

Chapter 12

ADDICTIONS AND BONDAGES

THE CAUSE AND CURE

Several years ago a terrible story appeared on the front page of the Denver papers. The story was about a family who had a pet snake, a python, which they had named Sammy. They got Sammy when it was a little snake and had it for many, many years, and it had grown from about 18 inches long to about 12 or 13 feet. They kept it in the house and fed it dead rodents. One evening all the family went out someplace together and left their young son in the house alone with Sammy. That evening the snake climbed up and wrapped itself around the boy, crushed him to death, and then started swallowing him from the head. That is the way the family found their son when they returned home. Of course, they called the police who came and killed the snake. The family was grief stricken. But when reporters interviewed the family, they became defensive. They said, "We can't understand how this happened! Sammy was our pet and we all loved him. We thought we could trust him."

Christ said He came to set the captives free.¹ The Bible makes clear that when people sin they become slaves of sin, captives of the devil.² But Paul wrote to a church, to Christians, and warned them, "*Do not become entangled again in a yoke of bondage.*"³ The fact is that many Christians are not really free.

We tend not to talk about "bondage" in our culture because it is not politically correct. Instead, we talk about addictions. An addiction is a habit or an attitude that controls a person's life, and there are many of them: love of money (which can be expressed by spending and self-indulgence, hoarding, gambling, or stealing), alcohol, drugs, smoking, food, work, television, sports, and sexual sins of all kinds. These things and many others can be addictions that lead people into bondage. These addictions, I

believe, are universal and demonstrate the way sin progresses: A temptation yields to becomes a sin - which becomes a habit - which becomes an addiction or bondage and leads a person to be a slave of that addiction. The time to deal with this progression is in the beginning when the temptation first comes to our mind before we are drawn deeper and deeper into the snare of the devil.

Regarding the news story that started this chapter, the family who had a pet python obviously forgot one thing: their pet was a snake! Some who read this may have a "little" addiction in your life that has been present for many years. You know it could potentially be dangerous, but you are sure you have it under your control. It is your pet, and you love it. It's like a snake! It has demonic power. And like a

snake, it is growing every year. One of these days you will suddenly realize that it has wrapped around you and that you are being suffocated. Or, perhaps, it won't destroy you but will attack one of your children.

Addiction, I believe, is idolatry. Anything a person loves more than he loves God is an idol, a false god. It is easy to see how an addiction slowly becomes an idol that a person loves more than he loves anything else. For an alcoholic, life starts revolving more and more around alcohol. Every experience of life (holidays, vacations, time off, trips, relationships, whatever it might be) is all planned with a view toward obtaining alcohol, and gradually the person starts loving that alcohol, being focused more on that alcohol than on anything else in this world.

An article in the Denver Post⁴ covered the problem of people becoming addicted to the computer and to the internet. A woman wrote, "My husband is literally glued to our computer 24 hours a day, he has lost his job because of it, and he is about to lose his family. He barely eats and for the last week he hasn't even taken a shower. Many women worry about their husbands having an affair with another woman, mine is having one with the computer. I have thought about destroying the computer, but my husband said he would take his own life if I did. My kids and I need to leave here. My children are frightened by their father's behavior." We see in this tragic story a picture of a man who has become addicted. He loves his computer more than his family, his job, or anything else in life. It was his idol and his god. Demonic power lurks behind addictions. I Corinthians 10:19-20 and Psalm 106:36-38 clearly connect idols and demons.

Years ago I read about a missionary in India who went into a huge Hindu temple where hundreds of idols of various sizes were residing on shelves around the room. As he examined the idols he noticed that they were all hollow and each had an opening in the back. He asked a Hindu priest why they were made in that fashion. The priest said, "That is so the spirit of that god can enter into the idol when the people worship it."

What does Satan want from us? He wants our worship. Remember that in the wilderness he said to Jesus, "*If you will bow down and worship me I will give you all the kingdoms of the world.*"⁵ Most of us are not so deceived that we become Satanists and literally worship the devil. So he approaches us in a deceptive way, behind some socially acceptable addiction: alcohol, drugs, pornography, or gambling. As that addiction takes control of our personality it becomes an idol, it becomes our god, and we are giving ourselves to the devil. Not metaphorically but literally!

