



ANTI-ADDICTION DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection – Proverbs 28:13; Romans 6:17-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

Proverbs 28:13

No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Romans 6:17-23

(v. 17) But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, (v. 18) and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (v. 19) I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. (v. 20) When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (v. 21) So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. (v. 22) But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. (v. 23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Addictions adversely affect our families, churches and communities. What starts out as a means to experience reprieve from the pressures of reality and/or the catalyst for a mental escape rapidly subjugates people we love, causing them to become slaves to addictions that render them powerless over the control of their lives. This loss of control initiates a vicious cycle that eventually lures the addict into a lifestyle that displeases themselves and God.

Anti-Addiction Day promotes sensitivity and empathy towards those who are tormented and hopefully plants within churches the desire to help these persons discover the hope that they need which seems to them so distant. God wishes for addicts to be free from the

bondages of their oppressive lifestyle. De-Gruy Leary compares the repression of addiction to the culture-wide condition known as Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome (PTSS). PTSS, he declares, “seduces many African Americans who are looking for a way out of the stress, frustration, pain, pressure and sense of hopelessness associated with the continued oppression and the absence of opportunity.”¹ Roland Williams’ article entitled “Cultural Considerations in AOD Treatment for African Americans”² offers further insight into the bondages of addiction.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Proverbs 28:13; Romans 6:17-23

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Stanice Anderson, author of “I Say A Prayer For Me,” uses the lyrics of the song by the Whispers to introduce her addiction. She declares, “I only meant to wet my feet, but you pulled me in...oh, the waters of love run deep.”³ Drugs offered Anderson what she believed was a safe escape from her inner pain and despair. Millions of others, some famous and some only known to their families and loved ones, have joined Anderson in using drugs to escape from their desperation.

In our society today, the quest for life is being muffled by the lurking presence of destruction brought about by addiction. Many, young and old, have succumbed to the temptations to use drugs (alcohol, food, Meth, cocaine, sex, power, etc.) to temporarily escape from reality and gain what they believe is a moment of mental bliss. This confused moment of assumed bliss quickly shatters as the truth inevitably comes forth.

As a young girl in the inner cities of Baltimore, some family members and friends were “wetting their feet” as they experimented with drugs. They too became trapped by their behavior with an addiction that claimed their lives. Some are physically dead; others are psychologically depleted. They were all seeking life.

Have you also dealt with the sting of drug addiction in the life of a loved one, or perhaps even in your own life? If so, know that addictions are never hidden and that it is never helpful to use addictive behavior to solve a problem; most importantly, because of the God we serve, no addicted person is ever hopeless.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

(a) It’s NOT Hidden

Those who attempt to hide their addictions require isolation. Such an environment is fertile ground for addictive behaviors and creates fewer opportunities for others on the outside to intervene. Defense mechanisms, e.g., denial, minimizing, rationalizing and others, are inner enablers that will lend a hand to help addicts believe that they are concealing their behavior.

However, Proverbs 28:13 makes clear that no sin is ever totally hidden. Those who believe that they have carefully hidden their addiction would be surprised to learn that everyone who chooses to know, knows. On top of that, God knows all. Whether an addiction is carried out in a closed-door bedroom, a hotel bathroom, on the floor of a crack den or other assumed places of privacy, God sees. Wherever we go, God was there before we got there and if we return there, God will be there too. Whatever we do, God knows what we will do before we do it.

Solomon, who wrote many sections of Proverbs, had a personal encounter with the consequences of so-called hidden sin. His brother died because of the sin of his father (David). David's so-called hidden sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah caused David to lose his son. Living with his father, David, Solomon was an eyewitness to the consequences of addictive sins that we believe are hidden. However, Solomon did not learn from the sins of his father, for he too fell prey to his addictions.

Addictions are no respecter of persons. Through my study of scripture on the life of Solomon, I surmised that Solomon's actions through the years of his reign as king suggest that he had a brain change that, over time, manifested itself in behavioral changes. Solomon was granted great wisdom from God. God declared to Solomon "[S]ee, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you" (1 Kings 3:12). However, Solomon was either unwilling or unable (or both) to stop his behavior, even after massive negative consequences. But by the time Solomon wrote the proverbs, he was mature, at the peak of his rule, and tainted by physiological or psychological deadly behavior.

Solomon's strengths were those of the mental variety: meditation, planning, negotiation and organization. Solomon also came to understand that his greatest weaknesses were also of the mental variety. How often have we heard it declared that the mind is the devil's battleground?

But Solomon, the wisest man to ever live and will ever live, shows us that after you have fallen prey to the darkness of temptation, there is still hope, and life to live. Why? The answer is given by Solomon in Proverbs 28 and Paul in Romans 6:17-23.

