

Chapter Twelve: Addiction

For the counselee who struggles with addiction, begin with the principles from chapters 4-6. The material in this chapter is designed to supplement those chapters with principles directly related to addiction.

The World's Definition

Addiction is commonly defined as a condition involving *tolerance* (requiring an ever increasing dosage to achieve the same effect) and/or *dependence* (withdrawal symptoms when use is discontinued).¹ The psychological term that has been coined to encompass both tolerance and dependence is *neuroadaptation*, which, predictably, locates the entire problem in the brain.

It is no surprise, then, that many believe that addiction is caused by substances (nicotine, alcohol, etc.). It is possible for a substance to have properties that cause an intense craving for more. And it is also possible that some people are born with a predisposition to be especially weak in regard to certain kinds of sins. But neither the craving nor the predisposition is, of itself, an addiction. No substance can *cause* addiction, because the decision to indulge in a behavior is an act of the will. No drug can make someone decide to take it, and no activity has the power to make someone decide to engage in it. (If it did, no one would ever become free from an addiction.) For the believer, slavery to sin is voluntary.

Romans 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?

One becomes a slave to either sin (or righteousness) by allowing himself to be subject to it. But even then his will is still intact. His life will be dominated by whatever or whomever he allows to influence his will.

Believers have been freed from bondage to sin. For a Christian no one particular sin is impossible to resist (Php. 4:13, 1 Cor. 10:13), however it is possible for a Christian to voluntarily re-enslave himself to a defeated foe:

2 Peter 2:19 ... a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

God's Definition

The biblical terms for addiction is *bondage*, or *enslavement*. Titus 2:3 speaks of the problem of being **addicted to much wine**. The word translated "addicted" (*dedoulomenos*) comes from the word "slave" (*doulos*). A person is enslaved to a behavior when that behavior is seemingly impossible to quit. Normally when people experience severe negative consequences for some behavior, those consequences are enough to make them stop. Enslavement is when a person will continue to do in spite of such consequences. He is resolved to stop, wishes he could stop, but cannot seem to do it.

Enslavement to anything other than righteousness is sin. We are not to be mastered or controlled by anything (1 Cor. 6:12, 2 Pe. 2:19). Paul went to great lengths to make his body his slave for fear

¹ The world's definitions of addiction not only ignore the spiritual aspect, but they fail to explain addictions that do not involve chemical substances, such as gambling (most gambling addicts do not suffering physiological withdrawal symptoms or require ever-increasing "doses" of gambling).

that even after having preached to others, he himself might be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27). Part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, so all failure to exercise self-control is sin, whether it is a forbidden behavior, such as sexual immorality, or a neutral behavior, such as shopping or drinking coffee.

Instead of using the unhelpful and inaccurate psychological terms (neuroadaptation, tolerance, and dependence), perhaps a better definition of addiction is this:

Addiction is when a person keeps deciding to do something that he wishes he wouldn't do (in other words, a bad habit).

Conflicting Desires

When you counsel someone with a bad habit, do not say, “If you really wanted to quit, you would.” That is not a valid assumption. It is possible to want to quit but to also have powerful impulses that seem impossible to resist.

Galatians 5:17-18 ... the [flesh] desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the [flesh]. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Jesus said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt.26:41 NASB). We all have conflicting desires. In most cases, the reason a person seeks counsel is that he sincerely *wants* to be rid of his addiction. He wants to be rid of it because of the negative consequences, yet he finds himself controlled by his craving – like the drunk in Proverbs 23:31-35 who is confused, dizzy, being beaten, and yet says, “When will I wake up so I can find another drink?”

2 Peter 2:22 Of them the proverbs are true: A dog returns to its vomit....

Not only will dogs return to their vomit—they will even eat it! It is impossible to imagine anything more repulsive—or foolish—than re-ingesting something your stomach has already rejected. Your body threw that stuff up for a reason. When your body has gone to extreme measures to expel it, what could be more foolish or disgusting than eating it again? That is what these kinds of sins are like. They bring incredible pain into a person's life, yet he goes right back to them time after time.

The World's Solution

The world's main way of dealing with enslaving habits is through Twelve Step programs (such as Alcoholics Anonymous), which can be summarized under four headings:

- Admit you have no control over your habit.
- Clean up your life morally.
- Look to a higher power for help.
- Try to make amends.