One addiction can be tied to others. Ephesians says, "*Do not be drunk with wine which leads to debauchery.*"⁶ A man in a prison said to me that when he was on drugs he was led into every kind of vile sexual sin imaginable. This is very typical. One kind of addiction leads to other kinds, and Christians can have any of these addictions. Some of their addictions may be known to their family and friends and some of them may be hidden. While they are ashamed of their actions, they can't seem to stop. They are "*doing the thing they hate.*"⁷

How do people act when addicted?

First, they usually deny it. One of the common symptoms is that they blame someone else and deny that they have a problem. In other words, addictions make people into liars. Commonly, a person who is addicted to alcohol or drugs says it is not a problem, "I am just a social drinker," and I drink to relax." A person who is addicted to gambling might say it is just his hobby and not a problem, although he might be at the point where he has lost everything and is stealing money from his company or his family. Someone who is addicted to sexual sin and perversion excuses or denies it. Yet, behind that addiction is demonic power. I have ministered to people who claimed for years that their sexual practices were normal and just part of "human nature," but they finally admitted they were out of control. They were consumed and overwhelmed by the sexual fantasies and images in their minds. Homosexuals commonly disavow any responsibility for their lifestyle since they believe they were created by God as homosexuals. It is true they may have been born with an orientation toward homosexuality – because of generational sin, witchcraft curses, or rejection in the womb – but God no more purposed for them to be homosexuals than he purposed a man to be a lifetime alcoholic who was born with that orientation. In a rehab class for wife abusers, including men who beat their wives, these were some of the defenses by the men: "It's not my fault. My wife pushes my buttons. She's a terrible cook. She doesn't clean the house right. She is so fat! She's gained 20 lbs. since we married." Yes, some men say such stupid things.

People also become isolated when they are addicted to some sin. I was counseling a brother and sister 18 or 19 years old in Mexico and the young woman said to me, "My father said that he was a Christian, but all he ever loved was money and pornography. He never had time for our mother. He never had time for us children. All he had time to do was work and make money and go into his room by himself and look at his pornography."

On a Sunday morning in Mexico several of us were walking to a church about 10 a.m. Lying on the sidewalk was a young man of 25 or 30 years. He was dressed in shabby clothes, passed out on his back, and clutching a bottle in a paper sack to his chest. I thought, "That is a picture of the end result of addiction. This young man has lost his family, his career, his self respect, his relationship with God, and he is in the process of losing his health and his very life. It is insanity!" Why do you think that addictions have such power over people? They have demonic power, a counterfeit god that draws people to destruction.

Addiction leads to loss of control. The alcoholic or drug addict says, "I'm free, I can stop anytime I want to," but gradually they drink or use drugs more and more until it destroys everything they hold dear in life. A person who is addicted to food goes on eating binges. Food increasingly controls their life, destroys their health, and destroys their relationships. A gambling addict borrows, steals, and goes

bankrupt for his/her addiction. For the sex addict, their mind is controlled. Their actions become more and more perverse and sick with less and less satisfaction.

Finally, addiction can lead to thoughts of suicide or to suicide itself. The person starts feeling, "I'm helpless, I'm evil, I've messed up everything and every relationship. Suicide is the only way out." But suicide is not God's means to set us free!

All right, what is the cause and cure of addictions? This is a complex matter and I don't pretend to have all the answers, but from my study and experience I believe these are some of the main reasons for addictions:

THE FIRST CAUSE FOR ADDICTIONS IS THE MODEL AND EXAMPLE OF PARENTS, AND JUDGING PARENTS.

