



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Addicted Help! God's Hope for the Hurting Galatians 5:1 Steve Lombardo | June 13, 2021



We're going to be in Galatians 5:1, talking about a serious issue.

We're in a sermon series called "Help! God's Hope for the Hurting." We all need help. We need God's help, plus we need help from one another when we face difficult things in life. We're

talking in this series about things that are hard to deal with and seeing what the Scriptures have to say about them.

For those of you who like numbers, let me give you some statistics. Ninety thousand people this year in our country will die because of alcohol. One hundred thirty people will die today in our country because of an opioid overdose. Right this second, 30,000 men and women are looking at pornography online in our country. Some of those numbers are hard to understand because our country is so large. What does 30,000 people looking at porn right now mean? It means 76% of men and women aged 18-30 consume porn on a regular basis. You can say they're addicted to it. I've just mentioned three big things that can be addictions: drugs, alcohol and sex, but things are only getting worse. .

As a matter of fact, during the COVID pandemic—which thankfully we're coming out of—we're told that addictive behaviors skyrocketed. Last summer, the National Institute of Health did a study looking at the rise of addictive behaviors that coincided with the COVID lock-downs. People had nothing to do, so why not drink a little more? A person would be filled with anxiety, not knowing what the day would hold, so why not pop some extra pills? People became a lot more addicted this past year to substances and activities that are harmful to them.

We're going to need a definition of addiction so we have a broad understanding of our subject this morning. Here's one of the definitions I saw for what it means to be addicted to something: "Repeated involvement with a substance or activity, despite the harm it causes, because of the pleasure it brings." In most cases, addictive behaviors bring pleasures with diminishing returns. Over time, this addictive pleasure requires that a person increase the intake in order to gain the same result, resulting in a vicious spiral that requires more and more of whatever they're addicted to.

I want to go to Galatians today, because the church there was an interesting church. The Apostle Paul had been involved with bringing the message of Jesus Christ to these people and founding this church. So the people receiving this letter were believers. They believed Jesus died for their sins, rose from the dead and is coming again. They knew they could live in the forgiveness He provides.

But then after a time a certain group in the church gained power, a group known as the "Judaizers." These people believed in salvation through Jesus, but they also believed people should keep the Old Testament laws, in particular the rite of circumcision. So when non-Jewish people would come to Christ, the Judaizers would insist that they add circumcision to their salvation. In Galatians 1:6, Paul responded in this way: *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."* He went on in verse seven, *"Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."*

It's always a distortion of the Good News when somebody says, "Yeah, you must believe in Jesus, but you also have to do this." In essence, they're saying that Jesus is not sufficient, His death on the cross was not good enough, that His resurrection from the grave was not all we need to ensure our position with God and that our sins are forgiven. Paul also wrote this in Galatians 4:8-9:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Paul is saying that the idea that we need more than Jesus, that we also have to follow the Old Testament laws as part of our salvation, is actually slavery.

Then we come to Galatians 5:1, where he says, *“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”* We all know slavery was a dark part of our U.S. history. I’m so thankful for the Christian men and women who fought to abolish it. But slavery still exists today—the kind of slavery that comes from within. This slavery comes through an addictive behavior or through substance abuse. These are things that have power over us, thus enslaving us. So many people, both inside and outside the church, need deliverance from this yoke of slavery.

The good news is that Jesus sets us free. In John 8:32 He says, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* In verse 36 of that same chapter, Jesus says, *“He who the Son sets free is free indeed.”* When you come to Jesus Christ by faith, you receive freedom.

Freedom from what? Freedom from sin. Sin no longer has power over you like it once did. You also have freedom from your sinful flesh. Now you don’t have to follow your carnal desires. You have power over them because Jesus has delivered you from them. The New Testament also says we have freedom from the law. Our faith isn’t reduced to keeping a certain list of rules and regulations. Because Christ fulfilled the law, He set us free from it.

Don’t you want to live in this freedom? Wouldn’t it be great not to be enslaved to anyone or anything? In order to experience the freedom Christ provides us with, we’re going to look at three things that hopefully will help us in our battles against addictions.

## **Examine the problem.**

I tried to read everything I could about addiction over the past month or so. There’s so much material, both from non-Christian and Christian sources, from counseling and psychology. There are so many different categories of addiction. But as I looked at this issue through my simple eyes, I tried to understand addiction especially from a biblical perspective and came up with several categories.

