaneously factual statements about *us* precisely because we have a relationship with Christ. As we noted above, our baptism (water and Spirit) dramatizes our death and resurrection with Christ. What Paul does in 6:8-10 is make clear the implications of that baptism. Of special importance is the confident claim: "Death no longer has dominion over him," and, by implication, has no dominion over *us*. What does this mean?

The word "dominion" comes from the Greek *kurieuō* a verb which the same root as the noun *kurios*, "Lord." In classical usage, the verb applies to a person who is lord or master of a people or country. It also can mean "to have legal power to do." In the Gospels we find it used for Gentile rulers who "lord their power over others" (Luke 22:25 and Matthew 20:25). Death is thereby depicted in 6:9 as a tyrannical ruler whose reign has decisively come to an end in the life of the Christ follower. The saving work of Jesus is a work of deliverance from sin and defeat of death. His defeat of sin is also his defeat of death. They are, in fact, part of the same victory. Once more, there are undertones of the Exodus and the reminder of Israel's ancient past when Pharaoh held iron-fisted sway over an enslaved people. At that time, like sin and death, Pharaoh had dominion over God's chosen people until God set them free, having dealt a death blow in the tenth plague to Pharaoh's first-born heir to the throne — indeed to all the first-born of the Egyptians. Under the sign of the blood, painted on doorposts and lintels in the Hebrew settlements, God saved His people, and Pharaoh no longer had dominion over them. Salvation is about deliverance and rescue; it is about the radical transfer of power from sin to Christ.

Factually, Jesus "lives to God." We might say, Jesus lives at the behest of God, that is, by His authority and rule. Now that the dominion of sin and death has been set aside, the kingdom of God has the upper hand. Similar language appears in 1 Corinthians 15 and has strong futuristic tones (that is, *eschatological* ones):

Then comes the end, when he delivers *the kingdom to God* the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24).

And elsewhere:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

These, then, are the indicatives in Romans 6:8-10.

But now we come to the *imperatives* (Romans 6:11-14): the commands which flow from these statements of fact. The sort of ethics advocated by the New Testament is not a kind of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" variety. No one is able to help themselves in the least toward holiness and righteous living apart from the work of Christ. However, since the indicatives are *true*, the imperatives have a springboard from which to advance into holiness and away from the addictions of sin. We are empowered by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

Here then are the imperatives:

Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies.

Do not obey the passions of your mortal bodies.

Do not present your members as instruments of sin to do unrighteousness.

Present yourselves to God.

(Present) your members to God as instruments of to do righteousness.

Each imperative draws its energy from the indicatives. For example, we are commanded "let not sin *reign*..." precisely because we *know* that the dominion (reign) of sin and death has come to end. Further, we are commanded not to obey the passions, because we *know* sin and death cannot any longer legitimately enslave us. Armed with the truth of the Gospel, we deny to addictive behavior any right to control us: it has no right! To put it concisely, if Jesus is Lord, then a host of other competing lords can claim no ground at all.

Discussion of Passion or Desire as the Prelude to Addiction

Of special interest to this week's topic is Paul's use of the word "passions," translated from the Greek *epithumia*, a term which stresses the "longing after" something. Companion meanings include "yearn" and "desire." There are some 38 instances of the root form in the New Testament, appearing in some 37 passages. A closer look will help us see the special emphasis of this expression:

1. "desires for other things" (Mark 4:19): referring to those influences which crowd out the effect of God's word in our lives.
2. "your father's desires" (John 8:44): where "father" refers to the "your father the devil." Jesus tells the Jewish leadership that their "will" is shaped by what the devil wants.
3. "lusts of their hearts" (Romans 1:24): description of what the pagan's desire in their hearts, and which spill over into their sexual practices (see the subsequent verses for the context).
4. "covet" (Romans 7:7-8): Paul uses this word to translate the command not to "covet" found in the Ten Commandments. He places this sin at the heart of how sin actually operates.
5. "flesh...its desires" (Romans 13:14). Has to do with "gratifying the flesh" by *always* doing what it *wants*. Set in contrast to "putting on the Lord Jesus," which suggests doing what *he* wants instead. "Flesh," as noted previously, points to the human condition apart from God, acting in its own strength.
6. "gratify desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Placed in contrast to "walking in the Spirit," an expression which refers to allowing the Spirit to direct our steps.
7. "crucify passions and desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:24). By "belonging to Christ," this passage says, the act of crucifixion has already been done. Along with *epithumia*, Paul uses the word *pathēma* which means a

passive emotion or condition, one which leaves the person unarmed and unprepared. This idea shows one of the ways addictions thrive: passivity.