The model and example of one's parents is, of course, profoundly imprinted on one's personality. Overcoming a negative example might require years of reorientation through prayer, immersion in the word of God, and healthy relationships. But, also, there are those spiritual laws I mentioned in previous chapters regarding forgiving others, repenting of judgments and condemnation in the heart, and honoring one's father and mother. So the first question to ask when people are addicted to alcohol or drugs is, "Was your father or mother an alcoholic? Did they have a problem with alcohol or drugs or any other form of addiction?" If a person is having a problem with some sexual addiction, I ask them, "Was your father faithful to your mother? Did your father or your mother abandon their spouse for someone else?" The first place to look is for the deep wounds in their hearts that resulted from their parents' sins, and for any judgment and condemnation that has been harbored in their hearts against their parents. The cure is to forgive that parent, to repent of their judgments and to receive prayer for their wounded heart.

THE SECOND CAUSE FOR ADDICTIONS IS REBELLION. The sequence of events in life for many begins with rejection by one or both parents which results in fear, loneliness and insecurity. These kinds of feelings transform into rebellion during the teen years by developing into a stance of pride where the person takes on the particular identity and lifestyle they have chosen. This tends to harden into a stronghold in that person's life.

The life of a person in an addiction resembles a pendulum. When a person is rejected as a child or young person, they feel fear, loneliness, depression, and hopelessness. Then, as they grow older, the pendulum swings into anger, rage, and rebellion. Their outer actions might be expressed in the use of alcohol, drugs, or sexual sin. It might take the form of becoming a member of a gang, a homosexual, or a criminal, all of which harden into strongholds in their lives. Usually there is a swinging back and forth for a period of time between rejection, fear, and loneliness, over to the other extreme of rebellion, anger, rage, vandalism, crime, and addiction.

What is the cure for rebellion? The first step is to forgive the people who have hurt and rejected you. The basic cure for rebellion is repentance. Then Christ must be invited in to heal your broken heart. It is important to renounce and break the stronghold of rebellion in whatever form it has taken in

your life. On the P.B.S. Channel recently I saw an interview with a hard-core member of a motorcycle gang who was apparently speaking honestly and openly. He was asked what was the appeal of membership in such a gang. He thought for a moment and said, "It is a life of rebellion. It makes me feel strong. I like it." His membership in a gang, accompanied by drug addiction, sex addiction, and addiction to anger and violence was the cumulative result of many choices he had made on his life's journey. Unless and until he chooses to repent and cry out for help to a merciful God, that stronghold will grow ever stronger.

I BELIEVE THE THIRD CAUSE OF ADDICTIONS COMES FROM THE "PAIN OF LIFE." Life is painful, as I'm sure you have noticed, and we desire to be comforted. We desire to escape our pain, to escape the fear and anxiety that sometimes paralyzes our lives. We can seek comfort through smoking, alcohol, drugs, pornography, sexual encounters, gambling, food addictions, and a host of other habits.

A friend of mine who suffered many years with alcoholism said he believes every alcoholic has fear deep inside and that alcohol is a way to escape that fear. Why do young women, or not so young women, go from relationship to relationship with men who are very destructive to them? In part, it is to find comfort for their loneliness, to escape the pain of life.

What is the cure for this pain of life? The cure is to turn to "the God of all comfort."⁸ An addiction can give us some comfort and some escape for a period of time, but obviously there will come a time when it will let us down, and then our situation will be much worse. God loves us, desires to comfort us deep within, and is the only one that can ultimately give us wholesome and lasting comfort.

When I am teaching alcohol and drug rehab groups or in prisons, I refer to Mark 15:23. After the horrible torture of scourging or whipping of Jesus, his lacerated body must have been burning like fire. Then, just before they nailed his hands and feet to the cross, "*They gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink. But He did not take it.*" They offered Him a mixture of alcohol and drugs to deaden the pain. However, He was not suffering for His own sins but for ours, and He chose to take all of that suffering and pain because of His love for us. Can you be a man or a woman of God and accept the pain of life without having to anesthetize it with some addiction? Do you love Him enough to do that?