There are some very good things that can be said about this approach, and those who struggle with addiction are understandably drawn to Twelve Step programs. Everyone in the group understands what you are going through. You are not judged or looked down upon. The people are compassionate, and yet firm. They will tend to see through lies and phoniness, which creates a genuine, open, honest atmosphere. And instead of sermon-length discourses, advice is kept mostly

to very practical, very simple advice that is closer to bumper-sticker length. And the advice comes from human wisdom, so it seems very reasonable. No faith is required.

Even many churches have modeled their efforts after the world's Twelve Step approach. The popular Celebrate Recovery program takes the principles of the Twelve Steps and connects them to the wording of the Beatitudes. For example, step two in the Twelve Steps is "believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." In Celebrate Recovery that principle is attached to the Second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Mt.5:4).

If the world discovers a principle that is biblical, it makes good sense to embrace that principle. There is a danger, however, in taking human wisdom that is not biblical and adjusting the terminology to make it sound biblical. Such is the error that is so common in the integrationist approach—drawing principles from the world's human wisdom and dressing them up with biblical language, rather than drawing the principles directly from the Scriptures.

Some of the principles in the Twelve Step programs are quite biblical, and for that reason many, many people have been helped through those programs. There are, however, some unbiblical principles as well. Beginning with the world's solutions and attempting to adjust them to fit Scripture often leads to error because the foundational, underlying assumptions are not compatible with the truth of God's Word.

Evaluating the Twelve Steps

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addiction

Celebrate Recovery attaches this principle to Romans 7:18 "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." In the CR system this corresponds to the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Step 1 of the Twelve Steps may sound similar to Ro.7:18 and Mt.5:4 on the surface, but the principles are actually very different. The Twelve Step program is very closely tied to the disease model of addiction.² Here is an excerpt from Narcotics Anonymous literature: "our first step [is to] admit powerlessness over it. That admission is the foundation upon which our recovery is built. Our experience with addiction is that when we accept that it is a disease over which we are powerless, such surrender provides a basis for recovery through the Twelve Steps."

The key word is "powerless." Dr. Howard Fields, Director of the Wheeler Center for the Neurobiology of Addiction, states, "Most people tend to think of addiction as the result of a weakness of character or a moral failing, but as the biological mechanisms that produce drug dependence come to be better understood, researchers are learning to think of addiction as a brain disorder not unlike chronic depression or anxiety. I don't believe an addict is responsible for being addicted. I believe they've been victimized by the drug and by circumstances that are largely beyond their control."³ In an interview on the subject Fields stated that punishing an addict for his actions is akin to putting cancer patients in jail for having cancer. Alcoholics get drunk only because "some unconscious force makes them take that fifth or sixth drink even when they know they shouldn't. This is a disease, not a crime."⁴

² The language about alcoholism being a "disease" was mostly metaphorical when AA was first developed, but in recent years there has been a shift from thinking of Alcoholism as being similar to a disease in some ways to regarding it as an actual, organic disease of the body.

³ Howard Fields, Wheeler Center for the Neurobiology of Addiction.

http://www.ucsf.edu/foundation/impact/archives/2000/10_fields.htm.

⁴ Fields, "Alcoholism: Vice or Disease? A Conversation with Howard Fields, Part 1 of 3"

<http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2007/04/3811/fields>

Steps 4 through 6 have the appearance of taking responsibility, but the underlying assumption is that the addiction is a disease, outside of the person's control, and that assumption limits the addict's responsibility for his behavior.

Dr. Fields goes on to say something very telling: "When we come up with effective treatments, then the public at large will begin to believe this. That's what happened with depression."⁵ Do you see the implication of what he is saying? The implication is that if a drug can be found to have an effect, that will be proof the behavior was caused by a disease and is not anyone's fault.

That is a logical fallacy. The fact that a drug may have some effect is not proof or even evidence to suggest the problem had a physical cause. If a person becomes angry out of selfish pride and then takes a sedative to alleviate his anger, that does not mean the anger had a chemical or biological cause. It had a spiritual cause. The fact that a physical manifestation of a spiritual problem can be affected by a drug says nothing about the cause.