8. "lived in the passions of our flesh" (Ephesians 2:4). Describes the "former life" which derived its energy from "passions of the flesh." Paul further explains how this decision led to carrying out the wishes of body and mind, driven by *orgē* — sheer anger or renege. The life of passion gains its power from unbridled anger and resentment.
9. "old humanity corrupted by deceitful desires" (Ephesians 4:22). The life before Christ — the life in Adam — is marked by desire which *damages* our basic humanity. The Greek word for "corrupted" is *phtheirō* and has to do with being lead astray, seduced, and brought to ruin.
10. "put to death what is earthly...evil desire..." (Colossians 3:5). Paul includes *epithumia* in a longer list of sins which climax with the idea of "idolatry," the worship of something unworthy of such adoration — worship which belongs only to God. By calling such things "earthly," Paul sets them in opposition to those things which have their source "in heaven" where Christ sits at the right hand of God (see Colossians 3:1, the lead verse for this section).
11. "passion of lust like Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:5). Absent any other God, the Gentiles followed, obeyed and served their desires. Elsewhere, of such persons it is said that their "god is their stomach" (Philippians 3:19). Failure to "know God" — that is the *true* God — leads to a passion-driven life.
12. "foolish and harmful desires plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9). The word "foolish" (Greek: *anoētos*) implies "without thought," while "harmful" (Greek: *blaberos*) carries the meaning "noxious, disadvantageous, hurtful." One of the marks of *epithumia* is its evident lack of wisdom or thought. The word "plunge" underscores the precipitous outcome of acting without thinking, especially neglecting God's wisdom and guidance. The combination of "ruin and destruction" (*olethros* and *apōleia*) is called a *hendiadys* in the Greek language, where idea *B* is dependent on idea *A*. In this case, the damaged condition (ruin) of human beings who are driven by passion leads to their destruction.
13. "flee youthful passions" (2 Timothy 2:22). As youths, human beings are still being shaped by those around them, and they are learning to respond based on their emotional, physical and mental constitutions. Under the direction of the Spirit, Christ followers are able to take charge of that process. The young are vulnerable and impressionable, and passions often replace thought and sound reasoning. Habits are formed in youth which may become harder to break in adulthood. Paul offers sound advice to Timothy in this regard: "flee," from *pheugō*: "flee, run away; escape; shun, avoid, turn from; disappear, vanish." The command is in the present active form, implying a persistent practice.
14. "led astray by passions" (2 Timothy 3:6). Passions are not good guides; they take us off the right road, allowing us to become lost.
15. "teachers to suit their own passions" (2 Timothy 4:3). Truth becomes a casualty at the hand of passion, for passion seeks justification from teachers who "suit" its objectives. Passion has already decided in advance what it wants, and then it turns to apparent reasoning to support its agenda. Addictions acquire similar structures for reinforcement.
16. "train...to renounce...ungodliness and worldly passions" (Titus 2:12). In 2:11, Paul informs Titus that grace and salvation have appeared (in the person of Jesus). Here, these gifts of God coordinate their efforts to train us in "renouncing" worldly passions. The word "training" (Greek: *paideuō*) suggests that passions are habits which need to be broken and new ones put in their place. Born into this "world" (and thus, "worldly," from the Greek word *kosmos*), we have been seated in the classroom of the passions, made to think and do as the world decides for us. In Christ, all of that can change if we are willing to submit ourselves to the discipline of righteousness. The strong connection between ungodliness and passions is striking: serving the passions is not serving God.
17. "slaves to various passions" (Titus 3:3). Once more we see the role of passions as a master and we as slaves.
18. "tempted .. lured ... enticed by his own desire" (James 1:14). The writer uses the word *idios* to describe the desires in question, namely, that they belong to and are the personal property of the person who has them.

Blame cannot be laid at the feet of something else, in this case, but the person bears full responsibility for submitting to them.

