

ANGER AND IDOLATRY

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING - This is the third and final series on the sins that undergird and sustain addiction. These are a major factor in many men's and women's struggle with addictions. Even the mere acknowledgment of them can be an important step in the healing process. This class and the preceding two all lead up to next week when we deal with repentance.

1. Again, this week, we will be dealing with some of the sins that may be the roots of your addiction problem. Good news! We are heading towards the end of this part of the program; next week we will be dealing with how we repent from all of the various sins that have kept us locked into our old identity and our old ways of behaving. Again, I want to remind you, don't lay every one of these sins on yourself. Use some discernment, and ask the Lord which you need to deal with.
2. This session we will be dealing with anger and idolatry. I do believe that idolatry is a root of every person's addiction problem. In fact, I would almost go so far as to say that addiction is a form of idolatry. However, because it is much more difficult to deal with, I will take a little more time discussing anger. Anger is almost always present in most people dealing with addiction.

ANGER

1. Are you an angry person? You probably think not. Sure, you get angry sometimes; everybody does, but chances are you don't classify yourself as an angry person.
2. Maybe you are, maybe you are not. But, what does this have to do with addiction? In this session I'm going to try and help you discover if you are an angry person, and I'm going to talk about how anger can be one of the roots of addiction; one of those things that we are going to have to tear out if we are to be truly free. If you have ever cut down a tree at its base, you know how the thing keeps trying to come back because you didn't remove the roots. Something in it stays alive.
3. First to make the subject relevant, let's look at addictions and anger. Does anger cause addictions, or does it hold us in bondage? No, it doesn't. Not directly. But anger has two offspring that can be major factors in holding us in compulsive behaviors--bitterness and unforgiveness.
4. Anger itself is not going to cause an addiction, because anger itself is not bad. It is not a sin. Jesus got angry. When we think of Jesus being angry, most of us think of Him chasing the money

changers out of the temple in John 2: 13-16, but I believe an even better example is his blasting the Pharisees in Matt. 23:13. He calls them names--hypocrites, a brood of vipers, etc.-- for almost a whole page in my Bible. No, if Jesus got angry, anger cannot be a sin.

5. But, we have been given some guidelines as to when anger is wrong:

Eph. 4:25 - *Do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

Col. 3:8 - *But now, put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk from your mouth.*

- a. The first passage tells us not to hold on to anger. It is wrong if we hold onto it.
 - b. The second passage speaks against anger in the context of those things that either harm other people, or are forms of expression that are out of control.
6. Anger is a spontaneous emotion given to us for a purpose--to respond with strength when we need to, but it is wrong when we hold onto it--we call this bitterness--and when we intentionally use it to hurt other people--a form of unforgiveness.
7. Let's look at bitterness first.
- a. We often refer to a root of bitterness--recognizing that it is something that lives on in us, something that is extremely difficult to get rid of because it has become so much a part of us.
 - b. Usually, it is a lasting anger or resentment over something that happened to us in our past, and now continues to rear its ugly head, controlling our words and thoughts and behavior.
 - c. It is closely tied in with self-pity and certainly with unforgiveness. It also may be a form of self-protection.
8. Let me illustrate how a root of bitterness can tie in with an addiction:

Stan had a heightened sensitivity to rejection because his father had been an extremely withdrawn man, and Stan, as a small child, had interpreted his father's attitude as rejection. When Stan moved out of the city into the suburbs just in time to start high school he had difficulty making friends. He wasn't a jock, and he was fairly introverted, so he soon started to feel like an outcast. In his view, most of the kids in his school were a bunch of snobs. The more popular, or successful, or athletic the other person was, the more Stan resented them. And so he withdrew into his own world and into a small circle of fellow

outcasts. They soon found themselves drinking to feel “cool.” Stan found himself in a downward spiral of isolation, drinking, a nagging sense of emptiness, despair and isolation.

Several things were happening with Stan:

- He was blamecasting. Seeing his schoolmates as snobs eased his pain of rejection. The problem wasn't in him; it was them - their snobbishness, their self-centeredness. There was an element of self-pity in this; he was a victim of the snobs.
- By finding a small circle of fellow rejects like himself; he could find justification. They felt like he did.
- He actually felt superior to the 'snobs'.
- His isolation, his judging others instead of trying to change himself; his finding support from fellow outcasts, all contributed to a deep bitterness in Stan.

