

## **"The Truth Shall Make You Free"**

By Reverend Pyle (Substance Abusers Victorious, © 1991; reprinted with permission)

### **THE PROBLEM OF A.A. AND THE CHURCH**

It is not our purpose to discredit the organization Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). But let the world keep it's AA – it has absolutely no place in the Church. In fact, as will be shown, the only way AA and the Church can work together is for the Church to reject the authority of the Scriptures, or for AA to abandon much of its philosophy concerning God, much of its Twelve Steps, and parts of its traditions.

For the Church to refer people to AA because "AA has the most effective program" is not much different than sending the evangelism committee to the Jehovah's Witnesses because they have the most effective door-to-door evangelism program.

We preach, *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14)*. Then we send new or weak Christians to smoke-filled AA meetings where profanity is acceptable; where Christianity is put down as "judgmental," "ineffective" or "no better than any other religion;" where members are told they may define God to suit themselves, but if they mention Jesus Christ they are either laughed at or expected to change their God.

**This is an abomination!**

As a Christian, one cannot straddle the fence and keep a foot in both camps, i.e., proclaim submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet endorse or give credibility to an organization that's teachings are openly contrary to Scripture. This is a reproach to the Gospel – it is "friendship with the world" (James 4:4).

### **A SPIRITUAL PROGRAM?**

AA claims to be a spiritual program. As Christians we understand "spiritual" to mean things that have their origin with God and which are in harmony with His character; the purposes of God revealed in the Gospel by the Holy Spirit; or men in Christ who walk so as to please God.

Observe what AA literature says about spirituality:

"We are told from the very beginning that AA is a spiritual program, but many of us are perplexed by the meaning of the word. There is no mystery in the spiritual side of AA. As a matter of fact, the good active member is practicing Christianity at all times whether or not he knows it."<sup>1</sup>

This sounds like another Gospel.

"Boiled down to its essence, Christianity, in fact spirituality, is simply LOVE. When you perform an act of pure love, something completely unselfish with no hope of gain or reward, you are participating in AA's Spiritual program."<sup>2</sup>

"Too often we hear an AA remark, 'I think this is a wonderful program but I can't understand the spiritual angle. To them the religion otherwise known as Alcoholics Anonymous is something complex, abstract and awesome.'<sup>3</sup>

"But, asks the alcoholic, where can I find a simple step-by-step religious guide? The Ten Commandments give us a set of Thou Shalts and Thou Shalt Nots; The Twelve Steps of AA give us a program of dynamic action; but what about a spiritual guide? Of course the answer is that by following the Ten Commandments and Twelve Steps to the letter we automatically lead a spiritual life, whether or not we recognize it."<sup>4</sup>

The impression one gets from this is that AA is superior to Christianity. In any event, the Ten Commandments were not given as a "guide." This thought reduces them to the Ten Optional Suggestions.

"The spiritual life is by no means a Christian monopoly."<sup>5</sup>

"He has lost faith, if he ever had it, in the power of religion to help him. But each of the miracles accomplished by Alcoholics Anonymous is a spiritual awakening."<sup>6</sup>

The problem is not a matter of "losing one's faith." Because of the rebelliousness and wickedness in one's heart, a choice is made against following God, and instead, following after the bottle. This certainly is not

God's fault. Alcoholics Anonymous, as such, performs no miracles.

On the one hand, AA states that it is not a church or religion. In practice, however, many of its members consider it to be a church. In fact, there are groups that meet on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings. Note some quotes from AA literature:

"Religion, later to be replaced by AA, is entirely out of the picture..."<sup>7</sup>

"Translating into terms of the alcoholic, we substitute ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS for RELIGION."<sup>8</sup>

"In the early days, the kitchen was the Church of Alcoholics Anonymous."<sup>9</sup>

"...To them the religion otherwise known as Alcoholics Anonymous..."<sup>10</sup>

### WHO IS GOD?

As Christians we believe:

"There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal most just and terrible in His judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

Westminster Catechism

We believe God's decrees are absolute and unconditional; that He is subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent.

*"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."* (Romans 11:33-36)

He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as

He pleases. God is holy and hates all sin. He is under no obligation to any of His creatures — especially to those who are in rebellion against Him.

