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ADAM AND EVE FELL . . . INTO ADDICTION

For many years I have been under the impression that certain pathetic people had “addictive personalities,” and these were the people that fell into all kinds of addictions. I knew for sure that I was one of those pathetic people, because I had been trapped for many years by alcohol, pornography, and anger. I have come to a deeper understanding: that addiction is universal and is the way sin is expressed in everybody. In other words, I think you are a pathetic person, too. Ha! In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve fell, they fell into addiction.

This is simply the way the process is described in the Bible: Temptation comes (the thought is not sin, but sin itself is when we linger over the thought and then we inwardly say ‘yes’ to it, when we *would* do the deed. Usually, then, we actually do the deed when the opportunity comes.) So the process is: Temptation – Sin – Habit – Bondage – Slavery – Death. Bondage is a Biblical synonym for addiction.

Gerald May was an M.D. and a committed Christian, and his book, Addiction and Grace, is outstanding. We may not agree with some of his theology, but let’s give him some consideration. (The part in parentheses is my commentary.)

“Adam and Eve’s behavior is usually interpreted as symbolizing man’s ongoing willful rebelliousness against God. God creates us with free will, and we respond by trying to be gods. I certainly think this portrayal of human willfulness is accurate.

But when I read the Genesis story carefully, I respond sympathetically toward Eve and Adam. Surely they are responsible for what they do, but they do not really seem like hostile rebels; instead they seem innocent and gullible, almost like little children. As the Scripture relates it, they ate the fruit not because it was forbidden, but because it was “*enticing to look at and good to eat*” and because the serpent told them they could become like gods if they ate it. It seems to me their real problem was not rebelliousness but foolishness. Their lack of wisdom made them exceedingly vulnerable to temptation. Once they gave in to that temptation, their freedom was invaded by addiction. They experienced the need for more. God knew then they would not – could not – stop with just the one tree. *They must not be allowed to stretch out their hands and pick from the tree of life also.* (Note also that Adam and Eve immediately fell from a love-based identity to a shame and fear-based identity. They were ashamed of their nakedness, and they were afraid of God and hid among the trees.) God, in His grace, went looking for them, covered their nakedness, and sent them out of the garden.

It seems to me that each of our addictions reenacts Eve and Adam’s story. But I believe that humankind’s ongoing struggle with addiction is preparing the ground of perfect love. Free will is given to us for a purpose: so that we may choose freely, without coercion or manipulation, to love God in return, and to love one another. This is the deepest desire of our hearts. But our freedom is not complete. Working against it is the powerful force of addiction.

Psychologically, addiction uses up desire. It is like a psychic malignancy, sucking our life energy into specific obsessions and compulsions, leaving less and less energy available for other people. Spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The objects of our addictions become our false gods. These are what we worship, where we give our time and energy, instead of love.

But addiction can be, and often is, the thing that brings us to our knees. The words of Paul are relevant: *I was given a painful wound to my pride, which came as Satan’s messenger to bruise me. Three times I begged God to rid me of it, but God’s answer was, ‘My grace is all you need; my power finds its full strength in weakness’.....For this reason I am content with weakness....* Like Paul, it is possible that at some point on the journey with addiction and grace, we might even come to see addiction as a kind of gift. Sooner or later, addiction will prove to us that we are not gods.

(Dr. May then gives examples of patients and their addictions): Sam, 58 years old, addicted to alcohol and languishing in a mental hospital; Doris, a successful business woman, addicted to eating; Jim, a responsible family man but addicted to work, money, and security; Frank, a loving father and husband, but infatuated and addicted to another woman; and Jean, a gracious homemaker who is addicted to her relationship with an abusive husband.

“My greatest interest is in the experience of ordinary addictions, the kind that all of us suffer. Perhaps the best way to understand is with an example of a temporary and simple chemical addiction.

