

# Addiction (and Bad Habits)

## Introduction

Generally, people are habitual beings. We draw comfort or a sense of orderliness or stability by doing or thinking about certain things on a regular basis. However, there are good habits and bad habits. Furthermore, there are habits that may not be considered as good or bad—we just do them for various reasons.

There are countless good habits that include things such as getting to work on time every day, opening doors for others, choosing healthy foods, participating in regular exercise, obeying traffic and other laws, greeting people with a smile, having regular fellowship and Bible study, praying, etc. Bad habits include such things as smoking, drinking excessively, swearing, lying, gambling, eating to relieve stress or boredom, speeding, coveting, gossiping, thinking immorally, etc. Habits that might not be considered good or bad could include reading every day, having a cup of coffee every morning, making lists, working on hobbies, etc.

Unfortunately, many habits can lead to addictions. We need to be careful to avoid bad habits in the first place, not only because they are wrong but because they can lead to many harmful consequences affecting ourselves and those around us. We should think about our habits and honestly evaluate whether we are addicted to any of them? If so, what can we do about it? How can we break an addiction?

## Definition of Addiction

*The American Heritage Dictionary:* [Addict] To devote or give (oneself) habitually or compulsively. Examples: one who is addicted, especially to narcotics; addicted to lying.

*Merriam-Webster:* [Addiction] A compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence; the state of being addicted. Examples: alcohol addiction; an addiction to prescription painkillers; drug addictions; and gambling addiction.

Addiction is defined as a disease by most medical associations, including the *American Medical Association* and the *American Society of Addiction Medicine*. However, according to *Merriam-Webster*, a disease is “a condition of the living animal or plant body or of one of its parts that impairs normal functioning and is typically manifested by distinguishing signs and symptoms; a sickness or malady. Examples: infectious diseases; a rare genetic disease; heart disease.” Therefore, instead of an addiction in itself being a disease, an addiction can result in disease.

## Some Types of Addictions and Consequences

The following table lists *some* harmful addictions and *some* of their potential consequences. Several of the listed addictions are based on activities that aren't harmful if they don't turn into addictions. Do you fit into any of these, or other, descriptions?

Harmful Addiction	Possible Consequences
Drugs, including narcotics, painkillers, nicotine, etc.	Debt, lying, stealing, physical and mental impairment, gum disease, lung disease, heart disease, cancer, poor health, loss of job, hurting or killing others, death
Alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; Ephesians 5:18)	Physical and mental impairment, liver disease, diabetes, poor health, loss of job, hurting or killing others (e.g., DUI), death
Lying (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Proverbs 14:5)	Irresponsibility, guilt (often resulting in mental or physical illnesses), getting oneself or others in trouble, loss of respect, loss of knowing or recognizing truth, loss of job
Gambling/love of money (I Timothy 6:9-10; Proverbs 23:4-5; 28:20, 22)	Greed, debt, lying, stealing, guilt, loss of job
Power/authority (Romans 12:3, 16; Proverbs 3:5-8; 26:12)	Pride, greed, hurting other people (e.g., profiting or advancing at the expense or to the detriment of others), love of money or prestige, poor associations
Fame/celebrity (Romans 12:3, 16; Proverbs 3:5-8; 26:12)	Pride, greed, love of money, poor associations, leading to other addictions
Exercise/perfect physique	Vanity, self-worship, pride, performance-enhancing drug addiction (and resulting diseases), physical damage (muscles and joints), death
Work	Pride (e.g., "It won't get done unless I do it."), love of money or prestige (e.g., impress others), stress-related addictions and illnesses, death
Sex/pornography (Matthew 5:27-28; Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:18-19; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:17-19)	Sexual sins—both actual and imagined (lust, fornication, adultery, rape), lying, debt/waste of money, waste of time, guilt (and associated illnesses), sexually transmitted diseases, disrespectful thoughts, words, or actions toward women, loss of job, death
Eating to relieve stress or boredom	Various eating related disorders, heart disease, poor health, guilt
Internet, Facebook, video games	Anger, frustration, fear/paranoia, pride, waste of money/debt (e.g., online gambling, buying unnecessary things, game and porn site fees, etc.), waste of time, loss of sleep, loss of self worth, suicide

In addition to the possible consequences listed above, all harmful addictions usually lead to straining or loss of relationships including marriage, and loss of fellowship with God. When addicted, our lives are driven by sinful desires and actions—we are focused on ourselves and feeding our addiction. Addictions are often very deceptive. We may not realize that we are addicted, perhaps because it slowly takes over our life without knowing it. Or, we may consciously be in denial and refuse to admit that we are addicted.

