In today's society, we have sex-aholics, choc-aholics, work-aholics, shop-aholics, and golf-aholics. We have self-help programs called overeaters anonymous, gamblers-anonymous, internet-sex-anonymous, and smokers-anonymous. We have info-maniacs, credit card addicts, rock-and-roll addicts, computer geeks, television junkies, and kids who have never been seen since they disappeared into the video arcade. Why is it so popular to be an addict today, to the point that non-addicts become jealous and try to figure out whether there might be something they could be addicted to? There are two answers.

First, American culture encourages everyone to think of herself or himself as a victim. The psychological advantage is that victims get to avoid taking responsibility for their own behavior and can instead simply blame it on the addiction. No one is a sinner today. People are simply victims of their addiction. Addictions are often excuses for unacceptable behavior. For example, a mother-in-law may be civil to her daughter-in-law until the mother-in-law has a tiny sip of wine. A few molecules of alcohol in her blood are a signal to her that she no longer needs to be polite, and she can denounce her daughter-in-law with slurred speech. The slurred speech acts like a public declaration that, "I can no longer be held accountable for my behavior, because I am drunk, or at least tipsey!"

The second answer is deeper. Addiction is idolatry. Everyone who chooses something other than the Lord as the top priority in life is addicted to that idol. Addiction is so popular because idolatry is as popular today as it was in biblical times. This understanding of the problem suggests an effective response. Many people who have had a Damascus Road conversion (Acts 9:9) were freed from addiction on the day of their conversion, and lived to tell the story. When Jesus walked the earth, He could heal any disease that a person asked Him to heal. Faith healings of physical illnesses occur today with less frequency, but faith healings of addictions are still commonplace. Faith is so powerful because God is the key ingredient in recovery from addictions. Faith comes first, then it is necessary to put faith into action and "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8).

Some people who never knew a day free from craving alcohol or drugs are delivered from that craving in a heartbeat, at the very moment the Spirit comes into their hearts and they are "saved." However, even they need to do a lot of work to get free from the shadow of death. They might decide to remove from their apartment everything that does not bring glory to God. For example, they may find all their hidden whiskey bottles, drug pipes and needles, or pornographic magazines and throw them in the trash. They might well also end their friendships with drug pushers, get an honest job, and begin to repair the damage they have caused to themselves and their families.

Other people say, in the foolishness of their hearts, "I have stopped drinking and doing drugs, so why do I need to bother with such steps or with recovery programs? I can do it on my own." The problem is that an addiction is like a cancer that has spread to every aspect of life, and removing the primary tumor does not cure the metastases. One must also become a different person, in terms of moral responsibility and accountability to others. In other words, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17).