



Sin Really Does Matter



The Deadly Consequence of Man's Nature

by David M. Tyler

"Abandoning the language of sin will not make sin go away. Human beings will continue to experience alienation, deformation, damnation, and death no matter what we call them," writes religion teacher Barbara Brown Taylor.¹

Similarly, theology professor Henri Blocher observes, "We cannot avoid facing the riddle of original sin itself. We have observed that the doctrine, as stated and unfolded, sheds light on the human predicament."²

Yet, even more consequential are the words of Scripture, "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'" (Mark 2:17).

THE NEW EVANGELISM

In 1946, the federal government took responsibility for promoting American's mental health. Some of the initiatives included the National Mental Health Act (1946), the National Institute of Mental Health (1949), the National Mental Health Study Act (1955), and the creation of the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health (1955). The landscape of American society would be dramatically transformed with the building of new mental health centers, the incorporation of training programs, as well as countless locations disseminating mental health principles.

On Feb. 5, 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered a national speech on mental health. He referred to mental health as the nation's number one health problem. In order to confront what was considered a mental health care crisis, Kennedy signed into law the Community Mental Health Centers Act on Oct. 31, 1963. The diseasing of America and calling sin sickness now had the backing of the federal government.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter organized the Commission on Mental Health. The agency studied the state of the nation's mental health and concluded a quarter of all Americans needed mental health services. In the 1980s, an eruption of 12-step programs provided a disease label for virtually anyone who wanted one.

The television talk shows capitalized on and added to the success and growth of the disease model. From "Donahue" to "Oprah," everyday people and celebrities alike have poured out their heart-wrenching stories of co-dependency and other addictions, disorders, and compulsions. No segment of society has been exempt. Therapeutic holidays such as National Depression Screening Day, National Anxiety Disorder Day, and National Eating Disorders Awareness Week were created. Local malls provided a convenient venue on these special days where people could be diagnosed and learn more about their

disease. For those who were too busy to go to the malls, a program of mental health education and screening for early detection and intervention was available online or by telephone.

Out of this milieu came one of Satan's master strokes of deceit: people began believing that happiness and feeling good was the end and psychological healing was the means. The Church, not wanting to be left out, jumped on the bandwagon. Sin was whitewashed and attributed to disease. A therapeutic gospel was born where feelings, happiness, self-esteem, and psychological healing were sacred. Mental health education was incorporated into ongoing church programs. Support and recovery groups claiming to be Christ-centered became the new evangelism. Conversions in main-line denominations have been falling ever since.

The psychiatric community long has recognized the Church's potential influence among its members and others in the community and, therefore, the strategic position the Church is in to advance the "health-engendering" philosophies of psychology. Today the Church of Jesus Christ is one of the nation's leading disseminators of mental health principles. Promoting mental health, through countless support and recovery programs, has become a major ministry of the local church. The emphasis and driving

force is a belief that spiritual and mental health is inseparable. During the years of modern psychology and psychiatry there was a compartmentalization of the spiritual and psychological. Christ said the greatest commandment was to love God and the second was to love one's neighbor. Today's wisdom says that people who are mentally ill have an impaired ability to give and receive love. Therefore, helping them recover from their disease has spiritual implications.

THE LANGUAGE OF DISEASE, GOD'S LOVE, AND GRACE

The Church's devotion to psychology has led to many additions to and subtractions from the language of faith. The argument is, because science has provided us with new insights into human nature, the old words simply do not work anymore. Words such as "damnation," "repentance," and "sin," when spoken out loud, sound inappropriate. They are words from an earlier time when man's relationship with God was associated with guilt and punishment. They are words that judge us and leave us feeling uncomfortable, anxious, or depressed. For far too long, the Christian message is said to have been distorted in ways that cause emotional hurt rather than healing. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. wrote:

"Through the centuries, religious leaders have been handling psychological dynamite with little awareness of the tremendous power for good or ill in their hands."³

He went on to explain how behavioral science has given us a "fresh revelation about man,"⁴ which has been beneficial in helping us to interpret the Christian message in a way that will not do psychological harm. The obvious solution is not to use psychologically harmful words. That is exactly what has happened. Ministers are encouraged to check their sermons against mental health criteria for dangerous language.

One pastor said it was helpful to him to interact with a professional therapist in his congregation before preaching some of his sermons.

Other pastors use the books of famous Christian and secular psychologists and psychiatrists. Whatever the situation, sin-talk is out and the focus is on "disease," God's love, and grace. Love and grace are said to be more positive and life-affirming. However, discarding the language of sin weakens and softens the full impact of grace. The grace of God is cherished most by those who realize their sinfulness most. The parable of the prodigal son illustrates the point.

The Scriptures said the prodigal son "came to himself" (Luke 15:17).

He had been unconscious of his true condition. He had replaced bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness. It was as if he had been in a sinful trance and now he was awakened. All boasting of his supposed rights and claims were gone. He had been full of pride, but now he was humbled and had given up all ideas of self-justification. He could only hope to be treated like a hired servant. And so, full of shame and remorse, he began his long journey home.

The Scripture begins describing the reunion with his father in verse 20: "His father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." The prodigal son confessed, "Father, I have sinned." His father said to the servants, "Quickly bring out the best robe." The son said, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." The father joyfully declared, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry." Each gift was a token of his father's love and forgiveness. The son was guilty. He knew he was guilty and deserved nothing but his father's retribution (v. 19). It was his guilt that heightened his awareness of his father's goodness and love.

When one realizes that he has sinned, the stakes go up dramatically. Sinning sounds much more serious than saying, "I have made a mistake, a poor choice, or I have an obsessive-compulsive disorder." Paul

wrote, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). One may conceivably be persuaded to die for a good man, that is, good in human terms. In God's estimate all are useless and have turned aside into rebellion. Paul also wrote, "There is none righteous, no, not one" and "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10, 12). Christ died for neither the righteous nor the good, but for the ungodly. His dying transcends all human instances of self-sacrifice for others. His dying is all the more wonderful and amazing in that it proves His love beyond what is common among men.

