

Saturday, December 8, 2012 – Self Control

“I can’t stop,” is the complaint heard of many drug-addicts, drunkards, gamblers and a variety of other self-indulgers. The idea that one is powerless over behavior fits nicely into the medical community’s view of disease; that is, we do not choose to get sick, we are not bad because we are sick, and when we are sick, we need treatment. In addition, whatever the medical community labels as a disease, insurance companies must pay for. So, do not accuse me of acting irresponsible, just accommodate me in my sickness. If I show up at work drunk, you cannot fire me. Instead, give me some time off and pay for my treatment. The problem is that the disease model did not confine itself to alcohol abuse, but expanded to other drugs, and eventually to all kinds of behaviors. Today, if a person has a problem with gambling, sex, eating, or shopping, then he can also say he has a disease. However, one must always recognize the difference between a problematic behavior and a physical disease. For example, drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes are behaviors, whereas cirrhosis of the liver and lung cancer are diseases. One characteristic of outrageous behavior is the loss of inhibition and lack of conscience. To be conscious of something is to be aware of it. The conscience is an inward awareness or consciousness of right and wrong behavior. Some people suppress their conscience to the point that they are no longer sensitive to what is right or wrong. Paul expresses it this way: “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Eph. 4:19). A strong faith in God, and an intense desire to repent, resolves many issues.

In a context that deals with the eating of meats (but proceeds to the general use of one’s body), i.e., whether one is permitted to eat certain meats, or to restrain—in a cultural environment where the eating of meats (e.g., pork) was considered “unclean”—Paul declares his fundamental liberty. Yet under certain circumstances, he will refrain from forbidden meat on the ground of expediency, i.e., when others could be offended, having their consciences violated, and thus be lost (1 Corinthians 6:12; 8:11; Romans 14:15).

The apostle declares: “I will not be brought under the power of any [thing]” (1 Corinthians 6:12). The Greek verb is *exousiasthesomai*, a passive form, with this meaning: “I will not be enslaved, mastered, or overpowered by anything” (Fee 1987, 253). The principle here has a broad application.

There are several things that honest souls need to know, and work seriously on, if they would overcome this problem, or any similar one, and live pure in the sight of Almighty God.

(1) They must cultivate a love for God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Love is the motivating power behind faith and obedience (Galatians 5:6). You can only do this by immersing yourself in the Scriptures and coming to appreciate their authority and value in your personal life. When Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4:1), he appealed to “it is written” as his shield.

(2) Study a wealth of Bible texts on self-control, temperance, etc. A good concordance, e.g., Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, can provide a list of passages relating to these topics. A comprehensive Bible dictionary, or a dictionary of Bible theology, can be very helpful on these themes as well.

(3) Become convinced that you really can do all things in him who is able and willing to “strengthen” (the idea of putting power into something) you (Philippians 4:13). Develop confidence in the Lord by coming close to him through the study of his Word every day.

(4) Talk to God in prayer. Plead with him to help you overcome this weakness. He loves you and wants to assist you and lift you out of spiritual slavery.

(5) Find a Christian friend (perhaps an elder, deacon, or minister), or a parent with whom you may confidentially talk. Confess your weakness and ask for encouragement as you fight the battle. Friendly, Christian confidants can be a powerful and wonderful source of strength.

Finally, remember that, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13)