### **Not sinful addictions**

These would be things that are morally neutral. For example, coffee is something people are addicted to. It might be the caffeine, but people can also be addicted to decaffeinated coffee. Somebody else might be addicted to exercise. I never had a problem with that, but people say you can be addicted that way. In and of itself, exercise is a great thing. Another addiction is video games. I’m not talking about the sinful sort—those that are violent or sexual—but just simple video games. While these are not sinful in themselves, they can be a problem if we become a slave to them.

### **Sinful addictions**

Then there’s a second category of sinful addictions. These are things that are not morally neutral. Pornography is a prime example of this. It involves sexual relations outside of marriage. Even if it’s just you watching a devise and only participating mentally, it’s still lust of the flesh. As I’ve studied addiction to pornography, I was amazed to find that 96% of young adults believe there’s nothing wrong with it.

What about lying? There are people who are addicted to lying. They cannot tell the truth. There are other people who are addicted to gossiping. Every time you talk with them, they seem to have some juicy story to tell about someone else; they can’t wait to tell you what they know. These are things that in and of themselves can become addictions.

### **Addictions that lead to sin**

I also see a third category and think this might be the most difficult one to talk about and understand. I hope we can honestly examine ourselves regarding actions, thoughts and substances that lead to sin. They might not be sinful when you first begin. A big example would be drinking alcohol. There are places in the Bible that talk about the good gift God gives in wine. Drinking in and of itself isn’t a sin, but drunkenness is a sin. There are numerous verses that tell us not to be drunk with wine, because it leads to debauchery. Rather, we are to be filled with the Spirit.

Another obvious example would be eating. We all have to eat food and it can bring great pleasure. It's God's gift to us. How many of you are going to be enjoying your lunch today, either at home or at a restaurant? You're going to enjoy God's good gift of food. I'm going to do that myself. But if you're getting up three or four times in the night to eat that chocolate you can't stand to live without, you might have an addiction problem. Eating isn't a sin, but gluttony is. It can have power over a person.

What about drugs? Prescription drugs, I mean; not illegal drugs. You injure your back, you have back surgery, you're prescribed something for the pain. Then sooner or later, maybe through no fault of your own, you find yourself taking these pills just to get up in the morning and function during the day. Now you're into drug abuse.

These are examples of actions that start well but lead to sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, the apostle Paul says there are lots of things that are permissible. There are a lot of things we are allowed to do. He's actually talking about food in this context, saying everything is permissible. Then he writes, "I will not be mastered by anything. I will not become a slave to anything." Christians should be alert to the fact that there are things that can enslave us. Like Paul, we can do a lot of things in the freedom God gives us, but we need to be careful not to let anything take the place of Christ. He is our Master and we should let nothing else master us but Him.

### **Do you have a problem?**

Examine yourself this morning. Last Sunday was communion Sunday and before we took the bread and the cup that symbolize the body and blood of Jesus, we remembered what He did for us. We're also told in Scripture that we should examine ourselves. That's not a call to examine the people around us.

I know that sometimes we pray for our spouse or our loved ones, because we want them to come to church or listen to this message. We think, "I hope so-and-so is listening to this message, because they really need to hear it." It's definitely okay to pray for that person and to bring them to church. But don't be the Holy Spirit for them this morning. Examine yourself today. Trust God with your loved one. Ask yourself, "Is there anything that has power over me, that's threatening to bring me under its yoke of slavery?"

### **Embrace the process.**

In order to experience this freedom we have to embrace the process. Look at the process we see in Galatians 5:1: *"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."*

#### **Stand firm.**

The first thing we must do is to stand firm which means to persevere, persist, keep on and be strong. How do we do this? Foundationally, it means we must be saved. Paul is assuming these people have been set free by Christ Himself. We can't stand firm on our own. If we're not standing on the Rock, on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, then we need to ask ourselves, "Am I really saved? Have I trusted in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior?" Romans 10:10 describes this as confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead. Verse 13 then tells us, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Have you called on the name of the Lord? Do you believe in Him? Are you following Him? It's not a matter of being perfect or sinless. We just need to be sure we're Christians, that we're believers in Christ.