A young inmate named David made a brief statement after listening to my teaching in a prison in Colorado. He said he had an addiction to smoking, and he started asking himself, "What is the root of this addiction? When and why did it start?" He remembered that he started smoking when he was 8 years old, when his grandmother died. She was the only one in his family, he said, who provided love and stability and a sense of right and wrong, and when she died he felt lonely and afraid. Also he felt angry and rebellious because of her death, so he started smoking for comfort and also out of his sense of rebellion. We led him through the steps outlined above: forgiving others, repentance for his rebellion, and prayer for his wounded heart. He said he started feeling a great sense of peace and well being. We encouraged him to be faithful and open with his brothers in the fellowship. The fellowships

inside prisons frequently are far stronger than those on the outside, so for those who are serious it is a wonderful place to be discipled.

THE FOURTH CAUSE OF ADDICTIONS IS GENERATIONAL CURSES. People with a scientific or secular perspective would say it is a genetic predisposition. From a Biblical perspective it is a generational curse.. It has been shown that the children of alcoholics become alcoholics at a 70% higher rate than average even when those children are adopted out at birth to families that are not alcoholics. If a child has a father or mother who are alcoholics or drug addicts and immediately after birth he is adopted by a family that does not have these problems, he will have this predisposition toward alcoholism or toward drug addiction almost the same as if he were raised in that addicted family. I read a study by a medical doctor, Doctor David Olms, in which he says that alcoholism is a disease. His study shows that the brain waves are different with an alcoholic and even with children of alcoholics. There are certain crucial chemicals in the brain that are different, and this is a genetic predisposition. It is not all genetic, please understand. He says, "If a person drinks enough, often enough, and long enough that person will become an alcoholic with or without the genetic problems." He also says this addiction is treatable. The earlier the person recognizes and does something about it, the sooner this problem can be overcome. This doesn't mean the temptation to drink alcohol or take drugs is going to be obliterated. These persons still have this tendency in their genes, but they can live in complete victory over it. What is the Christian approach to dealing with this problem? It is to break the curses, renounce the devil and all his works,

humble one's self before the Lord, and ask His forgiveness. Refer to the Chapter on GENERATIONAL CURSES.

THE FIFTH AND LAST CAUSE OF ADDICTIONS IS DEMONIZATION. I know from over 35 years of ministering to scores of addicted people that sometimes the work of setting people free is not finished until they get free of demonic ties. After cutting all of the bad roots, simply command all unclean spirits to go in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ: spirits of rejection, fear, unforgiveness, rebellion, alcohol, drugs, etcetera.. Refer to Chapter titled MINISTRY TO THE DEMONIZED.

To summarize: The cause of addictions is in each case connected with man's sin and his attempt to save himself, and the cure in each case is connected with a right relationship with the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ said He came to set us free! He said He "*came to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed.*"⁹ This is the work of Christ, and it is the work of His church. God has provided for us through His Son deliverance and freedom from every bondage. This is our heritage as sons and daughters of God.

Here is an example that illustrates how the five causes of addictions can merge and overlap:

Another counselor and I sat with Ian in the balcony of a convention center in a suburb of London at the conclusion of a time of worship and preaching. It was 1987, and I was one of a team of about 50 who had gone on a ministry trip to a number of cities in England. After a long period of small talk, Ian finally started opening up. His conscience was deeply troubled. He had been an active member of the IRA and had apparently participated in some actions that had taken the lives of innocent people. He had been an alcoholic, which was an almost universal addiction for the men in his culture. Over the course of the interview, I learned that his father had been an angry, violent man and, not surprisingly, an alcoholic. Ian hated him, but he had followed him into the IRA.

I led Ian to forgive his father, and to forgive England and the IRA for their atrocities against one another over the years; to repent of his judgments against his father; to break the ungodly soul ties between him and his father; to repent for his life of rebellion and violence; to break generational curses; to renounce the unclean spirits of alcohol, rejection, abuse, violence and murder; and to command these spirits to come out. We then prayed for his heart to be healed. Ian said that for the first time in his life he felt clean and at peace. We encouraged him in steps to grow in his walk with the Lord.