19. "desire ... sin" (James 1:15). In this case, the connection is between desire and the result of unbridled desire, namely, sin.
20. "as obedient children not conformed to the passions of former ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14). The writer contrasts living as children obedient to God (serving God) and allowing passions born of ignorance to control (conform, see Romans 12:2 as discussed above) them.
21. "abstain from passions of the flesh which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Addictions involve us in a battle which reaches deep into our souls.
22. "live for human passions ... or for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:2). Choice between allowing human passions to be master or doing God's will instead.
23. "what Gentiles want to do ... passions" (1 Peter 4:3). A mark of paganism is surrendering one's will to passion. The writer also includes here a lengthier list (which see) of related activities, with passion placed directly in the middle of them.
24. "share the divine nature ... escape corruption in the world through corrupting desire" (2 Peter 1:4). Peter tells the reader that "great precious promises" from God make possible sharing in His nature and thereby escaping the corrupting influences (addictions) rooted in the world.
25. "indulge lust of defiling passion" (2 Peter 2:10). The emphasis falls on those internal influences which invite "indulgence." The Greek word used is the simpler term *poreuomai* which actually means "to proceed, travel, journey, live, conduct." In effect, captives of an addiction make it their "way of life."
26. "enticed by sensual passions of the flesh" (2 Peter 2:18). The word for "enticed" is *deleazō* and has the sense of "lure, entice, trap." Used in this way, passions/desires bait a trap which the careless and mindless fall into because they do not have the wisdom of God.
27. "scoffers ... follow own sinful desires" (2 Peter 3:3). The scoffer makes fun of another while ironically following blindly the leading of passions. Claiming to be in charge of their own lives, they submit to an alien power which runs theirs (see also Jude 1:16, 18)
28. "lust ... flesh ... lust eyes ... lusts pass away" (1 John 2:16-17). We have already discussed this passage in our comments on culture (see previous week's study).
29. "the fruit longed for ... has gone from you" (Revelation 18:14). Desires offer reward but cannot deliver on their promises; desire is the great disappointment and quickly becomes addiction.

How We Present Ourselves

The imperative section (6:11-14) also contains two instances of the expression "present yourselves," based on the Greek root *paristēmi* used in the present active imperative form. Readers of the Old Testament may recognize the familiar language of a priest or other person "presenting themselves" before the Lord in the Temple (or Tabernacle) (see 1 Samuel 10:19, for example). We might paraphrase this, "place yourselves at God's disposal, ready for His service." This is the language of service and obedience to God. Paul calls upon Christ followers to stand at the ready, prepared to take orders from the king of heaven. Once they served their own desires and passions (as we have noted), but because Christ has set them free from these, they are now available for fully devoted service to God. Nothing hinders them from doing so, Paul tells his readers, since the old masters (sin and death) lie defeated beneath the cross and the empty tomb.

This verb also appears in Romans 12:1 (see previous study) where we are called upon to "present our bodies as living sacrifices..." In Romans 14:10 it is used of our standing before God at the day of judgment. To be brought into the presence of God is expressed by this verb form in 2 Corinthians 4:14. The word also implies purity and maturity in 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:27, and Colossians 1:22, 28. We are called upon to present ourselves as approved workmen in 2 Timothy 2:15. From these texts, the net accumulative meaning is surrendering to God's will (and not to an alien will) so that we might become effective instruments of His purpose in the world. Obviously, surrendering to passion/desire renders us ineffective in doing God's will, since it robs us of whole-hearted devotion to what God wants. Otherwise, ours is a divided soul, serving two masters, if we try to have it both ways (see Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13).

To present ourselves as "instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13) suggests our role as persons who help "put the world to rights," that is, who mend the broken things and restore God's good creation. But this cannot happen unless we ourselves have experienced the mending and the restoring. God wants to free us, Paul says, from bondage to destructive desires so that we might bring the message of healing to others. Liberation from addiction is not just a private matter, but has wider implications for the larger body of Christ. Addicted and in bondage, a human being can have only limited benefit to the world. If we correctly understand Paul's words in Romans 8:19-21, the emancipation of creation rests with the liberation of God's children:

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The prospect of a world which shares in "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" ought to motivate those who are afflicted with addictions. Their eventual freedom becomes a sign of God's ultimate freedom for the whole human race. In this sense, we ought to serve, not ourselves, but the interests of God's will throughout His creation.

Sin No Longer in Charge

The overwhelming burden of 6:14 is to announce the end of sin's reign and the enthronement of God's grace. Once more, Paul uses the Greek word *kurieuō* to communicate the idea that "lordship" belongs, not to sin, but to Christ. The grace of God is both His favorable unmerited disposition toward human beings and His fully deployed power at work in our lives. We are inclined to think of grace only in terms of God's disposition and forget that grace is an active force as well. Grace *does* what God desires; grace enables what God intends. Consider this familiar passage:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The notions of "sufficiency and power" are equally connected to "grace" in this text. In the following verse (12:10) Paul writes, "when I am weak, then I am strong..."