The God of AA (the higher power, or "god as I understand him") is a figment of human imagination. In reality, those who hold to such notions are atheists because there is *no possible alternative* between an absolutely supreme God and no God at all!

Is your life based totally on God?

Do you seek His will in your life?

Do you desire to know Him better?

If not, you're still in darkness!

If it means nothing to you that Jesus, God's Son, came out of heaven to be born as a baby in a stable, to live the life of a man, to endure the Cross, dying as your substitute for the sins you committed, you're in darkness. You're dead spiritually, and *God's wrath is upon you!*

Contrast the one, true God — the God of the Bible — with the God of AA:

"The alcoholic, objecting at first to the spiritual factor, is urged to keep an open mind, meanwhile treating his own AA group as a power greater than himself... He begins to form his own concept of God. This is what most AAs are trying to say when they talk about a spiritual experience. They mean a certain quality of personality change which, in their belief, could not have occurred without the help and presence of the creative Spirit of the universe.

"Almost every one of our members will tell you that while he may not go along with a clergyman's concept of God, he has developed one of his own on which he can positively depend — one which works for him."<sup>11</sup>

"But I believe that conscience in almost anybody's language is a synonym for God."<sup>12</sup>

"There was only one man on this earth who was perfect and even HE did not think so. We can only try to grow each day in his ways."<sup>13</sup>

"Every member of Alcoholics Anonymous may define God to suit himself. God to him may be the Christian God defined by the Thomism of the Roman Catholic Church. Or the stern Father of the Calvinist. Or the Great Manitou of the American Indian. Or the Implicit Good assumed in the logical morality of Confucius. Or Allah, or Buddha, or the Jehovah of the Jews. Or Christ, the Scientist. Or no more than the Kindly Spirit implicitly assumed in

the atheism of a Col. Robert Ingersoll... But as far as the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is concerned, a pathological drunk can call God 'It' if he wants to, and is willing to accept 'Its' aid. If he'll do that, he can recover."<sup>14</sup>

"To cure your spiritual illness, you'll have to admit God. Name your own God, or define Him to suit yourself."<sup>15</sup>

"At this late stage, common sense, if I'll use it, will lead me to weigh each large or little issue on the scale of my conscience, which is the voice of my God."<sup>16</sup>

"When it was suggested to us as a step in this program, that we turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him, there were many of us who rebelled — determining that as between the extreme ruin from the bottle and the boredom of evangelism, we preferred the former."<sup>17</sup>

"(The) first step toward doing that job that God wants us to do is for us to live AA, for us to practice the principles of the recovery program in all our affairs, for us to give the basic principles of AA not only to our fellow alcoholics, but to the world at large."<sup>18</sup>

"Some religious organizations label the alcoholic a sinner and attempt to solve his drinking problem by saving his soul, but with little success."<sup>19</sup>

"...it is my sincere belief that God has saved us through AA because He has a job for us to do."<sup>20</sup>

"AA members do not always get what they want in life. No member gets all he wishes or prays for... His fondest wishes and most intense prayers are gratified only when they are in harmony with his daily thoughts and his constructive AA actions."<sup>21</sup>

The second tradition of AA states: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself' in our group conscience..."

The above teachings concerning God, were they taught by a church, would be branded as heresy. Much of it is blasphemous. This is the type of teaching that one can expect to receive in the AA recovery program. *As Jesus said in Mark 7:6-7, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."* Is it right to expose new or weak Christians to this kind of teaching?

## CONVERSION

The founders of AA were involved in the Oxford Group which was a non-denominational, theologically conservative, evangelically styled group. It is often mentioned that co-founder Bill Wilson had a conversion experience. One AA member put it this way:

"When Bill felt lost and abandoned and prayed for help, he had an experience similar to that of St. Paul and Mohammed."<sup>22</sup>

Note in his own words, Wilson's description of this experience:

"In his helplessness and desperation, Bill cried out, 'I'll do anything, anything at all!' He had reached a point of total, utter deflation — a state of complete, "AA members do not always get what they want in absolute surrender. With neither faith nor hope, he cried, 'If there be a God, let Him show Himself!' 'What happened next was electric. 'Suddenly, my room blazed with an indescribably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale by comparison. The light, the ecstasy — I was conscious of nothing else for a time.