Time of Reflection

Ask the Lord to reveal things in the area of causes of addictions of which you have never been aware. With the Lord's help, quietly work through the cures for each of these problems :

- (1) Cause: The example of your parents. Your judgments against them
Cure: Forgive, and repent of judgments
- (2) Cause: Rebellion
Cure: Repent for rebellion
- (3) Cause: Pain of life
Cure: Repent for turning to an addiction for comfort, and turn to the God who desires to comfort you
- (4) Cause: Generational curses
Cure: Break generational curses over your life and family in the name of Christ
- (5) Cause: Demonization
Cure: Renounce any demonic spirits connected to your addictions and command them to go in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

Ask the Lord to heal your heart, your emotions, and your memories.

- (1)
- (2)

(3)

IMPORTANT: For some people, getting rid of the stronghold of addictions is similar to the way the walls of Jericho fell. The people shouted and the walls fell down. Boom! For other people, probably the majority, breaking the control of those strongholds is more like the way the wall around Jerusalem was dismantled by the Romans – one stone at a time. For these people, one time of prayer and ministry is only a beginning. They need ongoing ministry and encouragement by a support group, a recovery group, where there is love, prayer, and accountability. I encourage you to seek out such a group and commit yourself to it.

Another way to illustrate this need: If a teenager or adult has not taken care of his teeth, and they are badly out of alignment, corrective dental surgery might be required. After the surgery the dentist will fit the patient with braces and then later with a retainer. Why? Teeth tend to return to the position they have grown into. They must be held in their correct position by consistent pressure over a period of time. Are you sincere about overcoming your addiction? Will you submit to the discipline required to get free of your destructive addiction no matter what might be required? Perhaps 9 months to a year or more in a rehab facility will be necessary to hold you in position spiritually, emotionally, and physically so that you can stand on your own. Are you willing to pay such a price? This can be a life and death decision for you.

Endnotes

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| (1) Luke 4:18 | (6) Ephesians 5:18 |
| (2) John 8:34, 2 Timothy 2:26 | (7) Romans 7:15 |
| (3) Galatians 5:1 | (8) 2 Corinthians 1:3 |
| (4) <u>Denver Post</u> , October 19, 1998 | (9) Luke 4:18 |
| (5) Matthew 4:8-9 | |
| (6) | |

THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

Everyone of us is involved in a life and death struggle with our fallen nature that, for most of us, is centered in one particular weakness, a "besetting" sin with which we have a love/hate relationship.¹ This besetting sin is nearly always expressed through an addiction which, because it becomes an idol in our hearts, has incredible power, demonic power. People literally lose their freedom and become slaves to these besetting sins or addictions, as God warns us in chapter 6 of Romans. The good news is that Jesus Christ came to set the captives free. I previously listed five root causes and cures for addictions. While Christ gives us freedom, salvation and wholeness, we have to do our part. That is, we have to "work out our salvation," and another word for that process is "sanctification." The definition of sanctification is: set apart for God, becoming Christlike, becoming mature, becoming holy, and walking in obedience and love. I believe that a significant part of working out our salvation involves breaking free of our addictions/bondages/ idols—the sins that easily beset us.

How do we become sanctified? Through faith in Christ, which means that we turn to Christ, and in turning to Christ we turn away from our sins. We repent. Repentance is a change of mind or attitude toward God, toward ourselves, and toward sin that results in a turnaround in our life. Trying to follow Christ without repenting is like trying to go east and west at the same time. John the Baptist preceded Christ and preached a message of repentance to prepare the people to receive Christ.² When Jesus started His public ministry, He said, *"The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!"*³ When Peter preached to the multitude at Pentecost, they asked, *"What shall we do?"* He replied, *"Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."*⁴ Repentance is always involved in following Christ. Repentance is not easy. It involves dying to self which is intensely painful. The Apostle Peter states, *"He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."*⁵ We have to lay our flesh and our sin at the foot of the cross. It is not easy, and there is nothing automatic about it.

