

Sermon 51: Romans 6:19: Addictions: Part Two

OUTLINE

Lies about God
Lies about ourselves
Lies about our idols

INTRODUCTION

The devil is the father of lies and addiction is a web of lies that holds the addict fast. God is a God of truth, His kingdom is built on truth and it is the truth that sets us free. We have begun to investigate the nature of addiction showing that it is lawlessness not merely a medical condition. We also showed how the true cure for addiction does not lie in merely managing the symptoms of addictions, nor even removing the substance we are addicted to. Rather we showed how addiction is primarily a worship problem and how addiction is inevitable in every person's life unless they are born again. Until God has His place in our lives we are dysfunctional and will blindly pursue other things looking for the satisfaction only He can give. In sin we are willing slaves to desire but in Christ we are remade into servants of righteousness who have experienced a death to sin, who are filled by the power of Christ's resurrection by the Spirit who is bearing the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Today we want to shift our focus from the heart and will to the area of the mind. The heart is the fountain of our lives and if it is given over to idols then addiction is the result. The mind is the next most important part of us. If we are indoctrinated by lies we may even be born again Christian who has the potential to live holy lives but on account of being indoctrinated by lies we are ignorant or deceived and we continue to stay bogged down in our desires not gaining the victory that has been made possible.

Today as we consider the words of Paul, 'lawlessness leading to more lawlessness,' we are going to show how lies are the catalyst for deeper bondage in sin. Last week we noted *that* sin grows today we are focusing more on the *how*. This perspective will be helpful not only for the addict who is trying to quit addiction but for every Christian who finds themselves caught in besetting sins. Likewise we will look at important truths that need to be considered in confronting sin and overcoming them.

Lies about God

The devil's use of lies has a long rich history in the Scriptures. If we go back to the beginning in the Garden of Eden we see the father of lies slaying humanity with his lies. He lied about who God is representing Him as not good, or trustworthy in what He said but rather as stingy, malicious and insecure. He lied about who we are misrepresenting our position as creatures before God and appealing to our pride in wanting to see ourselves promoted to equality with God. He lied to us about fruit indicating that it was what we needed to be happy and that it would not be the cause of our death but our liberation from

God's restrictions. It is the lies in these three areas that the devil continually uses to keep us in bondage, he lies to us about God, ourselves and our idols. Let's take these in order:

Lies about God: God is not good, we think Him a cosmic kill joy, in the case of Adam and Eve they believed that He was robbing them of the knowledge of right and wrong, and that the many trees that they had access to in the garden were not enough. One of the lies we believe when it comes to sin and addiction is that God is withholding joy from me by not letting me have certain sins in my life. We wrongly perceive of God as one who makes our joys and then delights in withholding the fulfilment of them. The devil wants us to think of God as a scrooge who is not willing to satisfy us so that we take matters into our own hands. We are to live by faith and trust in God's word as He reveals Himself to be the generous sustainer of His creation. A quick tally of what God has already given will quickly highlight your irrational desiring as wearing blinkers.

A common lie that the devil seeks for us to believe is the one that God is quick to anger and slow to forgive, not the God who is slow to anger and ready to forgive (Psalm 103:8-9). This comes in many forms. Guilt is a favourite weapon of the devil as it has some truth in it which always makes for a better sell. When we sin we are guilty, and we know God is holy, so the devil exaggerates these truths to take away all hope and make us feel like our case is hopeless so that we return to our vomit. This comes in many versions: 'you are a Judas; you have committed the unforgivable sin; you can't be forgiven for that one you deliberately chose it; this is the 20th time you've done it you can't expect forgiveness now. Here we need to remind us of God's promises and trust in His character. We need to fill our minds with 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' We need to think of Jesus restoring Peter after denying Him three times after he had been warned he was going to do it and did not pray as he should have when Jesus Himself told him to. The loving Father of the prodigal son is one of the most important truths that an addict needs to learn because they fall often and need to know God's willingness to forgive and that God was not surprised by their sin and has already paid for it in Christ.

If it is not the lie that I am too sinful to forgive then it will be the lie that God is not very holy. We might kid ourselves and think that sin is really not very serious. When we are in love with a sin we are willing to redefine God's holiness to accommodate it. That God is an indulgent Grandfather who just smiles and wags His finger but is not really concerned over sin. This is a lie that will drag the addict deeper into bondage. The Bible teaches that God is immensely holy, when Isaiah viewed God's holiness he felt himself undone because of his sin. Hell is a fair punishment for sin, and the God-man is the necessary payment for your 'little' sins. When viewed from the nature of the punishment the bible gives sin against an infinitely holy God takes on infinite proportions. A fear of the LORD that views Him, not as a tame little kitty, but as a consuming fire that punishes the impenitent is part and parcel of biblical spirituality.