## Remedy

Society attempts to treat addictions through drugs, psychological/psychiatric therapy, or a combination of the two. These types of treatments may be useful and helpful, but they focus more on the symptom than the cause. By classifying an addiction as a disease, it removes personal responsibility.

A person can be easily convinced that his/her addiction is the result of outside forces, which somehow makes it more tolerable (“It’s not my fault.”). Even if a therapy addresses the potential causes of an addiction, the solution is usually dependent on a person overcoming the addiction through his/her own personal strength and conviction, sometimes with the help of drugs. Unfortunately, these drugs may result in other problems or addictions. Additionally, our own strength can easily falter and we can lapse back into the addiction.

What society doesn’t understand is that the root cause of a harmful addiction is our sin nature—harmful addictions are sins. Even seemingly harmless addictions such as caffeine may be sinful if they consume us or affect our health (perhaps, therefore, all addictions are sinful). Because believers still have an old sinful nature, we are as easily susceptible to addictions and their consequences as anyone else. However, if we believe the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4), then we have the Holy Spirit of God within us and the resulting spiritual capability to deal with our addiction (I Corinthians 2:12-13; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 1:13-14). So, how do we overcome, or at least suppress, an addiction? Prayerfully consider the following suggestions drawn from Scripture.

### **Examine Ourselves**

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be done is to admit that we have an addiction. Those around us may know it, but we might be unaware or in denial. Before participating in what is referred to as the Lord’s supper, the Apostle Paul reminds the brethren to examine, or judge, themselves (I Corinthians 11:28-31). If we find that we are under the control of sin, then we are disregarding the payment for sin accomplished by Christ at the cross (Romans 6:1-14). If we are addicted to something, our focus is not on God and what Christ has done (and is doing) for us—we are living a hypocritical life. We are, in fact, bringing dishonor to God.

**For the death that He [Christ] died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts. (Romans 6:10-12)<sup>1</sup>**

### **Repent**

If we realize that we have an addiction, how do we address it? As believers, we don’t need to ask God for forgiveness, because we are already forgiven (Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13). However, we can remorsefully admit our addiction to God combined with a sincere desire to change what we’re doing. This is the concept of repentance as used by the Apostle Paul (II Corinthians 7:8-10; 12:21; II Timothy 2:24-26). In some instances, it may be helpful or even necessary to admit our addiction to others, especially those who are aware of it or directly affected by it. However, be careful not to cause unnecessary trouble—some things may be best kept between ourselves and God.

**I [Paul] now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces**

---

<sup>1</sup> All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets were added by the author for clarification.

**a repentance without regret, leading to salvation [freedom from being controlled by sin], but the sorrow of the world produces death.** (II Corinthians 7:9-10)

## **Flee from Sin**

If we admit our addiction to God with a repentant heart, does He automatically (miraculously) cure us and remove our sinful desire? Although He could and perhaps sometimes does, God doesn't promise to do this in this dispensation of grace. Unlike the believers in the future kingdom of heaven on earth who will have one nature and be sinless (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27), we still have an old sinful nature that is in constant battle with our new nature of Christ (Romans 7:14-25).

There is a saying related to computer capabilities, "garbage in; garbage out," that applies to sin and sinfulness. We are surrounded by endless sinful temptations. If we feed our minds with sin, then we will think and live according to sin. If we let ourselves be exposed to (or even seek after) sinful activities or activities that could influence an addiction, then we are more susceptible to being snared and falling into sin (e.g., an alcoholic should avoid going to a bar with his/her friends). This even includes who we fellowship with, because "a bad apple spoils the bunch" (I Corinthians 5:9-11; 15:33-34; II Thessalonians 3:6; Proverbs 13:20).