A beloved pastor publicly shared a personal testimony in one of his messages. After he became a pastor he became infatuated with a woman who was on staff at his church. He resisted this infatuation but it became more and more powerful within himself. He was disappointed to discover an almost overpowering temptation to commit adultery in his heart. This woman had similar feelings toward him. He was tempted to leave his wife for this other woman. He said he started going home every

afternoon to lie on the floor in his upstairs bedroom, where he groaned and cried out to God. He said he couldn't express in words the suffering he was going through inside himself as he resisted this overpowering temptation. He said that for several months he had this awful struggle within himself until finally it left. He hadn't even been able to share this struggle with his wife. She knew something very significant was going on but he couldn't tell her because of his shame and double mindedness. Finally, he was able to go downstairs and with tears share with his wife and pray with her and it was over. He said if he hadn't gone through that awful struggle he knows that he would have fallen into sin and lost his wife, his children, his church, and his relationship with God. To me, this is an example of "suffering in the flesh in order to cease from sin."

Remember that temptation becomes sin, sin becomes habit, habit becomes addiction, and addiction becomes bondage. We then have become a slave of sin. The wages of sin is death: death of every meaningful relationship, possibly physical death, and, perhaps, spiritual death! If we will not deal with that "little" habit, with that "little" addiction while we can deal with it, it will grow and grow like Sammy the snake until it devours us. The good news is that because of our relationship with Christ we can deal with it and overcome it, even as the pastor did in the preceding story.

How are we to repent of these things? The Scripture teaches us to "flee from" sin. Paul tells us to "*Flee from sexual immorality.*"⁶ How did Joseph deal with the sinful advances of Potiphar's wife? He did not try to have a discussion with her about how wrong it was for him to sleep with her. He fled from her presence! You cannot reason in your head with the temptation to commit sexual immorality. You have to get out of the presence of it. You cannot watch immorality on television or rent sensual videos. You cannot watch pornography on the internet or buy X-rated magazines. You cannot get into a situation of temptation with someone of the opposite sex and let those feelings grow within you. You have to flee from immorality of every kind. By the same token, Paul instructs us to "*Flee from idolatry.*"⁷ Addiction is idolatry. If you have a weakness toward alcohol or drugs you should not spend time with your old friends who practice those addictions. You should not go sit with your friends in a bar, for instance.

Again, we are exhorted to "*Flee from the love of money.*"⁸ I believe people who spend endless hours studying the stock market and planning how to make more money are caught up in the power of Mammon, the pagan god of money. They are controlled by love and desire for money. Likewise, people who spend themselves into bankruptcy, those who steal, those who gamble themselves into poverty, and those who covet the wealth and possessions of others are bound to the idol of money. And, finally, we are warned to "*Flee from the wrath to come.*"⁹ God's wrath is a reality, not an imaginary concept or a scare tactic. God has a personal love for each of us that is so extreme that He sent His only Son to die for us. If we reject the love and light that He offers to us, and turn to the darkness, then judgment is the inevitable consequence of our own choice.¹⁰

Colossians 3 has a wonderful teaching about overcoming these besetting sins: "*If then you were raised with Christ...*"¹¹ Were you raised with Christ? That happened when you came up out of the waters of baptism. You were buried in death and raised in resurrection. "*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth.*"¹² So first God tells us to set our minds. There is a saying in our society, "You are what you eat." I don't believe that is true. The Bible says you are what you think. "*As a man thinks in his heart so is he.*"¹³ So we have the responsibility and freedom to control our thoughts, to set our minds on things above.

This is the second step: "*Therefore put to death your members which are of the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.*"¹⁴ Listen again. **Put to death** those things. The root of the Greek word for "mortify," used in the King James Version, is like using a tourniquet. If a rattlesnake bit you on the leg, you would use a tourniquet to choke off the poison. That is what we are instructed to do with our sins, which would include our addictions. We are to tighten the tourniquet and cut off the blood supply. Note: We are to do it. If we have to lie on our face and groan and cry out to God for months, we are to put it to death. Jesus says, "*If your eye sins, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off.*"¹⁵ He says do whatever it takes to avoid going to the everlasting fire. That is exactly what Jesus said!