This also includes lies about the Gospel. The addict is often prone to self-punishment adding extra difficulty to their lives with overly stringent measures which chaff and cause an

eruption from these restraints later on. We need to remember that Christ suffered all for our sins, we cannot pay for them by self-affliction. This is a lie the devil would have us believe in order to steal our assurance that God's grace covers our sins and Christ death is sufficient for the terrible things that we have done. If we have no joy in God and the joy of our salvation we will soon look for joy in the old ways, going back to the meat pots of Egypt.

Hebrews 3:12-13 gives us a positive strategy to help us overcome this unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin, 'Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.' One of the tendencies of the addict is to isolate themselves, as Proverbs 18:1 puts it, 'Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.' The antidote is to be amongst other Christians, to go to church, to be open for others to encourage you. This outside objective input is essential because of the deceitfulness of sin. When we are on our own we only have our own opinions and are accountable to no one but ourselves. However, when we are with others we have a more objective point of view to help us when our doubts are clouding God's true character and willingness to forgive. The problem is that when you are arguing with yourself, you always win. God puts us into communities to help keep us honest and guarded against our own blind spots. It is through others that we have the Gospel spoken to us when we most need it as well.

Lies about ourselves

The first possible lie about ourselves that needs to be processed is: are we saved? The Pharisees were very religious people who did not think they needed Jesus for salvation because they could do it on their own. Often addicts know their own weakness and sinfulness, but even addicts can be self-deceiving and think that they are basically good people who have been brought up in a bad situation and got some bad DNA. In other words, just as Adam and Eve shifted the blame, and there was some blame to be shifted, they deflected from themselves. We have the same tendency to think that we are not at fault that every bad thing that has happened to us is someone else's fault. This is where the disease model can break down. We are not born good and are merely victims who can now clean up our own acts. This gets more complicated when we have an easy believism going around as well where people who have not had a proper presentation of the gospel have been duped into praying a sinner's prayer and are now under the illusion that they are Christians. It is true that God in His mercy does save people through the altar call, though it is nowhere commanded in Scripture. And there are many who wrongly use the altar call yet who proclaim Christ as the only sufficient saviour from sin and call people to believe in Christ and forsake their sins in repentance. However, we also have versions of the Gospel which are selling Jesus as a friend who will fix all your problems. He is sold as a lonely friend who just wants to be accepted by you so that He can endlessly serve you and make you constantly happy. Those who are looking for an easy life and a quick fix have been taken in by the false advertising, they have walked the aisle, prayed the prayer and been told that they are Christians. However, the sad truth is they did not come to Christ because they despaired of their own righteousness, because they felt that they were guilty sinners

who would be rightly condemned to eternal hell and go to God for mercy and pardon. They did not see their sins as separating them from God and repentance is a necessary consequence of true faith in Christ. No, they were trying Jesus out, and if He didn't work out they would go back for a refund and try another product. This is not salvation. We come to Christ for salvation because my biggest problem in life is my sin which separates me from God and seals me under His judgement. I come to Christ to be cleansed of my sin, and in doing so I abandon all my former idols and relinquish the ruling of my life to Him. And even if Jesus does not immediately heal me of my addiction removing all desires and effects, I follow Him because He is God, not because He is the best choice to benefit me in the most ways. Following Jesus is the hardest thing in the world and if we come to Him because we are looking for an easy path to success we are coming for the wrong reasons under the wrong impressions. It is true that there are many benefits, but it is your sin that separates you from God and it is this that He died for.

You can know that you are believing lies about yourself if you are angry at God. Addicts and sinners think that God has made them the way they are, or that God is not helping, or that God has put them in difficult situations that are too hard for them. Anger at God basically assumes that you are a victim and are a good person. Anger towards God is deflection, it is the same tactic that Adam employed in the Garden. After Adam fell and God questioned him, Adam accused God of giving Eve to him as the source of the problem, not his own sinful choices. Owning our guilt is essential in overcoming sin. James tells us the truth about the source of our sins, James 1:13-15, 'Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.' Sin originates in our sinful desires and grows by our choices. Anger at God is a refusal to see the true root issue. As long as we believe the lie that God is the bad guy we can never deal with sin properly.