As believers, we are exhorted to flee from sin and become sober minded (I Timothy 6:11; I Corinthians 15:34). That is, we should consciously avoid sinful situations to prevent dwelling or acting on sin. For example, we are exhorted to speak the truth instead of lying (Ephesians 4:25), and work with our own hands instead of stealing (Ephesians 4:28; I Thessalonians 4:9-12). We are even to avoid the appearance of evil so that we can hold fast to that which is good (I Thessalonians 5:21-22). Because we have died to sin (Christ's death was our death), we should not let sin be master over us (Romans 6:10-14).

**Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.** (I Corinthians 15:33-34)

## **Discipline Ourselves**

Prior to our individual salvation, we had one nature—the old sinful nature (Romans 8:5-8; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:1-3). Therefore, our thoughts and actions were in accordance with that nature. Anything good that we did before we were saved was by the grace of God through the influence of the Holy Spirit, for God accomplishes His will through believers and unbelievers (Romans 9:14-24).

As believers, we have that old sin nature *and* the nature of Christ in us. Therefore, we have the ability to recognize and choose whether to follow one or the other. This requires a conscious effort on our part. Just as an athlete focuses on his/her training to win, and a soldier is trained to obey orders to serve properly (I Corinthians 9:24-27; II Timothy 2:3-5), we are exhorted to discipline ourselves to know and do the right things for the purpose of godliness (I Timothy 4:7-8).

**Apply your heart to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge.** (Proverbs 23:12)

**For even though I [Paul] am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.** (Colossians 2:5-6)

## Live for Christ Instead of Ourselves

Disciplining ourselves involves recognizing and setting aside sinfulness (thoughts and activities) and living for Christ instead (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21; 3:7-11). We are exhorted to lay aside the old self and put on the new self (Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:9-10), and be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:1-2). We are to present ourselves as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-14). Our motivation and goal should be to do all things for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:17, 23-24; Galatians 1:10). Brethren, we'll never be sinless as long as we reside in our bodies, but we can become less sinful and more honoring to God and our Lord Jesus Christ if we set our minds on things above where Christ is (Colossians 3:1-17).

**Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)**

## Walk Worthy of Our Salvation

To live for Christ as we ought, we need to understand what we have in Christ by the grace of God, what God has done and is doing for us through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and what our corresponding response to God should be. God has revealed to us, through Scripture, what He has accomplished and what He expects of us (II Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 1:15-21).

In response to all that God has done for us through Christ (e.g., read the first three chapters of Ephesians), we ought to be thankful and should demonstrate it by living in a manner that is worthy of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12). We should walk according to the Holy Spirit that is in us instead of according to sinfulness (Galatians 5:16-25). Instead of seeking fulfillment in riches, we should be rich in good works (I Timothy 6:17-19). Despite the opposition and heartache around us, we should not grow weary in doing good (Galatians 6:9-10; II Thessalonians 3:13).

**For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10)**

## Pray

Throughout our battle with a harmful addiction(s), we should remember to stay in communication (fellowship) with God our Father. Brethren, we can't overcome sin by our own strength. We need to depend on the strength of God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:14-19; Philippians 4:13). Through prayer, let's admit our shortcomings and needs to God, and humbly and thankfully request His help in overcoming the power of sin so that we may live for Christ instead. Only then can we truly know the peace of God and lose the desire to remain shackled to a harmful addiction.

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you**

**have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:6-9)

## **Conclusion**

When Paul was facing his imminent execution, he could say to his beloved coworker Timothy that he had fought the good fight of faith (II Timothy 4:7). Will we be able to say this? Brethren, a spiritual battle is going on within us and because of us (Satan is at war with God and His people), and we are to actively rely on the strength of God and His word to fight the battle (Ephesians 6:10-17). We have the assurance that God will accomplish His will through us because of His love for us (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13). In the meantime, however, are we submitting ourselves to sinfulness (such as harmful addictions), or are we joining with God in fighting the good fight of faith?

**Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** (I Timothy 6:12)

**For I am confident of this very thing, that He [God] who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.** (Philippians 1:6)

There is another important thing for us to remember. Despite an addiction or other sin in our lives, *nothing* can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39). If we believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead—then we are eternally sealed by the Holy Spirit as God’s child (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:12-17). God wants us to walk wisely, and to understand His will (Ephesians 5:15-17). May it be our desire to do so.

Dick Johnson  
April 2020