The Addiction of a Nose

Sally had a summer cold. Her nose was runny, her eyes watered, and her throat was sore. Since she had a vacation coming up, she talked her reluctant doctor into prescribing penicillin. She swallowed mounds of Vitamin C tablets and drank gallons of liquids. She also bought a large bottle of the strongest nose drops she could find. The nose drops gave her dramatic relief. Within seconds, she could breathe freely again. Three hours later the effects wore off. She could feel her nose starting to run again, and it seemed a little worse than before. She used another dropperful. Again the effect was dramatic, but it only lasted a couple of hours. The next time she used two droppersful. Again it worked, but only for an hour. Each time she used the drops, their effects wore off more quickly, and her nose was stuffier than ever. Sally realized she was overdoing it, and several times she resolved to stop. But she made excuses and kept on using the drops. She even started saying, ‘Just one more time.’

The following day Sally had gone through most of the bottle and couldn’t breathe through her nose at all. The drops no longer had any effect, and she was due to leave for the ocean the next day. She could think of nothing but her solidified nose. She was convinced she needed stronger nose drops, a prescription. She called her doctor, who scolded her for exceeding the recommended dosage and told her to stop the drops entirely. But Sally was desperate. ‘I simply have to have something stronger!’ she shouted. But the doctor refused and said if she would leave her nose alone it would clear up in a day or two. Finally, angry but defeated, Sally had no choice. It was not easy. At first her nose just seemed to get worse, and she became increasingly irritable and restless. As the doctor predicted, however, everything cleared up after a couple of days, and Sally says she will never use nose drops again.

This example of a temporary chemical attachment can teach us a great deal about the characteristics of addiction. Let us begin with the physiology. Virtually all body functions take place as a result of shifting balances among chemicals that have opposing effects. The body makes chemicals that stimulate the activity of glands and organs, and opposing chemicals that inhibit that activity. What actually happens in the body at a given time depends upon these balances. Nasal secretions are no exception. Certain natural body chemicals cause nasal congestion by increasing nasal secretion, while others cause decongestion by inhibiting secretion. The balance between these opposing natural chemicals determines the condition of one’s nose.

The cold virus had caused irritation and an increase in natural congesting chemicals in Sally’s nose. The nose drops contained decongestant chemicals, artificially made, but very much like the ones the body creates naturally. These artificial chemicals dried her nose up, but they also disturbed the natural balance. Trying to restore this balance, Sally’s nose adjusted by producing more congesting chemicals and less of its own decongestants. Then, when the effect of the drops wore off, she used more nose drops, and the vicious cycle continued until her nose was producing huge amounts of its own congestants and almost no decongestants at all. In trying to keep the balance, her nose had literally become dependent on the artificial decongestants in the drops. Her nose had become addicted. It had built up tolerance, needing more and more of the drops, and she had to put her nose through withdrawal symptoms before it could find its natural balance again.

This, in brief, is the way the body becomes addicted to substances. The substance alters a natural body chemical and adjusts by trying to reestablish the proper balance. In so doing, the body becomes dependent and addicted to stimulants, depressants, laxatives, pain killing narcotics, and a host of other substances.

You will note, however, that the struggle of Sally’s nose was paralleled by a struggle in her mind, one that led to preoccupation, obsession, and even mild despair. Afterward, the whole thing seemed rather absurd to Sally – making such a big deal out of a stuffy nose - but at the time it seemed beyond her control. She had made stupid rationalizations to herself to justify her abuse of the drops. There was even a point, during that last conversation with her doctor, that she felt she almost could have killed for just one bottle of really powerful nose drops. In addition, she experienced a temporary but very real impairment of her opinion of herself and of her concern for other things and other people. Her little brush with addiction had not only wreaked havoc with her nose and made her play games with her mind, it had also eroded her freedom, her will, and her capacity for love. (Dr. May discussed other physical, neurological, psychological, and spiritual dynamics of addiction in his book. He said that because of the tricks our minds play on us, many of our addictions are able to exist for years completely outside our awareness; and it is only when our addictions are frustrated or cause us conflict that we have an opportunity to notice how attached we truly are.)