"Then, seen in the mind's eye, there was a mountain. I stood upon its summit, where a wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of spirit. In great, clean strength, it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought, You are a free man. I know not at all how long I remained in this state, but finally the light and the ecstasy subsided. I again saw the wall of my room. As I became more quiet, a great peace stole over me, and this was accompanied by a sensation difficult to describe. I became acutely conscious of a Presence which seemed like a veritable sea of living spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world. This, I thought, must be the great reality. The God of the preachers.'

"Savoring my new world, I remained in this state for a long time. I seemed to be possessed by the absolute, and the curious conviction deepened that no matter how wrong things seemed to be, there could be no question of the ultimate rightness of God's universe. For the first time, I felt that I really belonged. I knew that I was loved and could love in return. I thanked my God, who had given me a glimpse of His absolute self. Even though a pilgrim upon an uncertain highway, I need be concerned no more, for I had glimpsed the great beyond.'

"Bill Wilson had just had his 39th birthday, and he

still had half his life ahead of him. He always said that after that experience, he never again doubted the existence of God. He never took another drink.”<sup>23</sup>

Notice that in this “conversion” experience, there is no mention of Jesus Christ or repentance of sin. Wilson goes on to explain that he read a book *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Written by William James, the psychologist, it suggests that the conversion experience can have “objective reality. Conversion does alter motivation, and does semi-automatically enable a person to be and to do the formerly impossible...”<sup>24</sup>

“If the spirit of that great psychologist, William James, could be consulted, he’d doubtless refer us to his famous book *Varieties of Religious Experience* where personality change through the ‘educational variety of spiritual experience or conversion’ is so ably explored. Whatever this mysterious process is, it certainly seems to work, and with us who are on the way to the asylum or the undertaker, anything that works looks very, very good indeed.”<sup>25</sup>

“Of course we speak little of conversion nowadays because so many people dread being God-bitten. But conversion, as broadly described by (William) James, does seem to be our basic process.”<sup>26</sup>

### SIN OR SICKNESS?

There is much controversy on the issue of whether alcoholism is a sin or a sickness. Generally speaking, Christians who believe in the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures strongly hold to the belief that the problem is sin.

Peer pressure is just as real to adults as it is to adolescents. Some Christian counselors, pastors, psychologists or psychiatrists, are faced with the dilemma of accepting the authority of Scripture on the one hand, or being accepted by their peers in their respective fields on the other. They want, or feel a need, to be accepted as professional or “in,” and not considered to be naive or religious fanatics.

It is both amusing and sad to watch them. Some try to sound “professional” and “expert,” and they pompously declare to the world that alcoholism is definitely a disease.

Some resort to double talk and call it “dis-ease,” which means nothing. Some say it’s both sin and sickness. They say it starts out as sin, but once a person passes over the undefined line and becomes addicted — when he loses control — he has a disease

and is no longer responsible. This is absolute nonsense.

“Bill [Wilson], a co-founder of this organization (AA), tells how his work with alcoholics and with himself and his own problem succeeded when the emphasis was changed from sin to sickness.”<sup>27</sup>

AA is very emphatic in its “disease” stance on alcoholism. The message is that alcoholics are in no way responsible for being alcoholic.

“We need not be ashamed that we have a disease. It is no disgrace. No one knows exactly why some people become alcoholic while others don’t. It is not our fault. We did not want to become alcoholics. We did not try to get this illness.”<sup>28</sup>

“We did not suffer alcoholism just because we enjoyed it, after all. We did not deliberately, maliciously set out to do the things we were later ashamed of. We did them against our better judgment and instinct because we were really sick, and didn’t even know it.”<sup>29</sup>

The American Medical Association declared alcoholism to be a disease in the 1950s. However, the American Medical Association is not our authority. God’s Word is!

Using current definitions of “disease,” almost anything can be called a disease. But remember, alcoholism only happens to people who drink. One third of all adults never drink, and these people can never become alcoholics.

The process starts as a result of a personal choice to drink. The process then deteriorates through drunkenness, self-deception and a myriad of related sins, to finally an unquenchable appetite for alcohol as a total enslavement.

God holds each of us accountable for the choices we make and for the moral patterns of life we elect to pursue. There are always consequences to our choices. Some are pleasant and desirable as a result of wise choices, while others are devastating and painful as a result of unwise choices. We don’t determine the nature of the consequences for poor choices. Likewise we don’t know ahead of time our degree of susceptibility, or when we are about to slide past a point of no return.