(b) It's NOT Helpful

Paul's letter to the Romans is considered one of his most influential writings. This epistle was written A.D. 56 and the theme is the righteousness of God in the Gospel of Christ. Key words in this text are righteousness, faith, justification, law and grace.

In this pericope, Paul desires that the people experience the richness of liberating salvation through Jesus Christ. To illustrate this, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor to compare and contrast two forces: slavery unto sin and slavery unto righteousness. Liberation is an issue for Paul, and it is stressed continuously through his writings. Paul was now mature, having served in the ministry for ten-plus years. The church to which he wrote was not established by Paul but by an unknown group of Christians.

Paul emphasizes the need for growing in the grace of God and the importance of not submitting to sin. Sin is at the root of every addiction. That sexual act that harmed you and the person with whom you engaged was just a manifestation of some sin. That crack pipe that is stuck to your lips and that needle in your arm are manifestations of some sin. That food that has become your reason for living is just a manifestation of a deep sin. Enslaving the body to sin will never offer true liberation. In fact, living in the bondage of addiction is contrary to the Gospel and, therefore, to God. Addiction is destructive. There is no up side to it, ever. If your addiction is power, you will never get enough of it. If it is food, you will never eat long enough to heal the hole in your heart. If it is crack, meth or heroin, you will never sniff or ingest enough to get you so high that you escape your problems. If it is sex, you will never engage in it enough to reclaim your self-esteem or find true love. Addiction just doesn't help! Not for a few days, a few hours a few minutes, or a few seconds.

In verses 19-23, Paul contrasts the consequences of being a slave to sin versus the benefits of being a slave to righteousness. Sin is never helpful; it makes you impure (v. 19); it makes you ignore what's right (v. 20); places you in shameful predicaments (v. 21); and ultimately leads to death! (v. 23).

(c) It's NOT Hopeless

Paul is challenging readers to be slaves to righteousness if they are to be bound by anything. Paul understood the power of submission and repentance in living a life of true freedom. Such submission/obedience requires one to submit without reservation and to submit completely. If you want total liberation, total submission to God is the only road that leads there.

Paul gives the readers an opportunity to decide for themselves what life they desire to live. Paul recognizes that true liberty is only experienced when a person is given the freedom to make the choice. Solomon had to make choice. He did and wrote that those who "confess" and "forsake" can "obtain mercy." Those to whom Paul wrote had to make a choice; and everyone wrestling with an addiction must make a choice! Every trembling withdrawal symptom is a choice. Every counseling session is a choice. Every push of the beer bottle and the whiskey bottle to the side is a choice. Every walk past the crack den and the meth house is a choice.

The good news is that for everyone who is besieged by an addiction, no matter how long, no matter what type, liberation is available. No problem is too hard for God. God can even sanctify a former addict, and instead of a back-alley life, give all of the blessings that come from a life fully submitted and committed to God, especially eternal life.

Celebration

God's love for us is so great. When we confess our sins and submit our lives to Christ Jesus, sin no longer has victory over our lives. The Word declares, "Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) When we

come to God with all of our addictions, God is merciful towards us. “If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us of sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”(1 John 1:9) While we were once slaves to sin, now we are called the righteousness of God. In the words of a saying common among drug addicts, “That monkey is off our back.” As servant of the Most High God, we have been rescued from the clutches of every death-dealing addiction.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sounds: Paul’s pen writing on papyrus; the bonds of sin being broken; the racing heart of an addict;

Sights: Bodies that are slaves to impurities (fill in the type); faces that are ashamed; bodies that are free of impurities;

Smells: The stench of death; the smell of all the scents of a God-filled life; and

Texture: Papyrus paper-rough in texture, frayed edges.

III. Other Suggestions for the Preaching Moment

Jesus, Bucky and Me - This book was written by Dr. Brenda Etheridge. She is co-pastor of Lion of Judah Worship Center. This book is the true story of this mother’s plight as a recovering alcoholic who loses her son to the streets because of his life as a drug dealer.

I Say a Prayer For Me - This book is enlightening for those who think drug addiction is something engaged in only by the poor, inner city person who evolved from a broken home. Stanice Anderson does a wonderful job of explaining the naivety that is associated with the introduction of drug use and how it overcame her before she was finally able to overcome it. This is a good book for young women and young men.

Notes

1. De-Gruy, Leary J. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing. Portland, OR: Uptone Press, 2005.
2. Williams, Roland. “Cultural Considerations in AOD Treatment for African Americans.” O n t r a c k Communications. Online location: http://www.adp.ca.gov/TA/pdf/Cultural_Consid.pdf accessed 10 July 2009
3. Anderson, Stanice. I Say a Prayer for Me. West Bloomfield, MI: Warner Books, 2003. p. 6.