

# American Decency Association

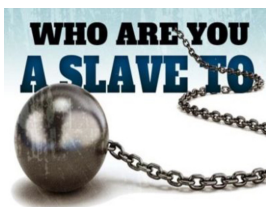
PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 [www.americandecency.org](http://www.americandecency.org)

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

September 2016

## The Consequences of Addiction

By: Heath Lambert



Our English word addiction comes from a Latin term that means to give oneself over or to surrender... Addicts surrender themselves in obedience to some object. ... The most profound reality that the Bible uses to describe this problem is slavery.

In Romans 6:15–23, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to describe the mastery of sin over every human being who exists apart from Christ. He says, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey?” (Rom. 6:16). Sin ... summons us to obedience, and we dutifully surrender, giving ourselves over to its whims. ... Addicts are

wooded by the object of their enslavement and surrender in obedience to the commands of their master. But addictions are cruel masters. When we follow the dictates of our addictions, we end up hurting with the kind of pain that comes with following the dictates of a malevolent ruler. In Romans 6, the Apostle Paul spells out at least three consequences that flood the lives of people who are trapped in the kind of slavery represented by addictions.

**First**, the kind of enslavement we see in addiction is sinful and leads to more sin. ... (Rom. 6:19). Addictions are wrong because it is sinful to be given over to anything that is not God Himself. Paul says that even though Christians are free to enjoy all of God’s good gifts (1 Cor. 6:12) believers should not be mastered by anything other than Christ. ...

**Second**, the enslavement of addiction leads to shame. In Romans 6:21, Paul asks, “But what fruit were you getting at

that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?” Shame is the painful remorse we feel when, in our right minds, we reflect on the miserable things we did in our foolish obedience to the harsh mastery of our addictions. ...

**Finally**, the kind of slavery manifested in addictions leads to death. After asking his question about shame, Paul immediately adds, “For the end of those things is death” (Rom. 6:21). The slavery of addiction leads to more sin, to shame, and to death. In the Bible, of course, death is expressive of the physical experience that points to a more profound spiritual experience. The death of our physical bodies points to the spiritual separation from God that renders us dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Each of these biblical meanings of death is highlighted in the experience of addiction. ...

Addictions lead to physical death because they are manifestations of spiritual death. Death is the payment you receive for your slavery to sin as a person

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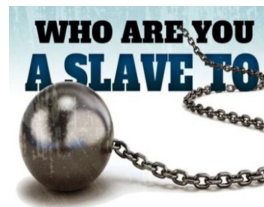
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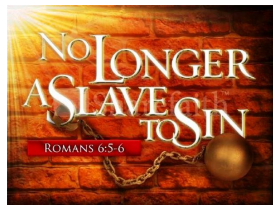
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who is dead in trespasses and sins (Rom. 6:23).

This truth gets at a reality in Romans 6 about addiction that is perhaps more profound than Paul's honesty about the consequences of those addictions. In addressing slavery to sin, Romans 6 does not single out addiction. The metaphor of slavery is inclusive of addiction, but is not limited to it. Slavery is not just a powerful illustration for those with an obvious addiction. Every one of us knows what it is to be enslaved. That means, in one way or another, we are all addicts.

You do not have to struggle with the obvious addictions of sex, gambling, drugs, or alcohol to be a slave. The metaphor of slavery demonstrates that all of us are prone to a sinful mastery by things that are not Christ. All of us are hooked on something. It might be heroin, but it is more likely to be praise, television, new clothes, Facebook, Ben & Jerry's

ice cream, or dozens of other masters who compete with the risen Christ in our hearts. Enslavement to the subtle addictions leads to sin, shame, and death as surely as the more extravagant ones. They just do it more delicately and slowly. The difference is one of degree.

... The master that I am prone to follow looks more like an ice cream cone than a bottle of booze. But my sinful heart can latch on to that acceptable treat with a lack of trust in God as profound as that demonstrated by my mom anytime she was on a bender. My sinful enslavements do not show up in headlines but in the small print of my life, adding additional sins that are more subtle and consequences that are more socially acceptable than my mom's drunkenness. My enslavements will kill me more slowly than my mom's sin was killing her. ... In all the important ways, we are all addicts because we are all slaves. And all of us will, in our own way, experience the consequences that come from living an enslaved life.

But that is where the good news comes in. Romans 6

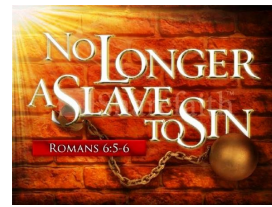
emphasizes that believers are no longer slaves to sin. We are not bound to the sinful addictions that hold sway over us. ... (Rom. 6:17-18)

The Bible promises that all who follow Jesus have a new master and will ultimately know freedom from every sinful master.

This is good news for addicts. ... It was not until my mom met Jesus that she truly changed. Her new Master, Christ, ultimately shattered her enslavement to all sin, not just to drinking.

How Jesus breaks addiction's hold on us slowly and over time is the subject of another, much larger article. But the point of Romans 6:15-23 is that addicts are slaves who will experience the bitter consequences of that enslavement. And, more gloriously, the point is that God has made provision for enslaved addicts to follow a better Master who brings freedom from slavery by making us followers of Him. That is good news for all of us addicts: my mom, me, and even you.

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