The gospel is so simple a child can believe and come to faith, but don't be confused by its simplicity. It's not easy to come to Christ, because we have to become honest with ourselves. We have to turn from our own ways to follow Him. Jesus said we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. We have to repent, which means we used to be going our way in our lives, but now we must repent, turn around and go God's way. Even when it makes us uncomfortable or requires us to do things we don't want to do, we need to let go of our own desires and plans to accept His. The gospel is simple, but it's not easy.

Scripture teaches that you must be saved. You must come to the cross. You must see the seriousness of your sin and that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). You must believe. That's the foundation of standing firm.

Then the second thing you need to do in order to stand firm is to pray. You need to ask God for deliverance. He can and does miraculously deliver people from addictions. So ask Him for that. Pray for a dramatic and drastic deliverance from whatever the thing is that's enslaving you. We've heard testimonies from people for whom God has done this. Maybe they were drinking for 20 years, then it was gone and they never wanted a drop of alcohol again. Or we've heard from the person who was addicted to drugs,

then God reached down and delivered them from the miry clay, taking away the desire for those drugs. God can do this with whatever holds you in bondage. Call out to Him for deliverance; keep calling out over and over again. If it's your husband or wife who is dealing with addiction, keep praying for him or her. Keep calling out to God for deliverance.

We learned this from Jesus in Luke 18, where He tells the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge. This judge doesn't fear God and he doesn't like the people he judges. A widow comes to him who wants justice. She wants to be treated the way the law requires widows to be treated. She goes to the judge for justice, but he denies her. She returns again and again. One day the judge wakes up and realizes, "I don't fear God and I don't care about these people I have to judge. There's this widow who is so persistent, I'm just going to give her what she's asking for." Jesus says, "How much more will our loving Heavenly Father give us when we ask Him?" I think the point is to keep asking, keep persisting. Call out to God in prayer to help you with the thing you're facing this morning.

The third thing you can do in the process of standing firm is to confess your sin. Keep short accounts with God. Some of the things in the third addiction category, that fall into kind of a gray area, can sneak up on you until eventually it's a full-blown sin and you're becoming enslaved to it. The way we counteract that as Christians, through the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, is we confess sin as soon as we realize what's happening. We then turn from that sin. We examine ourselves and confess our sin to God, so we keep our accounts short.

Paul tells us that if we don't do this, we run the risk of giving the devil an opportunity in our lives. In Ephesians 4:26-27, he uses the example of anger, writing, "*Be angry and do not sin.*" Did you know that you can be angry and not sin? How many people needed to hear that today? You can be angry and not sin. That's a good thing. Jesus was angry, but He never sinned. In anger, He turned over the money changers' tables in the temple. Paul says it's okay to be angry, but "*do not let the sun go down on your anger.*" Deal with that anger sooner rather than later. He says if we don't do that, we're giving the devil an opportunity, a foothold.

The best example I can think of is the wife who marries her high school sweetheart, but then he's a jerk toward her. She starts getting angry with him. She puts up with him, thinking, "This isn't what I expected when I got married." It goes by for another year. She's still angry at him; he talks down to her. Then they have kids and he's gone all the time, so she's angry about that. But she doesn't talk about it or deal with that anger; she lets the sun go down on her wrath. One day they wake up after being married for 20 years and realize their marriage is about to fall apart. She hates him and has resentment in her heart toward him, because she never dealt with the anger she had. The devil saw the opportunity, took a foothold and hardened her heart, making it cold.

This is the same way addictions work. Some of the things aren't sins, but if we don't deal with them in a timely manner, the devil has an opportunity to come into our lives, causing damage and even destruction. Don't let this happen in your life. Don't give the devil a foothold. Keep short accounts with God. Confess your sins. If you're angry, deal with it before the sun sets.

Now, Paul is not literally saying you have to deal with it before that night; the point is to deal with it sooner rather than later. If it is true about the sun setting, we might have to move to Alaska during the summer, so we can be angry for three months. Seriously, he's just saying we should deal with these things quickly. Embrace the process and stand firm.

### **Do not submit.**

The second thing Paul tells us regarding how to embrace the process is, "*Do not submit.*" This is an act of the will not to submit. You're fed up with the thing you're struggling with, so you make the decision not to deal with it any longer. By God's strength and power, you don't submit any longer. The problem with addictions is the person has been submitting to this thing so often that it's become part of them. It's influencing the way they're thinking and making decisions, the way they move and act and interact with others.