When I was a pastor in Loveland, Colorado, a man 35 years old came to me for counsel. He had been attending church intermittently for a number of years. He had a beautiful wife and three active children, including a new baby. Finally, he got around to telling me what was troubling him. He had a little problem. He had been smoking pot every day since he was 14 years old, and now it had started to cause a problem between him and his wife. He asked me, "Do you think I have to give this habit up?" You can imagine what I told him. But I was not able to convince him. He told me he would think about it and left. I didn't see him in church anymore, and about a year later someone told me that he and his wife had divorced. So he lost his wife and children. He lost his job. He left the church and the community. No one knew where he was. He lost everything. Sammy only seems to be a harmless pet. He will unobtrusively grow until he turns on his "master" and devours him. That is the nature of a python!

Colossians 3:8 says, "*But now you yourselves are to put off all these.*" The words, "**put off**", in this sentence is a different Greek word that means, "like taking off a coat." These are the sins in that list: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying. God's word tells us that for these things

we have a choice. When someone offends us or hurts us in some way and anger rises up inside, we are free to choose not to act out our anger. We are also free to turn away from wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language. It is an act of will like taking off our coat.

I speak frankly to the men I minister to in prisons. I tell them that filthy language and cursing, using God's name in vain, are not signs of manliness. Jesus was the epitome of manhood, and He had a clean heart and a clean mouth. What we say is of great importance. We have no right to spew out filthy language, and to do so is a testimony against our faith. Furthermore, it does something inside us if we speak negative words. It contaminates our spirit. We can choose to take off that language like we choose to take off a dirty coat.

As you continue reading in Colossians 3, Paul teaches about moving from carnality to Christ by saying in Verse 10, "*and you have put on the new man....*" This is the next step. The Greek word translated "**put on**" is "like putting on a nice clean coat." "*Therefore,*" vs. 12 says, "*as the elect of God, holy and beloved.*" This is the way God sees us. He sees us as holy because He is holy and His Spirit is within us. And we only become holy as we walk with Him and let His holiness become manifested in us. "*Holy and beloved,*" we are loved! That is the truth, we are loved! (And we are to "*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*" it says in Romans 13.) We are to *put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.* And then it says in vs. 14, "*Above all these things put on love.*" Putting on love is an action, a choice we have to make. Just as our clothes don't jump out of the closet and onto our bodies, neither does love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control jump onto us simply because we are Christians, but time after time we have to choose to put on these virtues. Verse 15, one of my favorite verses, says, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful.*"

God never intended that we should try to break free from our addictions and bondages by ourselves. We must remember to emphasize again and again to those we are counseling that we need one another. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ to give us encouragement and correction. We need teaching and worship. We also need prayer, fellowship, and accountability. We need one another in order to walk out of our bondages into the freedom that Jesus Christ has provided for us.

Time of Reflection

The process of sanctification involves becoming Christlike, mature, holy, and walking in love. We cannot do any of that apart from the ongoing help of the Lord.

Consider and reflect on the following:

- Repent, and turn to the Lord
- Flee from sexual immorality
- Flee from idolatry
- Flee from the love of money

- Flee from the wrath to come
- Put to death: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, addictions
- Put off: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying
- Put on: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering, love
- Am I willing to suffer in the flesh in order to cease from sin?
- Am I willing to die to selfish ambition and live for the Lord?

Help me, Lord. I find double mindedness deep within my heart at times. Help me to apply a tourniquet to that lower part of my nature. Fill me, Lord, with your Holy Spirit, and enable me to do your precious will. Amen.

Endnotes

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| (1) Romans 7:15 | (9) Luke 3:7 |
| (2) Matthew 3:1-3 | (10) John 3:16-21 |
| (3) Mark 1:15 | (11) Colossians 3:1 |
| (4) Acts 2:37-38 | (12) Colossians 3:1-2 |
| (5) 1 Peter 4:1 | (13) Proverbs 23:7 |
| (6) 1 Corinthians 6:9 | (14) Colossians 3:5-6 |
| (7) 1 Corinthians 10:14 | (15) Matthew 5:29-30 |
| (8) 1 Timothy 6:11 | |