The message of the Twelve Step groups is hopelessness. If you are an alcoholic, you will always be one. Even if you have not had a drink for thirty years, you are still as much an alcoholic as ever. Until the day you die, you will always be as susceptible as you are today. That is not the gospel. Our message is a message not of powerlessness, but of power, redemption, and transformation. Paul says to the *former* drunks in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived ... drunkards ... will [not] inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And that is what some of you were.

Is there such a thing as a former drunkard? Yes! Some of the Corinthians used to be "alcoholics," but they are no longer. And the solution was not simply quitting—it was transformation.

1 Corinthians 6:12 But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

If there is one thing Christians are not, it is "powerless" against sin. We have access to divine power and can do all things through Christ (Php.4:13).

Step 2: ... came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3: ... made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Christians do, of course, believe that a greater power can restore sanity and that we should turn our lives over to Him. However there is a reason for the vague terminology. There is no mention of the Lord Jesus Christ because that would imply the higher power has to be Jesus Christ. The reason for the words "power greater than ourselves" is to make the point that *any* god will do. It does not have to be Jesus Christ. It does not have to be the God of the Bible. It does not have to be a god who has any particular power or ability. It does not even have to be a god that actually exists, because it is not the god who changes you; it is merely the *belief* in a god that helps, according to this approach.

Is that the Christian message ... that it doesn't matter if you believe in some false god or a demon or Satan masquerading as an angel of light (all of whom are higher powers to be sure)? If that is our message, then we are saying that our God is impotent, that He has no real power of His own—the only power comes from our believing in Him.

But that is not our message. Our message is that the true God is all-powerful, and He has just as much power whether you believe in Him or not.

⁵ Fields, http://www.ucsf.edu/foundation/impact/archives/2000/10_fields.htm.

Step 4: ... made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Is that a good thing to do? Sure, as long as moral deficiencies are seen as sin against a holy God, and not an unfortunate disease that causes a person problems.

Most Twelve Step adherents see this step as an effort to clean up their act morally the best they can. But will a vague belief in a random higher power and an effort to shore up moral weaknesses be enough to transform a sinful heart into holiness? Not a chance.

Steps 5-12

The underlying assumption of a disease model of addiction, combined with the confusion over whether the power to change comes from the act of believing (regardless of the object of faith), or from Christ alone (the only valid object of faith) hinders what would otherwise be very helpful principles in the other steps. For example, step five is to admit to God, ourselves, and others the exact nature of our wrongs. Admitting culpability is a crucial aspect of repentance, but how can a person admit culpability for his sin while at the same time insisting it is a disease over which he has no control? And what good is it to confess to a god who has no authority to forgive nor power to redeem?

No restoration can take place until there has been true repentance, and repentance is not merely turning from a sin; it is turning from a sin back to Christ. Turning from an addiction to a false god is not repentance. Nor is it repentance to confess to having a disease. And where repentance lacks genuineness or thoroughness, the rest of the steps are undermined. Steps six and seven involve asking God to remove our “shortcomings.” That is a good request, but apart from true repentance it will not happen.

Human Wisdom Cannot Transform the Heart

Thousands of people have had success at quitting a habit as a result of Twelve Step recovery groups. This is most likely due more to the exposure and accountability of the meetings than to the steps themselves. Continual encouragement and accountability can be quite helpful. Most participants know from experience that people who do not keep going to the meetings are much more likely to relapse than people who do.

Encouragement and motivation from other people are very helpful in modifying behavior, but apart from biblical principles of transformation they cannot change the heart. That is why as soon as someone stops going to the meetings, he tends to fall back into his old habits. The Twelve Steps do nothing about bondage to the flesh. In fact, they often simply enable a person to exchange one bad habit for a less troublesome one. Drunks go from being hooked on alcohol to being hooked on nicotine, caffeine, sugar, etc. Life becomes more manageable, but the bondage to the flesh remains.

God's Solution

In the war against the flesh, most of our failures are due to our general position of weakness in the overall war. We tend to focus on wanting to win individual battles with temptation, but individual battles are rarely won when fought from a position of disadvantage in the overall war. The balance of this chapter, then, will have two parts: 1) How to gain a position of strength in the overall war, and 2) How to then win individual battles with temptation.

