

Addicted to Sin

"I can't begin to understand the pain that the parents of those children and these young women that I have harmed feel. And I can't restore really much to them, if anything, and I won't pretend to. I don't even expect them to forgive me, and I'm not asking for it. That kind of forgiveness is of God? I don't want to die. I deserve, certainly, the most extreme punishment that society has, and I think that society deserves to be protected from me?" (Life on the Edge, James Dobson, 1995 Word Publishing, p. 199, quote from an interview).

Remember Ted Bundy? If you were old enough to read the newspaper in 1978, you probably do. He was convicted ? and later executed ? for raping, torturing and murdering at least 28 young women and children. The public outcry against him, once he was found out, was fierce, and the media attention given to his execution made him a byword in every state in the U.S. It is less likely though, that you were aware of his words of remorse and contrition.

Bundy, by his own account, "grew up in a wonderful home with two dedicated and loving parents. It was a fine, solid, Christian home." (p. 194). But Bundy had a secret addiction that he was unable to escape from by himself. He was addicted to pornography. And from that beginning flowed all of the unspeakable crimes he committed.

An addiction is a habit that is so strong, so powerful, that we will do nearly anything to support it. There may be a genetic component to addiction which, certainly, is not the addict's fault. Yet it is his responsibility to deal with it. Bundy recognized this. He described it as "something so awful, so alien, and? .{yet you} realize that, basically, you are responsible" (p. 196).

Would any of us disagree that Bundy was responsible for what he did? I doubt it. And yet the power of addiction is such that it seems truly beyond the addict's control. Many experts on the subject of addiction have recognized this. A brief perusal of several professional websites dedicated to helping people combat addictive behaviors brings up these statements:

"An addiction is behavior a person cannot control"

"The basic characteristic that defines addiction is the 'loss of control' phenomenon"

"Diagnosing addiction is usually simple?If an individual intends to control his or her drinking or using and fails to do so, he or she is probably addicted."

The Encyclopedia Britannica, in its section on drug addiction, states "the major problem that comes from abuse?is dependence. The user feels compelled?"

This feeling of compulsion, that the behavior is no longer under our own control, is a hallmark of addiction. It is echoed by the apostle Paul, when he tells of how powerfully he is drawn to do the very things he does not wish: "It is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:20).

We tend to categorize sins into "harmless" and "serious". Yet both emanate from the same impulses and our failure to recognize and deal with them. As Bundy was addicted to pornography, others are addicted to alcohol, drugs, sexual experimentation, or other behaviors.

We have learned to be compassionate toward most of these people, because we recognize that some people are inherently "driven" by their addiction. But when it comes to inflicting obvious harm on others, we draw the line. We might consider hating our brother to be harmless, but killing him ? that is another matter. Yet Jesus looked on them both in the same way: "whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). They are not separate categories of sins, but a continuum, along which those vulnerable to addiction are swiftly and inexorably drawn.

We are not a community of "us" normal people and "those" addicts. Bundy said "basically, I was a normal person?I had good friends, I lived a normal life?those of us who have been so much influenced by violence in the media ? in particular pornographic violence ? are not some kinds of inherent monsters. We are your sons, and we are your husbands" (p. 196).

The apostle Paul describes himself as "sold under sin" (Romans 7:14). Paul isn't just talking about the Hitlers and Stalins ? and Bundys ? of the world. He is talking about himself: "I am of flesh, sold into bondage to

sin" (Romans 7:14 NAS). We are slaves to sin (Romans 6:16). Enslaved! What is this, if not addiction? Yes, we are all addicted to sin. We need to understand this if we are to understand the power that sin has over us.

Is there hope for an addict? Alcoholics Anonymous has shown that there is, but that acknowledgement of both our addiction and our need for help are required. God has shown us this too. Apart from God's help, we are simply "hooked" on sin. Jesus said "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34, NIV). And we all do sin: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"(1 John 1:10).

God teaches us to acknowledge our sin. "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive" (1 John 1:9). But we must go even further, and seek help in turning from sin. It is no use thinking we can do it on our own. How can we put to death the deeds of the flesh (that is, sin), when sin is an inherent part of our nature? It can only be done with the help of God's spirit: "If ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). It is that same spirit that "helps us in our weakness" (Romans 8:26, NIV).

Throughout our mortal lives, we will always be addicted to sin. That does not mean we must continue to practice it. Like the alcoholic who stops drinking, yet must recognize that he is still an alcoholic, we can abandon our sinful practices, yet must recognize that we are still sinners. We will always need God's help to avoid becoming entangled again. Just as, to the alcoholic there is no such thing as a harmless drink, for us sinners there is no such thing as a harmless sin. Not recognizing this was the terrible mistake Ted Bundy made.

Yes, we are all addicted to sin, but we can do something about it. We can start by acknowledging our addiction, and asking for help. Let's take that first step right now.