9. That's what bitterness is - a form of blamecasting, rooted in rejection and anger, seeing the world or some part of it as the source of all of one's problems.
10. Bitterness cuts us off from the kind of healthy relationships we need in order to grow and change. Bitterness isolates us and holds us in our old patterns of coping and sin.
11. Bitterness is anger held inside and putrefied.
12. The other stepchild of anger not released is unforgiveness. It is different from bitterness in that bitterness is most often not recognized, but justified. Unforgiveness has a direction - towards the person whom we feel hurt us - bitterness has lost its direction; it has become a way of responding to the world - with suspicion, with judgment and often with more anger. Of course both bitterness and unforgiveness can both be present and intertwined.
13. Unforgiveness is usually justified (and perhaps not seen as unforgiveness - but called justice or righteousness) when it demands:
 - that the offender fully acknowledge the harm done to me
 - even that they suffer (emotionally at least) for what they did
 - and that they turn from their old ways and start to behave the way I think they should.
14. Since I can't make another person do any of these things, I stay locked into my anger, and into my old ways of coping with my anger.
15. Now, more directly, how do bitterness and unforgiveness perpetuate addiction?
 - a. First, they sustain anger, and anger is a painful emotion from which we seek to find relief.

For many of us, our addictive outlets were our main way of finding relief from emotional pain.

- b. Second, in both bitterness and unforgiveness, we are “the victim”. Stan was the victim of the snobs at school. I am a victim so long as my father fails to repent adequately. Victims don't get well; they just continue to suffer.
- c. Third, and most important, there is the spiritual truth that may encompass some of what I have just said, but which ultimately goes much deeper. We are commanded to forgive both by the words and by the example of Jesus:

Matt. 6:12 - The Lord's prayer tells us to forgive others as we are forgiven, and then Jesus reinforces this twice in vs. 14 and 15. *“For as you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.”*

Matt. 18:21-35 - We have Jesus' story of the steward who was forgiven by his master and then failed to forgive one of his subordinates a much smaller debt. The master ended up turning the steward over to the torturers, leading Jesus to say, *“so also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Luke 23:37 - Most significantly, we have the example of Jesus on the cross saying, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Who had a better cause for bitterness than Jesus? There was no indication at all that his persecutors were sorry for what they had done. Forgiveness is a foundational principle of our faith.

- 16. Many in healing ministry will tell you that they believe that unforgiveness is the greatest block to healing. (We will get into this more in a later session).
- 17. How do we let go of bitterness and unforgiveness? There are several things we must do. Most do not come easily. Bitterness and unforgiveness are heart problems - coming out of a hardened heart. For the new believer, with a new heart, they may not become too difficult, but for Christians who have allowed their hearts to become hardened around these things, our hearts usually don't become softened very quickly. However, here's what you can do:
 - a. First, of course, ask the Lord if these are problems with you. Some signs that you may have a problem with bitterness or unforgiveness are:

-You find you over-respond in certain situations.

- You find relationships never last very long.
- You recognize that you have a cynical nature, a critical spirit or you get very angry at issues.

- b. Repent. Unforgiveness is a sin as is a root of bitterness. More about this next week.
- c. Regularly thank God for not judging you the way you are judging others.
- d. Make a decision to take control of your life, or at least to no longer be controlled by the actions of others - particularly their rejection of you or their failure to acknowledge how they have harmed you.
- e. Be ready to repeat these steps over and over.

IDOLATRY

1. I'd like to move on now to what I have said I believe is the core sin of addiction: Idolatry.
2. How is addiction an idol? Well, what is an idol? It is something we worship. Why do we worship it?
 - a. We worship something because we are needy.
 - b. An idol is something that we believe has power.
 - c. We want the power of that idol to meet our needs.
3. In Exodus, the Jewish people created the golden calf and worshiped it when Moses left them and went up on the mountain. In fact, the only explanation as to why they had done what they did was that they did not know what had become of Moses. Moses had been their strength, and they feared they had lost him. So they tried to create some other source of strength and power.
4. All men are needy. That is why, in the absence of the one, true God, they will always create other Gods. That's why strong leaders, even if they are evil, can have such power over people.
5. We gravitate to, or create an idol that can meet our specific need. What are the specific needs of an addict?