Break the Power of Idolatry

The attraction of sin comes from the soul's belief that happiness and satisfaction will come from that sin (see "Diagnosing the Desires" in chapter 4). An essential part of worship is looking to God as the only source of joy and satisfaction, so looking to anything else is idolatry (Jer.2:11-13). Looking to something for your joy and satisfaction is worship because it places that thing in the place where only God belongs – giver of joy.

The first step, then, is to depose the idol. This is done by convincing oneself of two facts:

- 1) The pleasure of sin is temporary, fleeting, and unsatisfying. When it is over it leaves emptiness and depression, not joy.
- 2) The experience of God's presence will be thoroughly satisfying and more delightful to the soul than the pleasure of sin.

When the soul sees a particular sin as the source of satisfaction of the thirst of the soul, then every time that sin is resisted it will feel like a loss – like the person is missing out on something good. As long as resisting feels like a loss, there will not be significant victory. The person must come to the point where the nearness of God's presence really is so much more delightful and desirable than the sin that when temptation is resisted it feels like gain rather than loss.

The first twenty meditations in the book "What's So Great About God?"⁶ are designed to re-train the soul to prefer the presence of God over the pleasures of this world. It may be helpful to have the counselee read and pray through at least one of those meditations per day for three weeks, and discuss them with you when you get together.

A More Powerful Attraction

John Piper began his message in the 2004 Desiring God Conference with an illustration about the solar system. The massive sun stands at the center and holds all the planets in their proper courses. Even Pluto, 3.6 billion miles away, is held in orbit by the powerful gravitational pull of the sun.

So it is with the supremacy of Christ in your life. All the planets of your life—your sexuality and desires, your commitments and beliefs, your aspirations and dreams, your attitudes and convictions, your habits and disciplines, your solitude and relationships, your labor and leisure, your thinking and feeling—all the planets of your life are held in orbit by the greatness and gravity and blazing brightness of the supremacy of Jesus Christ at the center of your life. And if He ceases to be the bright, blazing, satisfying beauty at the center of your life, the planets will fly into confusion, and a hundred things will be out of control, and sooner or later they will crash into destruction.⁷

In the Christian's struggle against sin, love for God must be at the center. If love is for God is lacking, the sun is effectively removed from the solar system and all the countless strategies, tips

⁶ The book is available for free download at http://foodforyoursoul.net/abc/?page_id=394 (Resources are listed in alphabetical order. Scroll down to "W" for "What's so Great about God?")

⁷ John Piper, "Sex and the Supremacy of Christ," [sermon on line]; (Desiring God Ministries, 2004, accessed 11 November 2006); available from http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/EventMessages/ByDate/184_Sex_and_the_Supremacy_of_Christ_Part_2; Internet.

and tricks for resisting temptation are like so many rockets, trying to nudge Jupiter back into orbit.

The pull of an addiction on the heart can feel like an inescapable tractor beam, and the only way out is to be pulled in another direction by a more powerful force – desire for the presence of God, fueled by delightful experiences of His presence in the past. For more on how to do this, see the sermon series, “Loving God with All Your Heart.”⁸

Fight desire with desire. Override desire for sin with desire for something better. Thomas Chalmers called this “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” Cravings for the pleasures of sin will be expelled by craving for the nearness of God.

Increase Faith

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: ... drunkards ... 10 will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified.

The former addicts in Corinth overcame their addiction to alcohol and other sins through the washing of sanctification (1 Cor.6:11). Sanctification is the process of becoming more holy through the work of the Holy Spirit in the normal progression of spiritual growth, which is by grace through faith. Only God’s grace can transform the heart, and only faith can give us access to that grace. Every sin we ever commit is due to lack of faith. God promises that His way will be more satisfying than the pleasure of sin. Satan promises the pleasure of sin will be worth whatever it costs us spiritually. We choose one or the other based on who we believe. The most basic key to overcoming an enslaving sin is to increase one’s faith in the great and precious promises in God’s Word.

The three basic ways of increasing faith and gaining access to more grace are Scripture, prayer, and fellowship. For a summary of the basics of how to have a daily routine of Scripture, prayer, and fellowship that will result in spiritual growth and increased faith, see “The Basics of the Christian Life” series.⁹

Exposure

For the person caught in an enslaving sin, the spiritual discipline that tends to be most neglected is fellowship. Sin always pushes us toward privacy and away from intimacy, because intimacy in relationships involves exposure. And where there is sin, exposure is terrifying. Very often a person will be willing to do anything to be free from his sin *except* expose his sin to others. And yet without help from others, the battle will be lost.