This was the experience of the early church, where grace and power appear in the same contexts:

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33).

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8).

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power (Ephesians 3:7).

God's grace sets us free and it also makes us strong. Strong against passion, desire, and addictions.

Paul also addresses a common frustration of those who grapple with addictions: that accusatory voice which quickly condemns but fails to correct. He knew something about that voice, having lived for some time with the false belief that to be *under law* was the same as being *under God*. Law in this sense is the abuse of Torah, a wrong-headed application of its meaning and message to human lives. Persons who live within the environment of religion often discover a merciless taskmaster in the law. Torah was suppose to be God's Word, spoken by a Father who desired the best for His children: guiding, directing, correcting, and leading them in the way of righteousness and true holiness. But (as Romans 7 — the very next chapter — suggests), Torah had been hijacked in Paul's time and turned into something God never intended: not a rod of correction but a club of condemnation. While addictions require "tough love," they are not helped by legalism, and that is what Paul tells his readers in 6:14.

Questions and More Questions

A natural section break occurs at Romans 6:15 in this week's reading. The tone changes, as Paul poses a series of questions which tease the thinking of his audience. These questions cause the reader to consider the implications of what Paul has just written in 6:8-14, but also anticipate possible responses from those who

wonder about this radical new teaching about God's grace. "What then?" (Greek: *ti oun*) introduces this fresh paragraph (6:15-16). If grace is seen only as God's accepting love, unconditionally given, some might exploit the opportunity such grace offers. Is God's grace a soft-touch which let's us get away with our selfishness? Or is God's grace a transformative love that will never rest until our lives are made better and holier and more in line with His will? This is the underlying inquiry of 6:15, namely, "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Here is a *deliberative question*, using the subjunctive mood. It asks about possibility, desirability or necessity rather than for facts. The Pauline response is immediate: *mē genoito*, that is, "may it never be!" (see also Romans 7:7). The construction in Greek is an optative aorist middle, expressing deep displeasure at the prospect that something might happen. Some scholars suggest that this is the closest we come to an explicative in the New Testament, a sort of sanctified oath!

Paul replies with more questions (6:16), this time of a *rhetorical nature*, introduced with "Do you not know that if...?" There is liberation in the right kind of knowledge. Did not Jesus tell his followers:
...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32).

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36).

The verb form used here, *oidate*, comes from *oida*: "Do you not know?" The word is in the perfect tense but has a present tense meaning. In this case, we might translate the verb with "do you not realize," emphasizing the idea of "coming to grips with the meaning of something." We can have knowledge without realization; we can "know" something without "getting it." Paul works out the implications of "presenting oneself" to another in the sense we discussed above. Putting myself at another's disposal is no small matter. Standing at the ready before sin has serious ramifications: death. Presenting myself to God has equally blessed outcomes: righteousness. This, then, is the direction of the argument in 6:15-16.

If we want to avoid the acquiring of addictions, we must stop putting ourselves in the position to be controlled by an alien power. The moment we stand before our own desires and allow them to control what we think, say, and do, we have become their slave. But grace is not about slavery to such things, but the means for freedom from them. And this freedom becomes a fresh opportunity for righteousness — the putting to right of things which have gone terribly wrong. Grace, far from being God's indulgence of our sin, is the means for its correction. Within grace lies the secret for ending addiction.

Grace and Gratitude

"But thanks be to God," writes Paul in 6:17. I don't take this as merely a fine piece of rhetorical writing. The Greek has *charis de tō theō*. What's interesting about this exclamation is the use of the word *charis* which can mean either "grace" or "thanks." Used as an idiom, the phrase is an outburst of gratitude with the force of "Thank-you, God!" But the double meaning of *charis* may imply something more, namely, the life of *grace* is also the life of *gratitude*. No greater reason for thanksgiving exists than the experience of God's rich grace.

Paul works out this gratitude for grace by setting up two contrasting ways of life: one past and one present.

1. "You were being slaves of sin," he writes, placing the verb "to be" in the imperfect tense (Greek: *ēte*). This has the force of our English "used to be" or, as some translations have it, "once were." Before becoming Christ followers, we made it our habit to serve sin; sin was our constant master. Like the Israelites in Egypt, there was no Sabbath, no day of rest, only the constant labor rendered to the Pharaoh. Sin benefited from free, cheap labor, offered dutifully by those who surrendered to self rather than to God. Life in sin was not an occasional existence but a normal one. The conjunction *hoti* which introduces this clause likely means "although" in this context: "Although you used to be habitually slaves to sin..." The reader expects to hear how all of that has changed. Indeed, we expect to hear that is has changed, and that serving sin — being addicted to selfish desire — is *not* the normal human life, and that things can actually be different. Imagine how ancient Israel must have felt about slavery in Egypt. No new day arrived without the constant reminder from the taskmaster, "We are in charge here and you are not!"