Sin matters. Grace and forgiveness can only be adequately experienced and understood when man's wickedness and sin is understood. The goodness and mercy of the prodigal son's father could not be understood apart from the son's rebellion and rejection of the father. It is a story of sin and grace. It is not just a story of a merciful and good father. It is also about a rebellious son. Peter wrote in his first epistle, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The wonderful light can only be comprehended when one knows darkness. Therefore darkness is our only hope of knowing light. Sin is our only hope of knowing life-giving grace. Men will not know their need for grace and mercy apart from knowing their sin. The crucifixion, the crowning act of mankind's wickedness, was God the Father's crowning example of grace. It was sin's most infamous moment and grace's most supreme moment! In man's most wicked deed we see God's most gracious act.

Sin and grace are both magnified in the story of the woman who washed and anointed Jesus' feet:

“And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil” (Luke 7:37-38).

While some identify her as Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany, most agree that she was neither. Her name is not mentioned. The woman was distinguished only by the title of “a sinner.” However, she was not just a sinner in a superficial, everyday sense of the word, but a sinner in the blacker and filthier sense. She was a well-known sinner. She was a sinner marked and labeled because Simon immediately recognized her as one of the town’s many prostitutes (v. 39). Persons of decent character would not associate with her. Like a leper, she was cut off from society. However, she was the object of grace.

The story begins with the woman hearing that Jesus was at the house of Simon. Earlier in the chapter Jesus had been preaching to the people. Perhaps it was then, attracted by the crowds, she first heard the good news. As Christ spoke of the abounding mercy and willingness of God to accept as many as would come to Him, the tears ran down her cheeks. She became a new woman, desirous of better things, anxious to be freed from sin. She truly believed Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who had come to earth to forgive sin. She rested on Him for the forgiveness of her sin. However, there was still the nagging question, could she, would she, truly be forgiven? She did have faith, however feeble, and desired an opportunity to pay Him homage and possibly receive a word of assurance and confirmation.

When she learned He had come to her town she thought, “Here is my opportunity.” And so, uninvited, she entered the house of Simon. When she came through the door, Jesus was reclining at the table (according to the

Oriental custom) and perhaps His feet were toward the door. She had noticed Simon had not paid Christ the ordinary courtesy of washing His feet. This broke her heart. With all sensitivity of her sinful past she began to wash His feet with her tears and then wiped them with her hair. Her beautiful hair, her chief adornment that attracted many men for sinful purposes, was the means of service to the Son of God.

She was as penitent as she had been a sinner. Love and grief was mingled together in her actions. First, she thought of her wicked life and then she would think of His grace and mercy. She kissed His feet. She took the alabaster vial filled with a costly perfume, which she had undoubtedly purchased to anoint herself and enhance her beauty, and poured it upon His blessed feet. She did not say a word. Her actions proclaimed her gratitude with a loud voice. Jesus defended and praised her to the self-righteous Pharisee. Jesus said to Simon, “her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (v. 47). Turning to the woman He said, “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 48). The Lord’s words sealed her pardon. From that day on she had full assurance of faith.

Grace gives attention to the most unlikely cases in order to show it to be grace. Grace finds a dwelling place in the most unworthy heart that its freeness might be better seen.

Grace removed brazenness from her face, flattery from her lips, and lustful desires from her heart. And though she had been recently awakened of her sinful state, she did not comprehend all the heinousness of her guilt. Jesus allowed her to wash His feet with her tears even though He knew of the shameful things her eyes had looked upon. Our Lord permitted her lips to kiss His feet even though He knew the foul and licentious words that had come from those lips. He knew her heart had been full of unhallowed and unchaste desires for He spoke of “her sins which are many” (v. 47). The Savior knew her best and yet He did not cast her

away. He did not move His feet. He did not rebuke her. He was delighted and refreshed by her sense of sin and grateful sense of forgiveness.

There can be no grace where there is no guilt. There can be no mercy where there is no sin. If man is not a sinner, then God cannot show mercy toward him. One must have sin or one cannot have grace. Leaving grace out of the story will ultimately lead to legalism, empty ritual, and men trying to earn what can never be earned. On the other hand, grace rings hollow, insignificant, and trivial without sin. The one cannot be understood or measured without the other.

The Apostle Paul said all men are “by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). We are not born neutral. We are not evenly balanced with the possibility of going either way, good or bad. Man is evil. For example, David analyzed himself and was awakened to his wicked behavior (Psalm 51). He committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband to cover up his sin. How could David, a man after God’s own heart, do such a thing? What made him capable of such vile and horrendous actions? There was only one answer, as he wrote, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (v. 5). David refers to his conception and birth with the clear understanding that his very being is permeated with the tendencies that produced the fruits of adultery and murder.

SLAVERY TO SIN

Something is terribly wrong with the world. The widespread and pervasive occurrence of human evil cries out for explanation. Oswald Chambers wrote:

“When we read the history of the race, our thoughts must fit into one of two fundamental categories: either we are wonderful beings in the making or we are wonderful ruins of what we once were. The latter is the view of the Bible.”⁵

Because the world is not self-explanatory, an explanation must be

sought from its Maker. Without His assurance and clarification the world appears to be full of absurdities and contradictions. The Creator says man is a sinner. The doctrine of Original Sin and its transmission has always been a Christian assessment of reality. Sin is why people do what they do. Everyday experience heightens its relevance. On one hand, we boast of the great progress that man has made. On the other, there is this tragic breakdown in personal relationships. It is one of society's major moral and social problems.