Have you ever heard of the angler fish? It's one of the ugliest fish in the sea, in my opinion. It lives at the bottom of the ocean. It was depicted in the movie, "Finding Nemo." The angler fish isn't just very ugly, it also reproduces in a very strange manner. The male angler fish is very small; the big ugly fish is female. In order to procreate, the male fish attaches himself to the underside of the female, then he dissolves into her. Yeah, it's gross; sorry. They share blood vessels and nutrients and skin. Eventually he is simply part of her, and is not seen anymore. That's how the eggs are fertilized and the generations continue.

This is similar to what sometimes happens with addictions. Something latches onto a person and becomes a yoke of slavery. After the person lives with it for a while, it actually becomes part of them. Apart from an act of the will and the power of God, there is

no escape. But God acts through the person who says, "I'm done with this. I will not submit to this any longer." Apart from this, there can be no separation, because that thing has been part of the person for so long.

Another thing we can do with our act of the will, besides simply deciding to turn from this habit, is to put checks and balances in place to help us defeat this thing that has power over us. For example, "Covenant Eyes" is a program that helps a person in their battle against pornography, their battle to be pure. I've had an app called "Covenant Eyes" since I started in the pastorate many years ago. Basically it keeps track of everything you log onto on your computer or phone, then sends a weekly report to people you've assigned to watch out for you. In my case, there were two people. One of them was a close friend; the other person was in my congregation but with whom I wasn't so close. If I went on anything questionable, they would get a special notification. If I disabled the app, they would also be notified of that. So by an act of my will, I put something into place to help me gain the victory.

## **Enlist people to help you.**

One more way we can experience the freedom over addictions that Christ provides is to enlist people to help us. I love 1 John 1:7, which says, *"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."* The idea of having fellowship with other people who have been forgiven is that this takes place in the light, not in the darkness. These sins and addictions flourish in the darkness. We never want to share our struggles with people. We want to pretend like we don't have any issues or problems. We don't want to be seen as needing to deal with sin in our lives.

More often than not, our sins—especially the addictive ones—find their power in the darkness. But do you know who else lives in the dark? The devil. There he speaks the language he's so good at, the language of lies, accusing the brethren. That's what the name Satan means: the accuser of the brethren. In the darkness he whispers things to us like this. "You're no good. How could God love you, you pathetic person? You call yourself a Christian? If only your family knew what you were doing, if the people around you in church knew how many times you've done this nasty, disgusting, rotten thing." But when you walk in the light, Scripture says, the devil loses his power in the light. In the light, the sin loses its control and is exposed. Then you have forgiveness of sin and fellowship with one another.

When you enlist others to help you, you confide in them. You expose the sin that's entangling you and they come alongside to help you. Now, you say, "I've been burned before, Pastor. You don't understand." I get it; I've been burned before too. There are sinners in the church as well as in the world. You might get burned. But the way God has designed our fellowship to work is that we are to be honest with one another and we enlist each other to help. Two are better than one in this fight for life. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says if you're going into a fight, go in with two people. That's better than one. If you go in with two people, the other one has your back. That's the old picture of how men fought. Two guys stood back-to-back as they went into battle. I can fight any foe when I know the second guy is fighting behind me and protecting my back. There's strength and power in this.

If you want to move to a greater level of sanctification in your walk with Jesus Christ, if you want to deal with the sin that's entangled you, if you want to deal with your addictive behaviors that you fall into time and time again, then enlist the Christians around you to help you. That's where the rubber meets the road in our relationships with one another.

The church is called the hands and feet of Jesus. That means that you and I do His work for others. That means somebody else can do that work for you and me. So our final application today is this: tell someone what you're struggling with.

The first application was to examine yourself and acknowledge you have a problem. It might not be that bad yet, but trust me. You can always find people who are worse off than you. You can always find people who make your problem look like nothing. I'm not saying you should compare yourself with anyone else; instead, compare yourself to Christ. Then once you've examined yourself and can say, "I do have a problem," decide to do battle against it. Are you going to stand firm or are you going to submit to it again? I hope you'll say, "I'm going to stand firm. I'm going to be what God has called me to be. I want to be like Jesus."

If that's the case, I challenge you today to tell someone about your decision, someone you trust. Get them on your side and let them help you in your fight. In some cases, this might even be a fight for your life.