



## Biblical Perspectives in Everyday Life

# THE SMOKER & THE SINNER

Today, as I sat in a local coffee shop, I watched a man cough and gasp for breath. He had a pale pallor and a sagging demeanor. His eyes seemed filled with despair. Everything about him spoke of sickness. My heart broke as I stole glances in his direction. I didn't want to stare, but his coughing, which was sporadic yet spasmodic, captured my attention. I was repulsed and saddened by the gag-filled noises he made. It sounded as if he was losing the fight to hold on to life. Then, something happened that turned my sadness into pity. You see, this man, the one fighting for breath, went outside to smoke.

My thoughts were not what I assumed they would be. I didn't think that he got what he deserved since he smoked. No, instead I thought how sad it was that he was so chained to cigarettes that he continued to smoke even though he was literally dying because of them.

Then my thoughts took another turn, this time toward God's Word. I thought about the proverb, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit is the fool that repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). In the past I thought that the "fool" deserved to be ridiculed for repeating his folly. Today, however, while watching this very sick man smoke in spite of his illness, I realized that the fool is only doing what is his nature. Neither the addicted smoker I encountered in the coffee shop nor the fool I encountered in Proverbs can help himself. In the truest sense, only God can help him.

Think about the apostle Paul. He lamented his continual struggle with sin. Although he knew what was right and what he wanted to do, Paul said he continued to do what he knew he shouldn't do and what he really didn't want to do (Romans 7:16-23). This is the same struggle that we all face.

Paul followed his confession with a question: "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24) He then provided the answer to his rhetorical question: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25). In other words, only God could help him.

The unknown smoker and the apostle Paul teach us a similar lesson. Sin is insidious and destructive. It is not content to occupy a part of our life; instead sin wants total control to the point of destroying our life. Sin often provides us pleasure but it is a momentary pleasure followed by an enduring pain. The counterpart to sin is discipline toward Christ-likeness, which may cause us momentary pain but yields lasting joy. It is the difference between circumstance-satisfaction (temporary pleasure/happiness) and soul-satisfaction (lasting joy).

So, here is the hope held out to those of us who have placed our faith in Christ: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:1-4).

Let us, therefore, live as those who are in Christ Jesus, walking according to the Spirit—not as dogs or fools, addicted smokers or persistent sinners who repeat what is repugnant and destructive. Only God can help us to live in freedom from the domination of sin. And if we stray, God's discipline may be momentarily painful but afterwards it will yield "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).