But these things are certain: When God forbids drunkenness, and when He clearly warns us that drunkenness is sin, and when He tells us that we will

reap what we sow, we can be 100 percent sure that if a person “sows” the seed of habitual drunkenness, sooner or later, there will be an abundant harvest of painful consequences. God, out of His infinite love and grace, will forgive our sins when we confess them. But, God, out of justice, cannot tolerate the sins of willful disobedience, regardless of who or what we try to blame. Therefore He may permit us to suffer severe consequences and pain as a result of our sins related to alcoholism.

It is good for us to be reminded that the sins committed which are related to alcoholism are no worse in God’s sight than any other transgressions. Lies, gossip, unkindness, etc., are all sins which God hates. All offenses (sins) need to be confessed.

Sin against God is the basic issue that always has to be addressed first.

Satan continually seeks to divert our attention away from the issue of sin and personal accountability. If he can persuade us that alcoholism is a *disease* rather than *sin* — if he can convince us that the alcoholic is a helpless victim of a disease or genetic circumstance— instead of accepting personal responsibility; if he can encourage alcoholics to call upon some generic higher power that can be defined any way they want, instead of calling upon the one true God through Jesus Christ; or if he can get the alcoholic to rely on a secular support group like AA instead of the Church where they can be spiritually fed, nurtured, loved, upheld in prayer, and guided through a study of the Word of God — then he can successfully keep the alcoholic enslaved in the bondage of drunkenness and its related sins.

Alcoholism is said to be a disease because:

1. It is primary. It is not a symptom of something else. (This is not true. It is actual a symptom of being a sinner. We sin — regardless of the particular sin — because we are sinners.)
2. Alcoholism is progressive. You use more and more and it gets worse. (So does sin!)
3. Alcoholism is chronic. You can never go back to it. (So is sin. Yield to it and you become controlled by it again.)
4. Alcoholism is fatal. Ultimately, it will kill you if you continue. (Sin is fatal — “the wages of sin is death...”)

5. Alcoholism is treatable. (No it’s not! Sin is not treatable. It must be punished. But Christ took the punishment. Keep in mind, God loves you very, very much. He offers His forgiveness regardless of what your sin may be — lying, stealing, gossiping, adultery, drunkenness, murder — no sin is beyond His ability to forgive and cleanse.)

The complaint is sometimes made: “Countless chemically dependant people within churches are not reaching out for help because they sense a judgmental attitude from their fellow Christians.”

No Christian has a right to be judgmental. On the other hand, practicing sin is not to be tolerated within the Church (I Corinthians 5: 11-13). It is not judgmental (or unloving) to call sin, “sin” — especially when God’s Word identifies it as such. Often, because of guilt, an individual thinks he senses a judgmental attitude in others, when in fact these so-called “judgmental Christians” may not even know he’s chemically dependent.

It has also been said, “There are numerous references to drunkenness in the Bible, but nothing is ever mentioned about ‘addiction’ or ‘alcoholism’.” Of course the Bible never mentions addiction or alcoholism. These are relatively modern terms. The Greek word *methe* means habitual drunkenness, and Christ paid the penalty for alcoholism/drunkenness/*methe*.

It is said that the alcoholic drinks involuntarily. *This is nonsense!* Our hearts beat involuntarily and many of our other bodily functions are involuntary. But to say someone drinks involuntarily is less than truthful.

Alcoholism (drunkenness) is listed as a work of the flesh. Galatians 5:21 states: “*that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” People don’t practice diseases. They do practice sin, however, and ultimately they run the strong risk of becoming enslaved. Drunkenness is always listed as sin (I Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; etc.) The Bible never excuses it, never suggests the slightest possibility that after one gets “hooked” that he will not be held responsible.

Advocates of the disease model admit their inability to cure patients. The reason is obvious. There can be no cure for a disease that doesn’t exist. Human beings cannot forgive sin. Treatment facilities can

clean up a drunkard, but only the blood of Jesus can cleanse a drunkard.