Attempting to win the war against an enslaving sin singlehandedly is as foolish as a single soldier attempting to win WW2 by himself. The person with an enslaving sin has already proven that he does not have enough strength on his own to win the war. It is hard enough to win a war when you start out on equal standing. But if the person is enslaved, he is starting the war behind the bars of the enemy’s prison camp. Clearly the enemy has the upper hand. If there are powerful forces out there who are willing to form an alliance and help the person, and that person refuses that help, he cuts himself off from one of the most important means of grace and dooms himself to failure.

Of all the things you will call the counselee to do, this will probably be the hardest. The shame of enslavement to a sin makes people say, “I’m not ready for that. I’ll do anything else - electric shock therapy, I’ll shell out big money for some program, I’ll do anything you ask – just please do not make me confess my sin to people in the church.” In many cases it is this step that will determine success or failure.

⁸ http://foodforyoursoul.net/ffys_v2/?page_id=37&series=1

⁹ http://foodforyoursoul.net/ffys_v2/?page_id=37&series=80

No Christian has the option of privacy. Privacy is worshipped in our culture, and that has infected the Church. Each person wants to function as his own, personal PR firm so he can control how each person thinks of him. But the Church, as Christ designed it, is not a place for privacy. God calls us to love one another with intimacy, and intimacy cannot coexist with privacy. If a person's only interaction with the body of Christ is at a surface level, he is sinning against God, against the church and against himself. If the counselee does not have close relationships with people in the Church, exhorting him to join a small group – not only to gain victory over his enslaving sin, but to be obedient to God's Word. Confront the counselee with the following commands in God's Word:

Shared emotions

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

That command requires knowledge of one another – several layers of knowledge. First, it requires that we know what is happening in each other's lives. You're not going to be sad when I'm sad unless you know I'm sad. And when someone is really sad, you aren't going to know that by sitting 3 rows behind them in the worship service. Most people can manufacture a pretty good smile for a couple hours on Sunday morning at church. You're not going to find out about the depth of their sorrow in a 60 second conversation in the foyer either. The same goes for rejoicing with those who rejoice. When people have special things happen that they are really excited about, you're not going to know that by osmosis. You need to know what's going on in that person's life. We all understand how hard it is when someone has to go through some terrible sorrow alone. But it can also be very hard for people to go through some great joy alone. When there is something you have longed for or worked for for years, and you finally get it, but no one knows your life well enough to know what a great joy that is – that can be very lonely.

So this verse requires us to know each other at the level of knowing the details of each other's lives. But there is another level too. Even if you know the events of my life, that, in itself, isn't going to affect your emotions. You might be aware that I'm happy or sad, but that awareness by itself won't make you rejoice or grieve. You grieve when someone you really know well grieves. When you hear on the news that someone won the lottery, that doesn't fill you with joy. You are full of joy when someone you really know well and you are close friends with gets some great benefit.

Confession of sins

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

This is not a command for a few people in the church who happen to have real close friends. It's a command that is binding on every single person who names the name of Christ. This requires the time, effort, and hard work required to develop friendships that are close enough to provide the kind of trust and love required for honest confession.

Much of the power behind the grip of enslaving sins is secrecy. It was David's desire for secrecy that drive him to multiply his guilt through a cover up that drove him to murder an innocent man. Satan can prevent the enslaved sinner from access to the grace he needs to be free. Once that secrecy is given up, the grip of the sin is far less powerful. When the sin is finally confessed and no longer has to be hidden, there is an amazing sense of relief and freedom. The shame and humiliation they so dreaded turns out not to be near as bad as what they feared. In fact, in many cases it causes people to admire the person who is so honest, and it opens up avenues of ministry to others who are struggling with sin.

Ministry to others is another reason why close relationships are so important. There are people

in the church who need help out of some sin, but they will never get that help until they can confess it, and they will never have the courage to confess until they see you do it. We aren't doing anyone any favors by putting up a façade of holiness. We think that will make people be impressed with us, but more often it just makes people either suspicious of us or intimidated by us. What they won't be is comfortable opening up with you.