In spite of the fact that there are more institutions and organizations than ever giving instructions concerning things about which people were never instructed in the past, problems persist. For instance, there are available today countless books, classes, and seminars on marriage. Up until a few decades ago, men and women were married without this expert advice. Then, there is the collapse of the relationship between one group and another group resulting in industrial and economic problems. On even a higher level, there is the relationship between nation and nation. The threat of war is always present somewhere in the world. This is proof that there is something wrong with the world.

The inclination is to lose sight of the fact that we are sinful apart from our actions. Sin is not just separate acts of the will. Sin is in us. It is part of our very nature. Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). The trouble is with man's heart. Paul said, "For I know that in me [i.e., in my flesh] nothing good dwells" (Romans 7:18). Man himself is corrupt. The Bible tells us repeatedly that sin is not just wrongdoing, it is wrong-being. When men look at sin psychologically, sin becomes defective development or disease. Sin is neither a disease nor is it something we catch in public. Though it is inherited, sin is not genetically transmitted like cystic fibrosis or Tay-Sachs disease. Sin is within man's nature and his nature is sinful. Man's intellect can never fill in the gaps; only God can provide. The

Bible speaks of man's sinful disposition or heart. It is the heart of man that the atonement addresses:

"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19).

"Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 18:31).

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

The trouble with modern statements concerning sin is that they make sin far too trivial. Sin is a mistake, an imperfection, an error, someone else's fault, broken neurotransmitters, or low serotonin. Committing sin is easy, while confessing it is difficult.

A man will sin without a tempter, but he will not acknowledge his guilt no matter how much he is begged. Although his sins stare him in the face he still pleads his innocence. He proudly lifts up his head, challenges his accuser, and rebuts responsibility. He argues had it not been for extenuating circumstances or providence itself, he would have not been compelled to sin.

Aaron, when confronted by Moses concerning the golden calf, acted as if his sin was an accident. Aaron said the people gave him their gold and "I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out" (Exodus 32:24). Saul ignored the instructions of Samuel the prophet and offered a burnt offering. Saul shifted the blame to Samuel, whom he accused of being late, and the people, whom he accused of getting restless. Saul said to Samuel, "Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:12).

Sin, culpability, and guilt are hard to determine in a world where people color and cloak their sin in all kinds of psychological language. A shoplifter has kleptomania. A child isn't

willfully selfish; he has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). An arsonist has pyromania.

Theologians over the centuries have spoken metaphorically of sin as an infection, infirmity, or disease. While the metaphor may be helpful and descriptive, it may also be very seductive. Losing sight of the metaphoric distance between sin and sickness is an imaginary reality in evangelicalism of our time. Disease may be very similar in some ways to sin and sin to disease, but they are not the same. The phenomenon of "slavery to sin" does, in fact, exist.

One may, as is the practice today, call slavery to sin a sickness, but there are reasons one should not do so. For example, the possibility to sin is often seen as being exciting and pleasurable; sickness is not. Men do not pursue multiple sclerosis or streptococcus the way they pursue adultery (James 1:14-15; 1 John 2:15-17; Titus 3:3; Hebrews 11:24-26; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Ephesians 2:3). People become infected with diseases not because they want them, but because of a bacteria or virus.

People in sin often seek ways to justify continuing in their conduct, however, no one tries to justify continuing a disease. Unlike disease, sin is something we can avoid and overcome (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:1-18). People involved in sinful behavior often encourage others to participate in the activity with them (Genesis 3:6). People don't encourage their friends to get cancer or arthritis. God punishes people for their sin. People are not punished for physical diseases which are beyond their control. The Bible teaches that an individual can choose to repent and put off his sinful behavior. No one has the ability to simply quit having influenza.

Slavery to sin is apparent in that, after sinning over time, people find their sin no longer pleasurable. Nevertheless, they may continue to sin. They have become habituated to the sinful behavior. They are "hooked" and find it difficult to quit. It is this

aspect of behavior that in some way makes it feel like a disease. The disease metaphor can be useful because it emphasizes the way one can feel controlled by something other than one's own will. However, the disease metaphor ignores the biblical teaching of man's bondage to sin, which is rooted in his relationship to Adam.

Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12-21). The disease metaphor also overlooks the fact that the bondage man experiences is intentional and willful. Sin's mastery over man is voluntary. The preference of sinners is to give themselves over to their desires. They choose slavery to sin. Sin is not part of DNA. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and their DNA was perfect. Lucifer, an angel, was created as the "model of perfection," and he has, as far as we know, no DNA. Thus, while the Fall is the cause of all sickness in the flesh, sin is not embedded in man's DNA. Sin is the result of our capacity, being made in the image of God, to think in abstract terms and to exercise our fallen will over God's perfect instructions for living and behavior. A perfect example is addiction.

ADDICTION: SIN OR SICKNESS?

Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, in *The Truth About Addiction and Recovery*, write:

"Every major tenet of the 'disease' view of addiction is refuted both by scientific research and by everyday observation. This is true even for alcoholism and drug addiction, let alone the many other behaviors that plainly have little to do with biology and medicine."⁶

The growth of addiction treatment, based on the idea that alcoholism and addictions of all kinds are diseases, has spread like a wildfire throughout America. All sorts of recovery and self-help programs such as Gamblers Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous, Depressives Anonymous, Impotence Anonymous, Grief

Care, Women Who Love Too Much, and others have sprung up in churches of all denominations. Christian radio and television programming feature confessed work-, sex-, and shop- "aholics." Christian bookstores are filled with books on addiction and recovery. Most of these apply the well known 12-step model to a whole host of assorted behaviors.

Our descent into calling sin sickness has brought us to the absurdity of defining any activity, involvement, or sensation a person finds consuming as a disease. Even good and worthy behavior, such as loving others, can be categorized as a disease. For example, Susan Peabody in *Addiction to Love* tells how she became interested in the subject of obsessive behavior in relationships. Her interest grew when she read Robin Norwood's book, *Women Who Love Too Much*. Peabody said the book helped her recognize many of her own patterns of obsessive behavior (i.e., sin). Ready to make the appropriate changes in her life, she began to look for a "Women Who Love Too Much" support group. There was none in her area and so, using Norwood's book, she started her own meeting. Peabody wrote, "I became interested in teaching others about the 'disease' of 'loving too much.'"⁷ Scripture warns us against the dangers of self-love, but never warns us of the harm of excessive love toward others.