2. Then comes the joyous contrast: "But (*de*) you are obeying from the heart..." Involuntary servitude — Egyptian-style — is not given "from the heart" (*ek kardias*) by "from the lash." Sin was a harsh master whose iron-tipped whips tore wounds in human flesh without mercy. Sin does not care for the well-being of human life. Sin presses its agenda with blind ambition and indifference to choice or reason or purpose. But Paul proclaims the Good News that the cross restores human choice and ends the cycle of addiction to sin. Our decision — one which is truly free — flows from the heart.

Exploring the Heart of Addiction or Freedom: A Sidebar

In an especially insightful saying, Jesus once taught:

"Do not store up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**" (Matthew 6:19-21)

To ask the question, "Where are your treasures?" is the same thing as asking, "Where is your heart?" The "heart", in Jewish understanding, was the center of one's thought and choice. Not referring to the physical heart, the term however is a metaphor expressing the true "pulse" of human life. To summarize: The heart (Greek: *kardia*; Hebrew: *leb*) consists of four elements: emotion (John 14: 1, Matthew 5: 28), will or volition (Exodus 35: 5), the intellect (John 12: 40, Romans 1: 21), and the conscience (Acts 2: 37). Each is essential. According to our text, a person is to "obey from the heart ..." (Romans 6: 17). Obedience from the heart involves will and emotion and to obey requires the intellect to understand and determine.

According to 6:17, we were once "slaves of sin" (*douloi tēs hamartias*). Paul uses the noun "slave" (*doulos*) to describe this static, fixed relationship human beings have to sin. We might say that sin treats us like *objects* not like *subjects*, ordering us about without consideration for our choice or dignity as human beings created in the image of God. By contrast, our new standing involves a free act of the will and a knowing act of obedience. Under sin, we lived as passive objects; in Christ we emerge as active subjects. That's the difference between slavery as property and slavery as personal choice.

Free willing beings are capable of rendering true obedience to another. Paul uses the verb *hupakouō* in its aorist active form ("become obedient"), suggesting a fresh decisive beginning of a new form of service. The range of meanings for this verb includes, "obey, be subject to; respond to, accept, adhere to; answer (the door)." The idea behind the verb is that there is a listening, a calling, a responding and a subsequent adherence. Someone knocks at the door, and we answer it — this is the sort of usage found in Greek literature. Heart-felt responsiveness to the call of God in Christ is a world apart from heavy-handed oppression by a cruel master.

When Paul tells his audience in 6:18 that we become "slaves of righteousness," he does not use a noun but a verb: *douloō*, and the subject of that verb is his audience. Becoming "slaves" in this way places the Christ-follower as the agent who chooses to respond and not as the object who is involuntarily subjected to an alien will. The phrase "free from sin" (from the Greek verb *eleutheroō*, in its participial form) reinforces this idea.

Where Does This All Lead?

Paul proceeds, in 6:19-23 to explore even wider implications of beings slaves, either to sin or to Christ. In 6:19 he makes clear that his language is accommodated to the thinking of his audience ("I am speaking in human terms," *anthrōpinon*). He knows that human beings have limitations in their ability to grasp spiritual truths, and so he chooses this extended metaphor of the master-slave. There were likely slaves (*douloi*) in the church at Rome, both present and former. They knew first-hand what it meant to be placed in an involuntary relationship with their masters. Such, says Paul, was your connection to sin in the past. But not all master-slave relationships were the same. Often a real relationship would develop between a slave and his master, and at the time of emancipation, a slave might well voluntarily request life-long service to his master. The roots of this practice are in the Old Testament, as this passage illustrates:

Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. 2 When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in

married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. 5 But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever (Exodus 21:1-6).

The key statement is "I love my master..." Love involves an act of the will — a free will, and words like these flow from a "heart set free."

By birth, human beings were sold into the slave-market of sin and death. By the new birth, they were given a choice to "go it alone" or, out of love for God, swear life-long obedience to the One who redeemed them from slavery. It's not just a matter of *having freedom* but how we use it. For the *doulos* who was granted his freedom and loved his master, the choice was manifestly clear: he wanted to serve the master for the rest of his life.