An attempt is being made to create a guiltless society in which people are not responsible or accountable for their behaviors. The fact of sin is ignored and the behavior is described as a medical, or emotional, or social problem. Those who promote the disease concept state that by calling alcoholism a disease rather than a moral (sin) problem, it relieves the alcoholic of guilt, and he is more likely to get help.

But guilt is not necessarily a bad thing. Normal people feel guilty when they have done wrong. We must question it when men call evil “good,” or darkness “light,” or bitter “sweet,” or sin “sickness,” guilt “innocence.” Theoretically, they do so, so they won’t feel guilty — even though before a holy God, according to His Word, they are guilty.

Guilt is an uncomfortable feeling and can be a great motivator for changing behavior. God uses guilt to bring about conviction of sin. Conviction brings us to repentance, which brings us to Jesus for salvation. In Jesus Christ, not only do we have forgiveness for sins, but we also have found a solution to the guilt problem. In Him we are justified — declared by God to be 100 percent righteous, our sins blotted out, washed away, the slate wiped clean. The old life is gone; we have received a new life, a new heart. We are new creations; the past is behind us. The guilt is gone.

Herbert Fingarette, in his book *Heavy Drinking (The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease)*, points out that no leading research authorities accept the classic disease concept. He quotes a leading research authority, “There is no adequate empirical substantiation for the basic tenets of the classic disease concept of alcoholism.”<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that proponents of the disease concept level their attacks toward Fingarette, but they do not have an answer for the research authorities.

The director of a treatment center takes issue with Fingarette by asking, “Why do thousands of experienced alcohol workers and recovering alcoholics accept that alcoholism is a disease?”

The answer is quite simple. The recovering alcoholics were brainwashed by alcohol workers who either were brainwashed themselves or knew they would be

discredited and fired on the spot if they as much as even questioned the disease concept.

Fingarette points out that “political and economic pressures as well as various constituencies within the health- services field have played a powerful role in actively promoting the scientifically discredited classic disease concept.”<sup>32</sup> The treatment of alcoholism has become a very big business.

Most treatment programs are based on the disease concept of alcoholism. Consequently, their lobbying, public relations, and advertising propagate the myth of alcoholism as a disease. In 1990, more than \$14 billion was spent on alcohol treatment. Naturally, the very greedy health-care industry is going to do all it can do to keep the disease concept alive.

In addition to the health-care industry, the liquor industry has a real interest in promoting the disease concept, and finds the idea suits its interests. With the health-care industry declaring that alcohol is not the cause of alcoholism, the liquor industry is completely off the hook. It is free to say that the vast majority of people who drink are not at risk — that there are just a few who, for some unknown reason, catch the disease.

There are many who are involved in the rehabilitation of alcoholics who know that alcoholism is not a disease. They prefer to continue treating a non-existent disease and so they refer to the disease concept as a “useful lie.” They believe that the lie serves as a means of getting people with alcohol problems to go for help — that the end justifies the means. *Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32).* A “useful lie” has never set a person free.

Secular treatment centers loudly proclaim that an alcoholic is a person who drinks because he has to — he can’t not drink. He has lost his will. He has lost the ability to abstain.

At the same time, they insist that if this person who has lost control enters treatment, he must voluntarily abstain from drinking. If he is able to voluntarily abstain, then their whole notion that he has lost control is out the window.

If alcoholism were a disease, one would expect medical doctors to be heavily involved in the treat-

ment process. Upon close examination, one will find that medical doctors are not involved and, in fact, medical doctors have limited knowledge in the treatment of alcoholism.

A study from London, based on 100 married male alcoholics, showed that those attending sophisticated treatment in a secular center fared no better than those who were told, "Stop drinking. Go back to work, and improve your marriage." Both methods produced the same result at the end of a year: about one third of each group had improved.

The disease concept is out of time with the facts. It is interesting that alcoholism seems to be the only problem that is addressed over and over as the "disease of alcoholism." You don't hear cancer or measles referred to, over and over, as the "disease of cancer," or the "disease of measles." The advocates of the disease concept seem to be trying either to convince themselves or to brainwash the public.

The Church must get involved in the debate about the nature of alcoholism, its cause, to what extent it is a sin that requires repentance, and to what extent it is also a harmful behavior with which some people struggle more than others. The care and "treatment" of alcoholics must not be left to those who disregard Biblical truths.