The doctrine of sin is the place one must begin when trying to understand addictions. Sin is foundational to any consideration of human behavior. However, when every human problem is considered a disease or addiction, the suggestion that sin may be the trouble is often met with raised eyebrows and sharp criticism. To bring sin into the discussion, even among evangelicals, is considered negative, insensitive, and counterproductive.

In a culture where self-esteem is something "*we must have ... and when it is unattainable, everybody suffers*,"⁸ talking about sin seems to be an attack on the psychological well-being of everyone. It is obvious to those who hold the disease-oriented perspective that those who question the

disease model are confused or simply poorly informed.

Although we may not like to be reminded of it, we were all born in sin and sinning is what we do best. We enjoy sinning. We sin more than we think. We sin even when we would rather not sin (Romans 7:18-19). It is difficult for some to concede, in a day so immersed in psychology, that personal sin is the root and cause of most of their problems.

Nevertheless, the reality that man sins and sin is the source of many of his problems is just stating a fact. To ignore the truth that there is something spiritually wrong with man, because it is believed it will harm his mental well-being or self-image, is to practice self-deception.

Today, Christians do not rely on Scripture to shape their view of addictions and other sinful behaviors. While they admit the Bible does speak negatively about drunkenness, the prototype of all addictions, they insist alcoholism as a disease was not known in Bible times, much like diabetes was not understood.

Years ago, people believed what today is called alcoholism was the result of the repeated sinful use of alcohol. Heavy drinking eventually led to addictive drinking. It was the same with drug users who eventually became addicts. Drunkards and addicts were therefore considered to be immoral and sinful. They were active agents, not passive, of their addictions. Today, the sin-model of addictions has been replaced by the sickness-model. Recent surveys have concluded approximately 80 percent of all Americans believe that alcoholism is a disease.

The core belief of the disease model of alcoholism is that alcoholics cannot control their drinking. They do not have the ability to drink moderately. Once they start drinking, they will inevitably drink until they become intoxicated. At the same time, alcoholism is seen as a progressive disease. This simply means it unalterably proceeds from its early stages to its ultimate true form. Stanton Peele, a psychologist, health-care researcher,

and leading figure in the addiction field and Archie Brodsky, senior research associate at Harvard Medical School wrote:

“At first, it seems hard to understand what is meant by saying that something a person regularly does (such as drinking alcohol) is a disease. Habitual, voluntary behavior of this sort does not resemble what we normally think of as a disease, like cancer or diabetes. What is more, A.A. — and even hospital programs for alcoholism — don’t actually treat any biological causes of alcoholism.”⁹

Peele and Brodsky go on to say that after decades of claiming to have discovered a biological connection to alcoholism, there is not one usable treatment. Hospitals for the past 50 years have been using the same old techniques — discussion groups and exhortations — that they have always used. They continued:

“Nor is any biological method used to determine whether someone is an alcoholic other than by assessing how much that person drinks and the consequences of this drinking. And if we have no special biological information about treating or identifying alcoholism, we surely know nothing about the biological causes of ‘diseases’ such as compulsive gambling, shopping, and loving, which have nothing to do with drugs or alcohol.”¹⁰

Peele and Brodsky continue by saying that when these ideas and theories concerning alcoholism are examined, they seem contrary to common sense. The disease concept takes a set of precepts invented by a small group of severe, long-term drinkers back in the 1930s, and applies them in an inappropriate way to people with a wide range of drinking and other problems.

The fact remains that there is no identifiable biological or genetic mechanism to account for addictive behavior. However, if a gene were found to be the source of addiction to alcohol, would the same gene cause other addictions such as drugs, smok-

ing, compulsive gambling, and overeating? If so, everyone with these addictions would be genetically altered. An individual without an addiction would be the notable exception. Peele and Brodsky continue:

“How could an addiction like smoking be genetic? Why are some types of people more likely to smoke than others (about half of waitresses and car salesmen smoke, compared with about a tenth of lawyers and doctors)? And does believing that an addiction like smoking is genetic help the person quit (are all those smokers who quit not ‘genetically’ addicted)? Returning to alcohol, are people really predestined biologically to become alcoholics and thus to become A.A. members? Think about the rock group Aerosmith: all five members of this group now belong to A.A., just as they once all drank and took drugs together. How unlikely a coincidence it is that five unrelated people with the alcoholic/addictive inheritance should run into one another and form a band! ... The question is: ‘If addiction isn’t a disease, then what is it?’ An addiction is a habitual response and a source of gratification or security. It is a way of coping with internal feelings and external pressures.”¹¹

The “hook,” Peele and Brodsky go on to say, is that the behavior gives people a gratifying sensation they are not able to get any other way. The sensation is the payoff that keeps people coming back. It helps them forget their pain and discomfort. It distracts them from the overwhelming problems and difficulties of life and helps them to feel better.

The Bible has much to say about drunkenness. Drunkenness is never referred to as a sickness, but always as sin. For example, Noah planted a vineyard, drank of the wine, and became drunk (Genesis 9:18-23). The consequence of his sin was shame. In his drunken state he did not cover himself, but lay naked exposing himself to his sons. Lot became drunk and committed incest with his daugh-

ters (Genesis 19:30-38). Men do things when they are intoxicated that, had they been sober, would sicken and disgust them. The sinfulness of drunkenness is clear in Paul’s words to the Church when he wrote:

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a *drunkard*, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person” (1 Corinthians 5:11, emphasis added).

Paul continued:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, emphasis added).