But choice has its consequences, and to this matter, Paul now turns. Two distinct lines of cause and effect are drawn in the text (6:20-22):

The Act of the Will	Master	Leads to...	Final Outcome
Present selves as slaves	Sin: Impurity and lawlessness	More lawlessness	Death
Present selves as slaves	God: righteousness	Sanctification	Eternal Life

Additionally, Paul contrasts these two forms of service (6:23):

Sin	Wages	Death
God: In Christ Jesus Our Lord	Gift	Eternal Life

Here are two quite different forms of relationship. One involves the payment of a "wage" (*opsōnion*), the other is a "gift" (*charisma*). Once more, Paul plays on the meaning of his previous use of *charis*, the primary term for "grace." In this instance, he chooses the noun which normally means "something given": *charis* + *ma*. The suffix *-ma* generally refers to the state of being which something has as the result of an action.⁵ The "gift" is the result of God's action of grace toward human beings in Jesus Christ. *Charisma* is that which results from grace, and, by contrast, is wholly unlike that which results from *work-for-wages*.

Another way that Paul illustrates the relationship we bear to either sin or God is the use of the word "fruit." He writes:

1. "What fruit" (*karpos*) were you getting by being a slave to sin?
2. "The fruit you get" from being slaves to God is sanctification/eternal life.

Scripture often compares different kinds of lives with different kinds of fruit. A few examples will suffice:

4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death (Romans 7:4-5).

16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:16-20).

Each type of fruit, Paul tells us in 6:21-22, is due to the relationship we have to our master. If our master is sin, the fruit assumes the form of a wage leading to death. If our master is God, the fruit is present sanctification and future eternal life.

⁵ See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and revised by Robert Funk, The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 59.

Concluding Thoughts

"Liberated slavery" — a seeming contradiction — well describes Paul's view of the Christ-follower, post-cross and post-conversion. Obedience to God replaces all forms of sub-human addiction, whether to gambling or alcohol or anything else. Simple freedom from sin, without such obedience to God, creates a vacuum of the spirit into which all sorts of addictions may swarm like bees displaced from their hive. Idleness of life is no better than slavery to an alien power. Christ brings fullness whether there had once been emptiness. Meaningful service for the kingdom and presenting ourselves as instruments for making the world right — these are the signs that we stand at the ready before a New Master. With freedom comes new responsibilities. Addictions to anything rob us of fresh opportunities to serve the Lord Christ and our neighbor. Born out of a need for pleasure, they plunge us into a world of hurt and bring upon us the great disappointment, namely, that slavery to pleasure is no better than slavery in Egypt, as Israel found out all too well. God has better things for us.

Our study of Romans 6 sheds light on the partial truth, popular in the present culture, that "God accepts us as we are."⁶ Our responsibilities as Christians depend on receiving God's grace, not on exploiting it. But we cannot continue in sin based upon our experience of grace. Nor can we coddle our addictions because we imagine God accepts us no matter what we do. It is absolutely true that God's grace reaches where human beings are, accepts them in this way, otherwise "who could be saved?" But to this half-truth we must add an additional emphasis: "God accepts us as we are, *but He does not leave us as we are.*" Grace is more than acceptance, as we have noted in this study: it is a liberating power intended *to transform us and form new habits within us.* We must not, to use Paul's words, "let sin reign in our bodies to obey its desires." Being a Christian means, therefore, not just doing *what comes naturally.* "True freedom is not simply the random, directionless life, but the genuine humanness that reflects the image of God. This is found under the lordship of Christ."

When it comes to potential alien masters, like gambling and alcohol, the real question is not merely about whether such activities break the rules of the church. If it were a case of slavishly following a code of conduct, we would not have advanced much further than our companions in Judaism at the time of Jesus. The answer to potential addictions lies not with a new conformity to man-made prohibitions, but with a new transformation by the power of God's grace through the Holy Spirit.

The secular world knows full well the dangers associated with certain behaviors. Its warning labels on bottles of alcohol or on advertisements for the casino are public reminders about the pitfalls. The biblical world knew about such things as far back as Noah and his naïve experience with viticulture. But he learned his lesson. As it turned out, the ancient world drank wine in moderation, but warned about the dangers of strong drink and excessive drinking. The number such texts is significant, and the reader of these notes is encouraged to read what the Bible actually says about the use of alcohol. Special groups of spiritual leaders, like the priests, Levites, and Nazarites, were expected to keep clear minds and self-controlled wills, since the life of God's people depended on their watch-care. Among the rank-and-file Israelite, similar admonitions were given.

Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations (Leviticus 10:9).

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, ³ he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. ⁴ All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins (Numbers 6:2-4).

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise (Proverbs 20:1).

⁶ N.T. Wright, "Romans," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vo. X, Abingdon Press, 2002, p. 548.

⁴ It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, ⁵ lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted (Proverbs 31:4-5).

⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb [about John the Baptizer] (Luke 1:14-15).

These texts plainly espouse a way of life that is wholly free from the use of wine and strong drink, and the choice to live that way strengthens a person's ability to discharge his responsibilities to God's people. The reasons for this form of abstinence focus on the need for a *constantly clear mind* and ability to make good judgments — things easily clouded by the effects of alcohol. There's nothing especially *religious* about these requirements, but rather they pertain to being a better functioning human being. Another good example appears in Daniel 1, where the Jewish apprentices to the king voluntarily refuse the rich food and wine offered to them, but instead choose a diet more compatible with the life of a Nazarite. When questioned about the wisdom of this decision, Daniel suggests that the Babylonians consider it a contest between the other youth and his Jewish companions to see who would be better off afterward. The results are recorded for us:

¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom (Daniel 1:19-20).

Notice how mental acuity was superior because of their choice to abstain.

In other passages, the emphasis seems to fall, not on abstinence, but on moderation. During the Hebrew festivals, for example, the people are invited to celebrate in the following way:

³ And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always ... and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses ²⁶ and spend the money for whatever you desire- oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household (Deuteronomy 14:23-26).

When the Old Testament characterizes prosperity and blessing from God, the common phrase expression is that "everyone sits under his own vine and fig tree," where "vine" points to the source for wine (see 1 Kings 4:25; Zechariah 3:10, and elsewhere). Vats overflowing with "wine" function as similar symbols (Proverbs 3:10; Joel 2:24; Zechariah 9:17). The Psalmist thanks God for the gifts of nature, including wine which "gladdens the heart of man":

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth ¹⁵ and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart (Psalm 104:14-15).

However, the Hebrew Bible contains a significant number of warnings about the bad effects of wine/strong drink, and acknowledges the easy abuse and addiction associated with this form of drink. A close connection is made between drunkenness and sexual immorality (Genesis 19:32-35; Proverbs 9). Violence and wine are associated (Proverbs 4:17), as are indigence (poverty) and drunkenness (Proverbs 21:17). Warnings are given about using wine to deaden the senses in an effort to alleviate emotional distress (Proverbs 31:6; Isaiah 22:13). Among the more poignant passages is this one from the Proverbs which describes the way wine works on the human body, affecting the one who is overcome by it:

²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? ³⁰ Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. ³¹ Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. ³² In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. ³³ Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. ³⁴ You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. ³⁵ "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink" (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Warnings against drunkenness are frequent, and this abuse of alcohol comes under attack throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, drunkenness is counted among the sins which do considerable damage to human beings, and thereby dishonor God:

Luke 21:34 ³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

Romans 13:13-14 ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

1 Corinthians 5:11 ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler- not even to eat with such a one.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:18 ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

1 Peter 4:3 ³ The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

Of special concern to the apostles was making sure that leaders of the Christian community were not addicted to wine, as these passages illustrate:

1 Timothy 3:2-3 ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Titus 1:7-8 ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Notice how being a drunkard is not different from being violent or quarrelsome or a lover of money. All forms of conduct which *lack self-control*, including quick-temper and arrogance, fall under the same judgment. What makes these particular actions incompatible with being a minister of God's people is precisely the loss of submission to the Lordship of Christ. Anything which alienates our affection and devotion to Christ is treated in the same way.

Permitted? Moderation? These are important questions, since the evidence for the biblical culture suggests that the use of wine in moderation was permitted. It's hard to make sense out of John 2 without that assumption in the background. Jesus' own practice of eating with all the wrong people brought him under condemnation from the religious leadership: "¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" (Matthew 11:19). Our Lord does not deny "drinking" with those he came to save, but he equally honored the wisdom tradition, maintaining that whatever he did, he did wisely.

Much is permitted to us that we choose not to do. Paul grappled with this in regard to a series of issues faced by the Corinthian church. In one of his more lucid statements, he affirmed:

"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 (1 Corinthians 6:11; also, 10:23-24).