Another complicating factor is that behavior is not limited to external physical activity. Thinking is also a behavior, a 'doing.' Thus images, memories, fantasies, ideas, concepts, and even certain feeling states can become objects of attachment, and one can become fully addicted to them. We have all experienced obsessive thoughts – the unrealistic worry that refuses to go away; certain images of ourselves or concepts about the world that we somehow feel deeply forced to hold on to; and certain moods – depression, shyness, cynicism, and the like.”

(This brief overview of Dr. May's book reminds us that addictions are one of the most powerful realities of our lives, and that God's grace is also a powerful and hidden reality. Glory to God for His ongoing love and grace!)

LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS

As we travel through life, we must constantly make decisions, but I believe there are three decisions that are more important than all the others:

(1) **CHRIST**. The most important decision of all is the decision to accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord. This decision determines our eternal destiny – heaven or hell. Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” Pilate's authority as governor confronted him with the decision, “What will I do about this one called the Christ?” This decision confronts each of us. Faith does not fall out of the sky, we must choose to believe or not to believe that Jesus came from God. We don't have the freedom to stay on the fence, Jesus said, *He who is not for me is against me.*

Have you chosen to believe and to bow your knee to Him, or have you chosen against Him? The Bible says, *It is given unto man once to die and then the judgment.* The book of Malachi says, *The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace.* The Bible says, *Now is the day of salvation.* You may not have another year, another week, another day. Choose Christ. Choose Him today and every day.

(2) **MATE**. I believe the second most important decision we make in life is whether to marry and whom to marry. Recently I ministered to two different ladies in two different towns who told me how they were completely misled, lied to, deceived, into marrying a man they thought to be a good Christian with godly character - - and after they were married they learned to their horror that he was not that kind of man at all. There is a television show named, “Who the (blank) did I marry?” A lot of people, both women and men, feel that way shortly after the honeymoon.

One time a lady told me that she dated a man for a long time. He faithfully went to church with her and told her how much he loved God. He assured her he did not drink or use drugs. After they were married, he immediately stopped going to church and ridiculed the Bible and the church. He had a terrible temper, which he had concealed while he was pursuing her, but he became very abusive after she said, “I do.” He admitted that he had fooled her and taunted her with how easy she was to deceive. Be very careful. Pray a lot. Have a long engagement (15 or 20 years would be good).

(3) **CHURCH**. The church you choose to attend and serve is the third most important decision you make in life. This decision matters to your spiritual growth, to your family, and to God. The New Testament contains many warnings about this matter. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7, **Jesus warned about false prophets.** *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.* Note that Jesus did not say that we should recognize false prophets by the supernatural gift of discernment, but by their fruits. Is the fruit of the spirit in this prophet/preacher's life? love, joy, peace, kindness, self control? Is he faithful to his wife? Is he scrupulously honest with money? You can't know this about a leader unless you spend time with him and learn what is in his heart. In Matthew 24:10, Jesus also warned about false prophets and lawlessness increasing at the end of the age.

(I have interviewed church members in Mexico and the U.S. whose lives and families have been just about destroyed by false prophecies.)

Jesus warned us about false prophets, Paul warns us about false apostles. I suggest you read 2 Corinthians 10 and 11 for the whole teaching. 2 Cor. 11:3-4 are very important: *But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.* Paul is not concerned about peripheral matters, but the false apostles were preaching “another Jesus” and a “different gospel.”

To preach another Jesus would simply be to present a Jesus to people different than the one presented in the Bible. (The Jesus of the Bible said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.*” He was the sinless Lamb of God who died to take away the sins of the world. He was born of a virgin, died on a cross for our sins, was in the grave for three days, and rose for our justification. He ascended to the Father and *ever lives to make intercession for us.* He will come again to judge the living and the dead.) Anyone who presents a Jesus other than that Jesus, the one clearly presented in the four gospels and the rest of the New Testament, is a false preacher.