## THE TWELVE STEPS

AA states: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."<sup>32</sup>

The basic concept came from what Wilson and others had learned from the Oxford Group. The original steps openly mentioned God: "Came to believe GOD could restore us to sanity," and, "Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of GOD." When Wilson presented the steps as he originally wrote them to his group, there were objections from atheists and agnostics who wanted the word "God" deleted. Consequently, the creed was changed to "Came to believe that a POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES could restore..." and "...turn our wills and our lives over to the care of GOD, AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM."

From a Biblical perspective, there are problems with some of AA's twelve steps. We understand that AA is trying to make its program available to anyone who has an alcohol problem, whether he is Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, etc. They call their program a spiritual program, but they define spiritual as something totally foreign to Biblical Christianity's understanding of the term. To make the steps acceptable to all religions of necessity offends Christians, especially those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture.

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

Alcohol isn't the problem. God says the problem is sin. We may say we're powerless, but God still holds us responsible for all sins we commit. Each of us will stand before God some day. [Those of us who are Christians will be judged for our Christian good works and will be rewarded accordingly.] How will unbelievers explain to Him that they were "powerless," and that which He calls sin isn't really sin, but is really a disease.

Step 2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

The problem is not insanity. The problem is sin. To say our problem is insanity relieves us of personal responsibility for our behavior. The only power that can help us is not a "higher power," but the Highest Power, Jesus Christ. *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly"* (Romans 5:6).

Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our over to the care of God, as we understood him.

This is a generic god. Man has never been given the prerogative to define God to suit himself. Only the God of the Bible can forgive sins, break the power of sin and offer the free gift of eternal life. To even suggest a possibility that another "god" or "higher power" has equal position or power or status with the God of the Bible is heretical and blasphemous.

It is New Age thinking. It is idolatry. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). "...and there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another..." (Isaiah 42:8).*

Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

God does the searching. *"Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there be any hurtful way in me..." (Psalm 135:23-24). "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give each man according to his ways, according to the result of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17).*

[In The Most Excellent Way, we encourage people to: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5).* It is important that we involve ourselves in the daily cleansing of our old nature.]

Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

The Bible says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).* There is a subtle difference between "admit" and "confess." To confess means we agree with God that what we did was wrong and we don't want to do it again. "Admit" means simply, "Yes, I did it." What is the "exact nature of our wrongs?" It is sin! If we "admit" this sin to Buddha, or the Kindly Spirit, or some generic higher power, have we accomplished anything? Can these gods forgive sin or cleanse us from our sin?

Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

You can't blame your sin on a character defect. When a person becomes a Christian, he is a new creature. We are to live like new creatures. If we don't, it is because we choose not to, and not because we have a character defect. God, through the Holy Spirit, enables and gives us the power to live the Christian life. To call it a "defect of character" waters down the seriousness of sin.

Step 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

God will forgive our sins. He will not prevent us from sinning if we're determined to sin. Through the consequences of our behavior, through His chastisement, He can make us wish we hadn't sinned. Basically His command to us is, "Stop sinning!" There is a tendency for people to get bitter toward God when they discover that He doesn't physically prevent them from sinning.

Steps 8, 9, 10. There are no serious problems with these steps.

[For a Scriptural perspective on these steps, read *Rapha's 12 Steps in the Wrong Direction: A Critique of Rapha's 12-Step Program for Overcoming Chemical Dependency*, by Robert McGee with Pat Springle and Susan Joiner, at [www.christiandiscernment.com](http://www.christiandiscernment.com).]

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.

Prayer and meditation may improve the conscious contact of a believer with God. But not for an unbeliever. The only message the Bible has for the unbeliever is *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved..." (Acts 16:31).* A generic god such as "higher power" can do nothing, even for an unbeliever: *"They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see, they have ears, but they do not hear; Nor is there any breath at all in their mouth" (Psalm. 135:16-17).*

God has already revealed His will for us in His written Word and He has *given* us the Holy Spirit who empowers us to carry it out.

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).*

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and practice these principles in all our affairs.

We don't have "spiritual awakening" as a result of

following formulas or steps; and formulas and steps will not lead a non-believer to “spiritual awakening,” no matter how long he follows them. These steps will not bring him into a relationship with Jesus Christ, since Jesus Christ is our only hope for a spiritual awakening.