And:

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, *drunkenness*, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21, emphasis added).

Solomon describes the irresistible appeal, cravings, irrationality, and awful consequences of heavy drinking:

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent,

And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 'They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?'" (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Paul emphasized the choice one makes when he wrote, "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12, NAS, emphasis added). Paul's emphasis is on the will. The continual willful use is what would finally bring a person under the power, so to speak, of a substance. Drunkenness is a lordship problem. It is a worship problem. It is a heart problem. Will God be your Master or will your desires rule over you? It boils down to the ancient command, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Addiction of any kind is the result of a person's willful, sinful behavior.

A virus or bacteria, which people do not want to have, is very different from addiction. Addictions are a form of self-worship and are pursued by a person because they desire it (James 1:14-15). A drunkard drinks because of the benefit he receives from drinking. There is always a payoff. A person drinks for social reasons. His friends drink so he wants to be accepted by them and so he drinks. He drinks in order to forget his problems. Drinking temporarily alleviates the pain of a difficult situation or traumatic event. The desire to forget one's troubles or loneliness may be the reason for drinking. Pleasure is oftentimes the reason people drink. Others drink to relax. There is always a perceived reward. There is always a purpose to drinking. Self, not God and neighbor, is always the focus.

This does not mean that there is not a feeling of having been overcome by something outside of oneself. Addictions are mistaken for real diseases because there are certain similarities. A loss of control is a feeling one has

when he has a disease. One feels powerless to invading bacteria. The problem lies when people stop using the word figuratively and begin using it literally. They substitute the words "addiction is *like* a disease" for "addiction *is* a disease."

THE PROBLEM IS IDOLATRY

The subject of idolatry is a prominent topic throughout the Bible. The first two commandments address it:

"You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:4-5).

The declaration was against having gods other than Yahweh. Idolatry was not just a temporary or momentary danger to the Israelites, or something they would overcome. Idolatry was a constant temptation and perpetual threat. It was a tendency they would never outgrow. The Old Testament books of Judges and Kings chronicle the repeated falling away of Israel into idolatry. Again and again we read of "high places" and "false gods." Again and again we read of captivities and chastisements on account of idolatry. In the New Testament, we read of the Apostles' expectations of the rise of idolatry in the Church:

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

"And do not become idolaters as were some of them" (1 Corinthians 10:7).

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14).

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

The vulnerability toward idolatry lies deep in the human nature. Idolatry is natural and easily runs downhill. Worship of God runs against the grain of man's sinful nature and runs uphill. No man is safe from the dangers of idolatry. It is not an old-fashioned sin into which we will never likely fall. Those whom God has brought to Himself need to be reminded over and over again that He is master. Jesus has put it as plain as it can be put, "No man can serve two masters." To depend on something other than God is a peril into which we are all liable to come. Pride makes a god of self. Covetousness makes a god of money. Sensuality makes a god out of the body. Whatever is esteemed, loved, feared, served, delighted in, and depended upon more than God, is made a god.

Idolatry best illustrates both the in-control and out-of-control experience of addiction. It is outside the boundaries of God, in turning to idols, that the individual seeks to find happiness, peace, and contentment. Manipulating the idol for one's own benefit is the purpose of all idolatry. Idolaters do not want to be ruled by their idols. The idol is a means to an end. For example, the Bible says the prophets of Baal "leaped about the altar which they had made" and "they cried aloud, and cut themselves" in order to manipulate Baal to do their will (1 Kings 18:26, 28). Biblical counselor Elyse Fitzpatrick wrote:

"An integral part of false worship is learning how to get false gods to give us what we want. In essence, we make covenants with them, expecting them to bless us if we act in certain ways. ... It wasn't idolatrous for Rachel to desire children [Genesis 31]. No, she was idolatrous because her

desire for children was the foremost desire in her heart. 'Give me children, or else I die!' is the cry of an idolater."¹²

It is not the goal of modern idolaters to be ruled by alcohol, drugs, love, people, food, sex, gambling, or work. The goal of the idolater is to get what he wants. His desire is for the substance or activity to give him good feelings, a sense of power, to forget his troubles or his past. Whatever his heart is craving is the purpose of the idol. Consequently, idolatry always has been rooted in the heart. Ezekiel wrote, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity" (Ezekiel 14:3). Idolatry is a heart issue. From Adam and Eve's lust to be like God and eat that which was forbidden, to the inordinate craving and lust for love, food, sex, or alcohol, mankind is guilty of idolatry.

When God created man, He gave him certain desires and needs which, when kept in an appropriate context, would give him pleasure and joy. However, it is Satan's goal to exploit natural wants and desires so that the physical desires rule. Satan reverses God's order. Instead of people controlling their desires, their desires become idols that control them. They become habituated, enslaved, and cannot say "no."

DESIRES OF THE HEART BECOME HABITS OF BEHAVIOR

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is

in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:19-24).

One of the mistakes people make in interpreting the above passage is they think Jesus is exclusively referring to money (mammon). We must avoid interpreting this only with respect to money. "Treasures" is a very large and all-inclusive term. It includes not only money, but also the things money can buy. However, Jesus is not so much concerned about possessions *per se* as He is concerned about one's attitude toward possessions, food, sex, etc. His warning is against worldly-mindedness; against getting satisfaction in this life from things that belong only to this world. We are all guilty of it, oftentimes without realizing it. Worldliness is so subtle it can infect even the most holy thing in life. Everyone has treasures or idols in some shape or form. Therefore, the command "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth" is aimed at poor people as well as the rich.

Our Lord gives a very common sense argument against laying up treasures on earth. Treasures on earth do not last. Jesus also said, "where moth and rust destroy." There is an element of decay in earthly treasures. There is always something wrong with the things of this world. Idols never fully satisfy us. There is a tendency to get tired of these things. Although a man may appear to have everything he could desire, he still wants something more. That desire is why we are often talking about and seeking new things.