There are many examples of preaching “another Jesus.” To teach that Jesus was a good example and a good teacher but that He was not the divine Son of God is “another Jesus” than the one clearly presented in the Bible. Likewise, to preach that He was not born of a virgin, did not die for our sins, was not resurrected from the dead, that He did not ascend into heaven, that He is not coming again to judge all men and nations, etc. To preach that there are many ways to God and that Jesus is but one way is clearly to preach “another Jesus,” for He clearly stated that “*No one comes to the Father but by me.*” To preach that Jesus was a revolutionary, or a Republican, Democrat, or Libertarian; or that He came that all who believe in Him might be wealthy; or to teach people that Jesus was the brother of Lucifer and that our Heavenly Father was once a man and that all faithful (Mormon) men will eventually be the God of their own planet, etc., is “another Jesus” and a “different gospel.”

A “different gospel” would be, for instance, to say that people are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, or by joining a certain church, or by being baptized a certain way, or by giving a large amount of money to a certain preacher, or by speaking in tongues, or that everyone is ultimately going to be saved since God is too loving to send anyone to hell, which doesn’t exist anyway, etc. One other thing the false apostles did (2 Cor 11:20) – *He takes advantage of you.* Almost invariably a false apostle or prophet or preacher is greedy and lives an immoral life. Note that in all the accusations against false apostles only one had to do with their teaching and the others had to do with their personal character.

Jesus warned about false prophets, Paul about false apostles, in 2 Peter 2:1-22 Peter warns about false teachers. These are some points that Peter raises: Vs. 1 – *They secretly introduce destructive heresies.* Vs. 2 – *And many will follow their sensuality.* (They lead people into immorality, for instance teaching that there is nothing contrary to Scripture regarding fornication, adultery, and homosexuality.) Vs. 3- *And in their greed they will exploit you.* (They are greedy.) Vs. 10 – *They are lustful and despise authority.* (Especially the authority of the Bible and of duly constituted church authority.) The chapter goes on to say that *they revile angelic beings, they are riotous, arrogant, promise freedom but live in corruption,* etc. Again note that only two of these points have to do with the content of their teaching, while the other points describe flaws of character.

Let me reiterate what Jesus said regarding false prophets, and which would likewise apply to false apostles, teachers and pastors, “*By their fruits you will know them.*” Some people will caution against evaluating or judging someone’s ministry because Jesus said “*Judge not, lest you be judged.*” That He did, but in the same sermon He said, *Do not cast your pearls before swine and to beware of false prophets,* so it is utter nonsense to make an absolute law out of His teaching about judging people which would make us blind to the very dangers He so clearly warned us about. Right? When Jesus says, “*Judge not!*” He is referring to an attitude of condemnation, He is warning about arrogantly judging someone’s soul, but in this teaching He is talking about judging their fruit, which is very different. Our heart attitude, even toward false prophets and preachers, should be one of love and compassion, not one of condemnation. At the same time, we need to listen to Jesus and try to understand how destructive false prophets and teachers are to the body of Christ.

WATCH FOR DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

from The Presence, Power and Heart of God,

by Randy Fisk

“A friend of ours was baking bread and brewing coffee when she saw a street sweeper go past her house. She felt the Lord tell her to take some of the fresh bread and coffee to the driver. She dismissed it, thinking she wasn’t hearing right. When the sweeper went by her house again, once more she heard His voice, but again dismissed it. About five minutes later, she heard Him again and finally began to think, “Maybe God is trying to tell me something.” She cut a few pieces of bread, poured some coffee and went out to her car. By now the street sweeper was out of sight. She started crisscrossing the streets of her neighborhood and finally saw it, flagged the driver down and said, “You’re going to think I’m crazy, but I was in my house baking bread and felt the Lord tell me to go out and give this to you.” The driver looked at her and asked, “Mrs. Lee, do you remember me? You used to be my Sunday School teacher.”

She was astounded. She told him, “I didn’t know the Lord back then the way I know Him now.” They sat down and had a long talk. He told her how he hadn’t been in church for a long time and felt he really needed God. By the end of the conversation, both were in tears. He was impacted that God cared enough about him to send his former Sunday school teacher out to search for him with fresh bread.

A WORD FROM THE LORD TO YOU AND ME: “Watch for divine appointments!”

God Bless

Glenn

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