Most people understand the importance of accountability in escaping enslaving sin. It is not enough, however, to simply ask a friend to keep you accountable. No one can "keep" another person accountable. Accountability works not when someone else keeps you accountable, but rather when you make yourself accountable. Where there is not a willingness to make oneself accountable, all the question from an accountability partner about how you are doing can be easily deflected with vague answers or flat out lies. The addict must initiate accountability rather than putting it on the shoulders of the accountability partner.

A Lifestyle of Exposure

Ephesians 5:11-13 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible.

2 Corinthians 4:2 we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception ... by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Even where there is a pattern of honest accountability with a trusted friend, over time the degree to which that motivates can diminish. When a person has an understanding response time after time, eventually the fear of confession decreases and the benefit of accountability is diminished.

In addition to direct accountability to an individual or small group, there must also be a lifestyle of exposure. The problem with accountability alone is it requires that you think rationally about consequences at the moment of temptation. But if you thought rationally about consequences at the moment of temptation, you wouldn't fall to that sin in the first place. What is needed is the help of other people right at the moment of temptation. And that doesn't come from an open, exposed lifestyle. It is foolish for an addict to have long segments of time when no one knows where he is or what he is doing. His credit card statements and bank activity should be an open book to his spouse or close friend. If a man struggles with looking at porn on his computer, he should have a window on his office door and have the monitor visible from the window. And he should utilize monitoring software that sends an email to his spouse or friend showing any questionable websites he has visited.¹⁰

Carry each other's burdens

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

God did not design you with enough strength to be able to handle the Christian life on your own. As Josh Harris says, "Lone rangers are dead rangers. Without the encouragement, rebuke, exhortation, prayers, and spiritual gifts of others, your burden will be too heavy to bear. And others' burdens will be too heavy for them to bear without your help.

Once again, this requires close friendships. You cannot bear a person's burdens if you do not even know them well enough to be aware of what their burdens are. Nor will they be much help to you until you have built a deep enough friendship that they are not only aware of what is happening in your life, but they understand your particular points of weakness and vulnerability. Some people

¹⁰ <http://www.covenanteyes.com/>

need gentle tenderness. Others need a good, swift kick in the seat of the pants. Tailor-made grace requires knowledge of one another.

Keep in Step with the Spirit

Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

The power of the flesh is broken only when a person walks by the Spirit. The imagery of walking points to progression of steps. This underscores the moment-by-moment aspect of the Christian life. When people become caught up in an enslaving sin, very often they become so focused on the particular behavior they are trying to escape that they forget about the importance of the thoughts. They think of steps toward or away from God in terms of actions. To think this way is to be oblivious to most of the steps one takes in life.

Job 31:1 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. **2** For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? **3** Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? **4** Does he not see my ways and count my every step?

Job understood that each thought, each lustful glance, is a step. Every moment our thoughts take another step in some direction. The addict resolves with all his heart to never engage in a certain behavior again, but when temptation hits he falls immediately, and is mystified as to why. He doesn't understand that after allowing the mind to run unhindered in a sinful direction, he should expect to end up in the place toward which he has been travelling. Gaining control of actions will not happen apart from self-control in the thought life. This is why the sinner is called to repent not only of his ways, but also of his thoughts.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Repentance must be thorough. When there is a willingness to give up a behavior, but an unwillingness to let go of the thoughts – that is not repentance. Urge the counselee to repent of sinful thoughts, and to strive to walk step-by-step, thought-by-thought with the Holy Spirit. This means thinking in ways He desires us to think, as revealed in his Word.

Romans 13:14 Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Thoughts are like a big snowball balanced at the top of a steep hill. Once they begin rolling in a certain direction, it is nearly impossible to stop them. To stop a thought process from going in a certain direction, it must be stopped at the earliest stages. For more on how to do this see "Correcting Wrong Thoughts" in chapter 6.

Resources

For Accountability

- **Accountability Form:** There is an accountability form on the Articles page in the Resource library of TreasuringGod.com.¹¹ Urge the counselee to modify the form, deleting questions that are not relevant for his situation and adding questions that he knows he needs to answer on a weekly basis. Urge him to commit to fill out the form each week and give it to you or another accountability partner.
- **Monitoring Software**¹²

¹¹ http://foodforyoursoul.net/abc/?page_id=394

¹² <http://www.covenanteyes.com/>