Jesus continued, "where thieves break in and steal." There are many thieves in this life that threaten and make us feel unsafe. Illness can steal health. A business loss can take life's savings. Corporations collapse and leave many without jobs. Finally, death comes to steal life itself.

Worldliness has an effect on man's entire personality. Jesus said, "For

where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The heart is the first thing He mentions. Earthly things have an awful hold and power upon us. They grip our feelings, affections, and all our sensibility. We love them. John wrote, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). We are absolutely gripped by these treasures.

Worldliness not only grips our heart, but it controls our thoughts. Our Lord said, "If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23).

Jesus uses the eye to illustrate the two ways we look at things in the world. First, the "good eye" sees things as they truly are. The good eye has single vision as opposed to double vision that distorts reality. Second, is the "bad eye." The bad eye is characterized by blurry and double vision. The bad eye is tinted by certain prejudices, lusts, and desires. Most people's thinking is based on these earthly treasures. Many of the beliefs and ideologies people hold are controlled entirely by prejudices, desires, and not by clear or pure thinking.

Finally, treasures affect man's will. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). As soon as one mentions the word "serve," one is talking about the will; man's actions. Our behavior is logically preceded by our thinking. In other words, the exercise of will is determined by thinking. Thinking is determined by the heart. Therefore, earthly treasures have a very powerful influence upon the whole man. Treasures seize hold of the heart, mind, and will. Ultimately, they affect and determine our relationship with God. Matt-

hew states an obvious truth. Worldly things make a totalitarian and tyrannical demand on our lives. They command all of our love. It is *either or*; there is no compromise. They want all our devotion. They expect us to live exclusively for them, but so does God.

Jesus warns us about these things to spare us the horrific effects of sin. Sin has had an alarming and disconcerting effect upon man. Man's terrible predicament is that he is no longer governed by his highest faculties (pre-Fall), but by something else. He is controlled by something secondary, inferior, and substandard to how God created him. He is controlled by his desires, his affections, and his lusts. That is the effect of sin.

Sin blinds mankind in certain vital respects. Sin blinds the mind of man to things which are perfectly obvious. For example, take the teaching concerning worldly treasures. It is obvious that treasures on earth never last. Everything is running down and wearing out. A woman may glory in her beauty, but beauty fades. A man may take great pride in his wealth, but there is always the danger of losing it. Everyone will die.

These are obvious facts every person needs to face. However, the simple truth is people tend to live with the opposite assumption. Most are not conscious of these truths.

The terrible and tragic thing about sin is its ability to enslave. Things that God has given mankind to enjoy, worldly things, tend to become our god. Our hearts become enthralled and captivated by God-given appetites such as hunger, thirst, and sex. We end up serving the very things God meant to serve us.

Our failure to recognize these things is the trouble with the world today in calling sin sickness. One can be mastered, bound, or enslaved to any sinful behavior, attitude, or thought. Scripture constantly warns us of the danger of becoming habituated to sin of all kinds:

“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away

with, that we should no longer be *slaves* of sin” (Romans 6:6, emphasis added).

“Therefore do not let sin *reign* in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not *present* your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, ... For sin shall not have *dominion* over you” (Romans 6:12-14, emphasis added).

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, *servicing* various lusts and pleasures, *living* in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3, emphasis added).

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is *not accustomed* to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of *practice* have their senses *trained* to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:13-14, NAS, emphasis added).

“Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the *habit* of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25, NAS, emphasis added).

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily *ensnares* us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1, emphasis added).

God made man with the capacity to formulate habits. If man did not have this ability he would have to think about *everything* he does or says. Every action would have to be thought out and performed in a methodical, meticulous, and laborious way. The ability to create habits allows people to carry out complicated tasks comfortably and automatically. Habit allows a person to write a letter to a friend without having to relearn how to write the letters of the alphabet. Habit allows people to walk, talk, and do thousands of different things and combinations of

things without thinking about every detail.

Over time, and by practice, people become habituated to tasks, behaviors, and attitudes. For example, greed is a learned behavior. Peter wrote, “Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart *trained* in covetous practices, and are accursed children” (2 Peter 2:14, emphasis added). Some people are never satisfied or content. Paul was one of those people, but he said he learned how to be content. He wrote, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have *learned* in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11, emphasis added). People who have sinful habits can change. Jeremiah wrote, “You also do good who are *accustomed* to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23, emphasis added). Paul wrote to Titus concerning believers who had been enslaved or habituated to sinful practices, but had changed. He said, “For we ourselves *were* also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, *servicing* various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3, emphasis added).

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, he reminded some of them about their past sinful practices, which they had successfully put off. He wrote:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

While habits can make life easier and more comfortable, they also can be a curse. Sinful habits are the source of many of people's problems. People become habituated to sinful behaviors and attitudes. Sanctification involves

helping believers put off sinful habits and put on the biblical alternative habits. It is putting off the deeds of the flesh and putting on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). Habits are learned ways of living, and therefore can be unlearned and replaced.

The gradual descent into idolatry begins somewhat innocently until eventually the idol serves more and more purposes in a person's life. It takes a focal point or center stage and becomes the axis of everyday living. The tendency of our psychologized culture is to talk about the uncontrollable characteristic of "addiction." They reason about the external thing controlling them. The Bible brings in the crucial element of the heart. The heart controls man. Man is responsible. We desire and pursue the behavior or substance. The tantalizing call to sin is rooted in the heart and as it is practiced over a period of time becomes a habit. That is the fundamental nature of sin. All people sin, all people sin differently, all people sin habitually.

What psychology calls addictive behavior, the Bible calls habitual sin. The addict is said to be sick and his disease is theorized to have a biological or genetic cause. In the sin-model the heart is the center of behavior. The heart, which is biased against God and for self, is the source of the problem. It is not an outside force that has invaded one's body; it is one's own desire. The problem is not God or the circumstances; it is the individual himself. Lust, not biology or genetics, is the principal problem.

