

The Nature of the Word Part 4
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I committed myself, in the previous article of this series, to discuss a form of religious addiction, namely, addiction to the Bible. Since I am not qualified to do so, I will not attempt to define addiction clinically, but simply state, especially in terms of our context, that addiction involves the attraction to, and bonding with, that which provides an immediate, short-lived, pseudo-gratification, but, in the long-term, seductively leads one further and further away from true fulfillment, so that one ends up settling for an ever accelerating descent into hopelessness and despair

We've been made more aware of substance abuse, but there are certainly other forms of addiction, such as the addiction to sound, particularly in our present culture; sound in the form of music of one kind or another. Many people can hardly live without their favorite music crowding out silence, that dreadful condition that would leave them open to actually spending some time in serious thought. The "American Idol" is the new god of this addiction.

Carbohydrates, in the form of pasta, potatoes, popcorn and bread are my personal downfall. When my wife Jan cooks pasta, I load my plate with a mini-mountain of the stuff, finish that off, and immediately return to the huge pot on the stove for a second helping of equal quantity, and then, shame, shame, maybe even a third. And with my physiology, it's processed into fat as soon as it's digested. Jan has learned that when she makes pasta, with any one of her superb sauces, that she had better make enough to feed an army, or I'll probably get that little boy look on my face, which says, "You mean that's all I get?"

Not being able to get enough of that which you're addicted to has much to do with the fact that our addictions numb us to whatever pain, be it emotional or physical, that comes with our personal variation of the human condition. It's that palliative element that hooks us. My pasta and popcorn are (some of you will understand) my

comfort foods. If I gorge myself on them, suddenly I feel loved. That general feeling of deprivation that is the monkey on the back of all humanity is temporarily relieved until that fix wears off and we need another of greater quantity or potency.

Where does Bible addiction fit into this? The study of scripture, with the knowledge that we acquire by it, even when there is an element of genuine revelation involved, can easily become a substitute for real communion with God and one another. Why mess with inner and interpersonal relationship, which can get frighteningly intimate, when we can get a high reading about it, right?

One of the signs of Bible addiction is that you can't think along spiritual lines without a constant mental reference to scripture, and you have great difficulty relating to others, and particularly loved ones, without Bible references creeping in. It really bugs you that there's so much in the Bible that you don't yet understand. It's sort of like the proverbial elephant in the living room. It's always there as you look and talk to one another over, under and around the elephant.

Things that are holy; that is separated from what is common, for a particular season and purpose within the economy of God, can become addictive. Anything short of God Himself becomes a possible agent of religious addiction. The attachment of the Jews to the splendor of the temple and the system of worship centered in it, became addictive, to the point that they became enraged when they were confronted with its temporality, and that they would have to leave it behind in order to worship God in Spirit and Truth.

Likewise so with the whole system of the Mosaic Law, which certainly offered them no lasting fulfillment, but only the immediate "fix" that it afforded them by its appeal to their hope of attaining to a righteousness that would be credited to them on its basis.

Integral to that whole system whose purpose was to present the shadow of, offer types of, and point to the coming One, was Holy Writ. Rarely in human history has there been a devotion to match that of the Jew's to what was written down, preserved and formed into that document which we call the Old Testament. What honor was

afforded to those men who gave themselves to interpreting, advocating, implementing, applying and executing "the law."

The ones, the prophets, who, called of God uniquely, and standing, in a certain sense, outside the system, proclaimed a message that revealed that the system, even in its pure form, was a concession to their mentality infected by the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; these were often persecuted and killed.

Today, there is nothing more central to the conservative Christian community than Holy Writ. "We are a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church." "I'm a Bible-believing Christian." "Our pastor is committed to expository preaching." How these claims ring with the sound of religious elitism that can't see the forest for the trees.

Should the presence of the Lord depart from them, they'd hardly notice that anything was missing, but, to even suggest that their Bibles might be taken from them---much more, that they should consider that, sooner or later, they must leave their Bibles behind, if they are to utterly follow on to know the Lord, be prepared for holy war? Selah.