His concerns are the maintenance of true Christian freedom and the protection of those for whom inexperienced freedom might lead to sin. "I will not be enslaved by anything..." is an honest affirmation of Christian conduct, one which offers wise guidance to us as we think through contemplated behaviors. It may appear, at first blush, that a particular practice is harmless, and we might be inclined to test it within the context of Christian ethics. However, Paul warns that a permitted practice for others might turn out to be a form of slavery to us, and the reverse might also be true. At what point will our *will* cease to be *our own* but become the slave of an alien power? The mind is susceptible to suggestion and incapacity. By doing certain things, we might well discover that our ability to make truly "free choices" diminishes significantly. As Christians who want to do the will of God, we are obligated to examine each practice and determine whether or not it weakens our wills. Anything which does so should be avoided *on principle*, not necessarily by command.

Even more than our own detriment, is that of others. Knowing that my brother has had difficulty with alcohol, though I might have made my peace with my own choice, his welfare matters more than my choice. My children's welfare matters more than my choice. What may never be an addiction to me, might become one for them. What sacrifices am I willing to make so as to strengthen their moral resolve not weaken it? (see 1 Corinthians 8 in its entirety; put "alcohol" in place of "food" in this context). We could easily say the same thing about gambling or any other potentially addictive behavior, either to ourselves or others.

The question of addiction boils down to a single question: Whose *will* are we serving: God's or that of an alien power which wants to usurp authority in God's place? Paul's counsel here is wise: "...I will not be enslaved by anything." And, more to the point, whenever anything becomes more important than the purpose of God for our lives, that "thing" is a potential addiction for us.

In a final text, we hear Paul's overriding concern about such matters:

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall (Romans 14:17-21).

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: Hot Topics: Alcohol and Gambling
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Hot Topics: Alcohol and Gambling*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Under what circumstances might *anything* become an addiction? Is it possible to know in advance that *some things* are plainly additive and to be avoided? What makes such a decision difficult?
2. Carefully read this week's main text from Romans 6:8-23. Try to follow Paul's argument in this passage. Also, examine what he wrote in the previous section (6:1-7), and what he wrote in the next section (chapter 7).
3. What words does Paul use in this reading which plainly pertain to the problem of addictions? List them and offer a brief definition for each one.
4. How does Paul use the word "slave"? How does this word apply to our relationship to God and to Sin?
5. According to this text, how do we know if we are bound by an addiction?
6. What provision has God made to liberate us from our addictions? How do we apply that provision to our lives?
7. In what way do we "let sin reign" in our lives?
8. Paul speaks about "the passions of your mortal bodies" in 6:11-14. Using the following passages, develop a general idea how "passions," "strong desires" or "lusts" can lead us into destructive addictions: Mark 4:19; John 8:44; Romans 1:24; Romans 7:7-8; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16, 24; Ephesians 2:4; 4:22; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; Philippians 3:19; 1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Titus 2:12; 3:3; James 1:14-15; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11; 4:2-3; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3; 1 John 2:16-17; Revelation 18:14.
9. In the same place, Paul writes about "presenting ourselves" to God. What does he mean, and how does that enable us to be free from addictions?
10. The grace of God not only accepts us, it also empowers us to change. How does 6:14 make that point? Examine these additional passages which connect power to grace: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Acts 4:33; 6:8; Ephesians 3:7. How is *grace* a better helper than the *law*?
11. What's the different between being a slave to sin on the one hand, and, on the other, "obeying from the heart" (6:17)? In what ways does slavery to an alien power de-humanize us, while obeying God humanizes us? How does this apply to addictions?
12. How do we know, in biblical terms, that we are involved in addictive behavior? What is the ultimate "fruit" of such behavior?
13. Using the follow passages, what concerns does the Bible raise about wine? (Proverbs 9; 21:17; 23:29-35; 31:6; 31:4-5; Genesis 19:32-35; Isaiah 22:13; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Peter 4:3).
14. What seems to be the general view of wine within Jewish culture? (Deuteronomy 14:23-26; Proverbs 3:10; Joel 2:24; Zechariah 9:17; Psalm 104:14-15). What seems to have been Jesus' experience with wine in the Jewish culture? (John 2; Matthew 11:19).
15. Certain groups of people abstained from wine in biblical times. Read these passages and discuss the rationale for such a life-style choice: Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:2-4; Proverbs 31:4-5; Luke 1:14-15; Daniel 1).
16. What guidance does the New Testament offer concerning such a life-style choice in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 6:11; 10:23-24; Romans 14:17-21.