At the heart of all sin is a basic misunderstanding of our own natures and what we are made for. Sinful desire is distorted and life lived following desire will make an animal like no other out of you. Unless we see ourselves in light of the purposes that God made for us we will abuse ourselves. One of the first things that needs to be corrected in any addiction situation is the correct view of the part of our bodies that we are abusing for a fix. The brain was not made as a toy to be manipulated by creating a chemical imbalance with alcohol but we must be sober minded in order to function correctly. Sexual pleasure is not a sweet that you can consume several times a day anytime you get a craving but is a means of procreation and expression of love in marriage. Adrenaline is not a drug for getting high on through kleptomania, adrenaline sports, and toying with death at high speeds. No, it is God's gift to the nervous to focus the mind and something to strengthen the muscles in an emergency and for important tasks. We are spiritual beings as well as bodied beings. If we pursue life thinking that all we are is a body, and neglect holiness, worship, prayer, communion with God and being transformed into Christ's perfect humanity we are living the sub-human life. We become worse than animals, for we end up doing things that animals

never do. And if we live as if all we are is spirits and neglect our bodies and view the pleasures of the flesh as sinful and not as God's gifts we likewise run into error.

Lies about our idols

The lies we believe about our sins relate directly to the lies we believe about God and ourselves. If we think that the main problem is one of moderation then we underestimate God's holiness. A little sin is still too much for God is holy and we are to be holy as He is. Another one is, 'I have it under control' but the truth is you keep sin as a pet and soon it will be your master. Here we are overestimating our own strength. Another one is addiction is something that other people fall prey to not me. Because we may have an addiction that is not painful or hurting anyone else we might think that our particular addictions are ok. This is false, any areas of compromise we have in our lives are footholds from which more ground will be taken from us. We have witnessed the snowballing effect of sin.

The heart if addiction is dissatisfaction with God. We buy the lie that God can't make me happy only sin can. Sin initially feels good but it's delights are lies and transient. They are not true lasting happiness and deeply satisfying, they are merely passing and not the hearts deepest delight. Solomon sees the vanity of sin Ecclesiastes 2:1, 'I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity.' Solomon tried riches, building projects, landscaping, farming, sex, drunkenness, you name it he tried it. However, without holding nothing from himself he learnt that in the end it was all worthless and vanity. Sin is a liar we feed it and we get hungrier not satisfied, Paul describes the life of pursuing lust with increasing greed as futility, darkness, ignorance and the lifestyle of those who have seared their consciences, Eph 4:17-19, 'Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.'

C. S. Lewis describes us as being too easily pleased: 'We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.' Sin does not satisfy only God can. As born again Christians we have been made slaves of righteousness by God to have new desires for the God we hated and hatred for the sins we love. We must take our thoughts captive to this newness God has made to be true about us. Holiness is now our deepest source of happiness, your memory may not say so, your cravings for your idols may not be convinced, but it is true, this is what you are and what you were originally made for.

Another area where lies need to be exterminated is in our talking to God, our confessions of sin. Confession of sin is very important. I have heard of an abuse of confession in rehabs where the addict is forced to publicly own up to very deep and dark thing they have ever

done before people like their parents, trying to shape a better person through the pain of humiliation. Confession is not a whip where we use the painful experience of public embarrassment to make a better person of us. No, it is rather a renewing of our relationship with God that He might not remove the effective working of His Spirit who is the true agent of change. Confession also alleviates the guilt that is often a source of pain and fuel for addiction. Psalm 130:3, 'If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?'

The Bible calls on us to humble ourselves before God and to confess our sins. The place where the addict has to be honest is on his/her knees. God can read our minds, He knows our excuses so we can't lie to Him. When we are in sin we are keeping part of our lives from God, keeping a locked door and not allowing Him to enter to demand the removal of anything that displeases Him. The truest liberation comes not when we can have any sin we want but when we open up to God and allow Him to put His finger on anything in our lives and we will remove it. David puts it like this in psalm 139:23-4, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Confession can be done with other people as well, and is encouraged in Scripture, 'Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.' James 5:16. As well as Ephesians 5:8-14a, 'for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light.' The power of sin is in its secrecy, open confession gives no place for sin to hide in us.

We will continue looking at the truths we need to believe next week.