James demonstrates the progression from temptation to sin and how this leads to habitual behavior, writing:

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

The process of sin begins with an event that stirs a desire within a person. By allowing the situation to stir an inner desire, the individual

creates the temptation. Thus, God does not tempt. James said "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his *own* desires and enticed" (James 1:14, emphasis added). At this point the temptation can be cut short by changing one's behavior (Philippians 4:8). For example, if the temptation is a beautiful woman at the mall, a man may turn and begin talking to his wife. He may walk to a different area of the store where the woman is no longer visible. The emphasis is on changing thoughts by changing behavior. If he does not change his behavior and allows himself to contemplate carrying out the sin, it will lead to adultery in the heart.

Again James wrote, "Then, when desire has *conceived*" (v. 15, emphasis added). James uses the analogy of a woman giving birth to show how temptation evolves into outward sin. Conception, or sin of the heart, occurs on the inside. This stage can be cut short by repenting of the inner sin (sin in the heart) and changing behavior. However, if one allows oneself to continue, it will lead to an outward act of sin. James wrote "it gives birth to sin" (v. 15). Thus, sin has manifested itself in an outward action.

The inner consideration of an improper desire will lead, in time, to the conception and birth of an outward act of sin. Left unchecked, an outer act of sin will become a continuous practice of a person's life.¹³ Paul warns, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Romans 6:12). Paul said he had to "discipline [his] body and bring it into subjection" as opposed to being a slave to the desires of his body (1 Corinthians 9:27).

SIN IS OUR ONLY HOPE

To abandon the recognition of sin is to abandon hope. Sin is the hinge on which hope turns. Modern statements regarding sin will prove how often we are more sympathetic with psychological explanations than biblical ones. To deviate, even the smallest amount, from the truth about sin will lead to wrong thinking and a loss of hope. Once settled regarding the

doctrine of sin, good reasoning and hope follow.

One would think calling sin sickness is so contrary to Scripture that evangelicals everywhere would rise up and expose the error. Unfortunately, the disease-model has squeezed out the sin-model not only in the minds of unbelievers, but believers. The consequence has had a devastating effect on evangelism and sanctification. Both Christians and non-Christians with problems of living, who seek help from the Church or a Christian agency, are likely to be told their problem is a psychological disorder or illness. They will be referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist and/or will be encouraged to attend a Church-based recovery program that is touted to be "Christ-centered." The person is, or is well on his way to becoming a patient in much the same way as if he had pneumonia or a broken leg.

The sickness-model of behavior has a defeating and disheartening effect in people's lives. Many people fail to understand when a psychiatrist or psychologist makes what is believed to be a medical diagnosis, it is in reality only the identification of observable behavior or experience. Consider, for example, how diseases are diagnosed as compared with how psychological problems are diagnosed. A patient complains of certain symptoms. His physician suspects a particular disease. However, before the doctor gives a definitive diagnosis, he performs several objective tests (x-ray, blood test, MRI, etc.). The tests will confirm or repudiate his suspicions. The physician does not make a diagnosis based solely on his patient's symptoms or complaint, but on verifiable evidence concerning both the cause and nature of the problem.

Contrary to what many people believe, this is not how psychological problems are diagnosed. A psychologist assumes because a person has certain feelings, thoughts, or behaviors over a prescribed period of time, he has a psychological problem. This is assumed even though the cause has not been proven, nor can it be, by scientific methods. The problem lies

in the foundations of psychological theories. These foundations are simply not amenable to scientific examination. Nevertheless, the decision is uncritically accepted. The diagnosis may sound plausible, but it never moves beyond the subjective into the realm of objective truth.

This is true, generally speaking, of the historical psychologies, as well as biological psychiatry which dominates counseling today. Biological psychiatrists seek to explain life through an interpretation that excludes God, sin, Christ, and sanctification. In turn, people begin to think the primary solution to their problem is not spiritual, but physical or materialistic in nature. The biopsychiatrist says, when it comes to responsibility for actions, *you* are not really you. You are just a body and a body part has malfunctioned. You can be fixed from the *outside* by a drug. The psychologist attributes your unpleasant emotions and bad behavior to a painful past, low self-esteem, or an empty love tank. The solution to your problem is "talking treatment."

A notorious component of sin is the loss of man's sense of responsibility. Adam and Eve ran, hid, covered up, and shifted the blame. Adam said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12, 13).

Psychology destroys a person's capacity to know and feel he has sinned. It figuratively and literally drugs man to where he feels no guilt or responsibility. It numbs the conscience, dulling the voice of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. It feeds our natural bias toward self-exaltation. It makes us feel we are sick when we are perfectly well. And by the ingenious trickery of our own heart, we boast that our blindness is true sight and *we are ourselves* absolutely fit to meet our moral and spiritual needs. The reasoning is, because man understands man, go to man for the solution. All this is accomplished by Satan's old but proven scheme of usurping God's

truth and promising to man god-likeness and superior knowledge. However, only in the confession, "I have sinned," can hope be found:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. *If we confess our sins*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10, emphasis added).

"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), and consequently God cannot have fellowship with darkness. The nature of light is to illuminate and to make things known. God is light and therefore, all things are known by Him. God is light and therefore He is truth. God cannot speak falsehood. For his own purpose, man devises and concocts things that are not true. God creates irrefutable facts. We see things as they *appear* to be. God, who is light, sees things *as they exist*. God never misrepresents. Light illuminates what *is*. Man is always rushing around with his paint and glitter trying to make things appear to be equal to the precious and valued. Man works hard to make the imitation look like the real thing. All this is contrary to the way of the Lord.