There are problems in trying to align certain Scripture passages in an attempt to add credibility to the steps. In order to make them fit, the meaning of the Scripture is often “bent” or misapplied. An example of a misapplied Scripture is the use of Romans 13:1. *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,”* is used as a proof text to justify the reference to “a power greater than ourselves” that “could restore us to sanity,” as per Step 2. The Romans 13 passage refers to government, while Step 2 is referring to a self-defined god.

The Twelve Steps of AA came from the Oxford Group — not from the Bible as some would have you believe.

*“The twelve steps of AA were in essence an evolution of man’s experience for many ages. They are truly the Christian code restated so that they can be more practically applied.”<sup>33</sup>*

*“It is not easy for an alcoholic to practice the principles of the Twelve Steps as our founders suggested they should be practiced. But, in doing so, we will, to the best of our ability, be conforming with God’s will each day of our lives on earth.”<sup>34</sup>*

Some would have you believe they either came from God or are equal with God’s Word.

*“God said if I didn’t think He had a large hand in that outfit (AA), I was still in the fog. As my new boss, He said the twelve steps were my tool to be used in building a smooth road from here on in.”<sup>35</sup>*

*“By following the Ten Commandments and Twelve Steps to the letter we automatically lead a spiritual life, whether or not we recognize it.”<sup>36</sup>*

*“But Christ didn’t shut Himself away from the world. He went out into the highways and byways, the length and breadth of Palestine to cure the sick, to give sight to the blind, cheer the down-trodden, to give the world the principles, many of which our founders have summed up in the Twelve Steps.”<sup>37</sup>*

Various ministries and organizations recognize a doctrinal or theological problem with AA’s Twelve Steps. Some change a few of the words so as to “Christianize” them. Others have developed their own twelve steps, completely different from those of AA.

Certainly there is nothing inherently wrong with “twelve steps” or “ten steps” or “ninety-nine steps” if that’s what an organization wants. But why should the Church borrow anything from the world?

The world, which is in enmity with God, has absolutely nothing we, as Christians, want. Stick with God’s Word. Everything the alcoholic needs to know in order to have victory is found in God’s Word. He will also discover that God is interested in giving him victory over *ALL* sin — not just drunkenness.

## SPIRITUALISM & PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

The founders of AA were involved in spiritualism and psychic phenomena.

This seems inconsistent with other aspects of their lives. For example, Bill Wilson urged his friends and “recovered” alcoholics to either join or rejoin a church.

Dr. Bob had morning devotions consisting of prayer, Bible study and meditation. He apparently was known for his prayer life — numerous people requested him to pray for them.

*“I was always glad to think that I was included in those prayers,” said Bill. ‘And I sort of depended on him to get me into heaven. Bob was far ahead of me in that sort of activity.’”<sup>38</sup>*

But Bill had a persistent fascination and involvement with psychic phenomena.

*“As early as 1941 Bill and his wife were holding regular Saturday spiritualist sessions, psychic experiments and sessions with an Ouija board.”<sup>39</sup>*

*“A man named Tom and his wife were regular members of spiritist activities. He states, ‘Bill and Dr. Bob believed vigorously and aggressively. They were working away at the spiritualism, it was not just a hobby. And it related to AA.’ According to Tom, Bill never did anything that was not in some way connected with AA and with his own spiritual growth.”<sup>40</sup>*

In letters Bill wrote in 1935 from Akron to his wife, he mentions séances and other psychic events. He was staying in Akron with Dr. Bob.

Wilson's psychic experiences are described in the AA World Service Book *PASS IT ON (The Story of Bill Wilson and How the AA Message Reached the World)*.<sup>41</sup>

What are we to make of all this? On the one hand, there is prayer, Bible study and church affiliation. On the other hand, there is the serious dabbling in psychic phenomena — the Ouija board, séances and other “contacts” with the dead — which most Christians consider to be Satanic. These activities seemed

to have taken place at about the same time as the founding of AA (1935), and continued through the formative years (into the 1940s).

To those who believe that AA is God-inspired we say, it is extremely doubtful that a holy God would inspire a “new truth” about victorious living to men whose occultist practices are contrary to the Word of God — and then transmit this so-called “truth” to His people through them.



*“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom,  
that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.  
To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.  
Colossians 1:28-29 NKJV*

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