- Affirmation of our worth
- Love

Who can provide that? Only God can. Originally, those needs would have been met by our

families, and the neediness would have gone away and we would have moved on to the next stage of our development.

6. But they weren't, and when basic needs are not met over a long period of time, they have a tendency to become obsessive. The craving increases. A characteristic of an idol is that it assumes a central place in our lives. It starts to dominate our lives. We become willing to make all kinds of sacrifices for it.
7. What specifically is the idol, or are the idols that addicts worship? I suggest there are two:
 - Power - Remember, because we are fallen beings, we will seek resources over which we have some control. In human relationships, it's easier to develop patterns of manipulation than attitudes of vulnerability. The more control we can exercise over the resource we turn to, the more attracted we are to it. The patterns of addiction fuel manipulation and a sense of control.
 - Pleasure - As we refuse to embrace our God-given longings for relationship, they become distorted into desires for fleeting pleasures.
8. The idol may assume a somewhat different character depending on the nature of the most powerful needs.
 - a. If the need is affirmation of our worth, it is apt to be power.
 - b. If the need is love, the idol may be pleasure.
8. But the tragic thing about this idolatry, and about any addiction, is that nothing can substitute for the love enough to fill that gaping void inside us. Nothing, can really affirm us if fundamentally we feel we have little worth.
 - a. But our failures never seemed to stop us from seeking. We didn't know there was any other way, and so we just kept trying harder and harder. We kept on using . . . only the need got worse and worse:
 - b. Remember the things you said you would never do, but eventually ended up doing?
 - c. How many of you saw your desires becoming more and more driving?
 - d. For some of you, this was the life you lived out. For others, it was the life you lived in your minds - in your fantasies. But it was almost the same; it was still idolatry - a focus on that

source of strength outside of yourself that would meet those awful needs.

Idolatry. How great were the sacrifices some of us made at the feet of our idol:

- Our reputations
- Our family relationships
- Our financial well-being
- Our health
- Our very lives
- Even our souls

- e. But it didn't work. False idols never satisfy for very long - even if we sacrifice more and more to them.

"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy." (Isaiah 55:2)

9. How do we get out of this? How do we change this whole focus of our lives?

- a. Obviously repent. We are going to talk a lot about that next week, but let me just mention here, that a key to repentance is that we repent of the right sin. Simply recognizing your sin as idolatry, rather than addiction, can have a tremendous effect. More about that next week.
- b. The other thing we need to do is recognize that the idol can never satisfy, but there is One who can. Jesus can meet these needs.
- (1). Jesus is the only one whose love is perfect enough and full enough to fill that extraordinary love need in us.
- (2). Jesus is the only one who can affirm. We were created through Him., so He has the right and the power to declare who we are.

10. In Jeremiah 2:13, we read, *'for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that hold no water.'* Jesus said of Himself; *"Everyone who drinks water that I shall give him will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life"*.

If we forsake our false idols, Jesus will meet our every need.

A PRAYER

Lord God, by your Holy Spirit, now let me see clearly the idols that I have created. Whatever I have put in place of you to try and meet my needs; show it to me now, Lord. Show it to me, that I might tear it from your throne right now; that I might smash it and grind it up as was done with the golden calf. Lord God, you are the only God, you are the only one who can meet my deepest needs. Help me, Lord, to come into that understanding in the deepest parts of my heart. Lord, I forsake those idols and I cast my lot with you. Let your power work in me, and may you be glorified; for you alone are holy, you alone are the Lord. In Christ's name, I pray. AMEN.

Scripture Memory Verse:

Eph. 4:32 (NASB) And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Assignment for the Week:

1. Are there any areas in which you have not forgiven your parents? Consider this prayerfully. If there are, write them down in your Journal, and start the process of seeking to forgive them. Share this with your group.
2. Make a decision that this week, if something or someone tempts you, immediately try to identify any idolatry that is driving you, and repent of it immediately. Also, thank God for the way He has made you.