The natural tendency of the sinful heart is to try to be what it is not. The love of praise compels us to pretend we are better than we are. Fear of condemnation and reproof is an equally powerful means of producing hypocrisy. We must, by all means, strive against psychological thinking that tells us we have not sinned when God clearly tells us we have. To say rebelliousness, drunkenness, lying, stealing, fornication, etc., is not sin when God clearly calls it such, is a fearful delusion that must be put off. Pretending the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) are diseases makes God a liar. To attempt to defend these ideas is abominable. To embrace them, by implication or innuendo, is contemptuous. To cling to such a lie is to call light darkness and darkness

light. One may say he has fellowship with God, but the facts do not correspond to the words.

Realizing something is wrong is the first step toward setting it right again. Jesus said the prodigal son "came to himself." It was the turning point in his relationship with his father. Had he never realized his true condition, he would have remained a prodigal. His life would have been a warning to all, instead of encouragement and instruction. His confession, "Father, I have sinned" led to a precious reception described by Luke, "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and *ran* and fell on his neck and kissed him" (Luke 15:20, emphasis added). Under a burden of shame, the prodigal son came slowly and fearfully toward his father's house. By contrast, when his father saw him, he ran to meet him, and while others loathed to touch him for he had just come from feeding swine, the compassion of a loving father greets him with arms of mercy and overwhelms him with affection.

The parable teaches us that true penitents are dear to God and welcomed by the Lord Jesus Christ. However, there is no such reception when one has been deceived and is convinced he is sick when he is sinful. Where there is no sensibility toward sin, there is no repentance of it and no forgiveness granted. There is no help for those who admit no need for help. Our Lord's words to the Pharisees who murmured against Him were fitting and in perfect order. Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12).

Those who are not sick do not need a physician. A legitimate physician does not prescribe medication for, nor does a surgeon perform surgery on, a person who is perfectly well. To go to the doctor's office to tell him you are perfectly fine and you have never felt better in your life is silly. In the same way, it is silly to think one would repent if he is physically sick while being morally fit. If one's bad behav-

ior is a disease, he will not go to Christ for cleansing. If, on the other hand, one decides to call sin sin, he has made a major shift in his perception of reality. He has acknowledged, like the prodigal son, that something is wrong with himself. The confession requires responsibility on one's part. Had the son shifted blame to his circumstances or attributed his anxiety to a condition other than sin, he would have spiraled deeper and deeper, as do so many nowadays, into depression and despair. Repentance and being absolved of his sin reversed the spiral of gloom and despondency.

A physician should be where there are sick people who need his service. It was obvious the Pharisees felt themselves morally whole, as do those who attribute their sinful behavior to illness. People who call sin a disease and treat it as such with talk therapy and/or medication become mired in an endless cycle of more talking and more chemical manipulation of feelings and thoughts. There is no hope; there is no cure. In his book, *Diseasing of America*, Stanton Peele wrote:

"People's belief that they have a disease makes it less likely that

they will outgrow the problem. For this reason, disease approaches are most inappropriate and dangerous for the young. Treatment programs for chemical dependence stress to young substance abusers that they will always have a drug-taking or drinking problem. This almost guarantees that relapses will be frequent, when under ordinary conditions the vast majority would outgrow their youthful excesses. Treatment thus serves mainly as an impediment to the normal process of 'maturing out' of addiction."¹⁴

We must recognize sin as our only hope. When sickness is substituted for sin, the emphasis is on diagnosing instead of judgment or rebuke. Treatment is the focus instead of repentance, forgiveness, and biblical change. To cherish the illusion that sin is sickness is to forfeit forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God. For the Christian, sanctification is thwarted; for the unbeliever eternal damnation is assured.

Endnotes:

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 3. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Mental Health Through Christian Community*. New York: Abington Press, 1972, pg. 27.
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 5. Oswald Chambers, *Biblical Ethics: The Moral Foundations of Life, The Philosophy of Sin*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House Publishers, 1998, pg. 127.
 6. Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, *The Truth About Addiction and Recovery*. New York: Simon & Schuster (A Fireside Book), 1991, pg. 26.
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 12. Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*. Phillipsburg, Pa.: P&R Publishing, 2001, pp. 24, 25.
 13. For a detailed exposition of James 1:13-15 on the stages of temptation read Jay Adams' excellent book, *A Thirst for Wholeness, How to gain wisdom from the Book of James*, (Woodruff, S.C.: Timeless Texts, 1988).
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THE FRUIT OF THE ROOT

(continued from page 1)

on extrabiblical and/or anti-biblical belief systems.

CAN A LEOPARD CHANGE ITS SPOTS?

It should also be observed that at times religious movements founded on various aberrations seem to make determined efforts to change, to deny their history, or at least de-emphasize portions of it. Such efforts often may be merely cosmetic or public-image driven, but they are nonetheless evident. Examples are plentiful.

For instance, to cite an extreme case, multitudes of Muslims and their willing apologists claim that Islam is a "religion of peace." They try to convince the public that Al-Qaeda terror-

ists and Palestinian suicide bombers come only from marginal, misguided sects that have perverted the true teachings of Mohammed, and to portray non-violent Muslims as his rightful spiritual heirs. They make every effort to convince the world that Allah is the one true God, and that he is synonymous with the God of the Bible.

How often it is heard, "We all worship the same God, we just call Him by different names." While it is evident that not all Muslims are radical terrorists, the truth is that Mohammed was a product of his times, his culture, and his demonic delusions, and that he achieved many of his goals by violent means. That which is widely known of how he confronted opposition and dealt with "infidels" (i.e., those who resisted his

religion) justifies the inference that if he had possessed high-tech equipment and weapons of mass destruction, he would have used them in much the same way as do modern Islamic terrorists. There is no good reason to believe that he would not have followed the instructions he placed in Surah 4:91:

"You will find others who desire that they should be safe from you and secure from their own people; as often as they are sent back to the mischief they get thrown into it headlong; therefore if they do not withdraw from you, and do not offer you peace and restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; and against these we have given you a clear authority."