

HUNGER FOR "HEALING" OR HUNGER FOR *RIGHTEOUSNESS*?

Keith Miller is a brother in Christ who has clearly struggled in his walk with the Lord and sincerely desires to offer words of hope to those with similar problems in living. There is no intent here to question his salvation or his motives in writing for the benefit of other struggling Christians. Writing a critique of a Christian brother's teachings is something that must be undertaken in a spirit of gentleness and loving concern, and certainly with fervent prayer. The purpose here is not to attack Keith Miller or any particular individual, but to express grave concern over the rampant spread of a "model for spiritual growth" that is borrowed from the unbelieving world. Contrary to popular belief, the 12-step movement was not created by followers of Jesus Christ, nor were its principles based on biblical teachings. (This is well documented and researched in *Twelve Steps to Destruction*, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan.)

Our basic approach will be to review the book step by step, pointing out both the truths that are acknowledged and the places where biblical truth is compromised. First, however, there are some broad areas of concern to be noted, along with a brief background of Miller's basic philosophy in embracing the 12 steps.

Keith Miller came into the 12-step program through a treatment center, where he was placed during a difficult time in his life. He had undergone a divorce, and in his words, was pursuing a "Christian work addiction." His attitude was one of resentment, frustration, and rebellion, believing that he was special and gifted (in biblical terms, this is pride). During this time period, most Christian books delivered the message that "if you commit your life to Jesus Christ, your problems will disappear." (A quick glance at the first few verses of James 1 and 1 Peter, along with an abundance of other Scriptures, should quickly dispel this unscriptural notion.) Miller now has nothing but glowing praise for the 12-step movement, despite its failure to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, calling it "the most important spiritual movement in America today" while churches decline in membership. (One wonders here: Why would the Lord have promised us "everything we need for life and godliness" in 2 Peter 1:3, yet leave His church without this "important spiritual model" for centuries?) He even terms it a "spiritual revolution" which is democratic, respecting the experience and rights of the individual while not allowing "theological ideas" to "impede

spiritual growth." Apparently unaware of the historical facts of AA's beginnings, he asserts that "the spiritual direction of the Twelve Steps came out of the Christian biblical tradition." Meanwhile, he levels the charge against the Christian church that it has largely eliminated the "biblical principles" that the 12-step groups use. He exalts the experiential basis for the program, claiming that "one's idea of God is entirely subordinate to the *experience* of a Higher Power as real in one's life." The Christian approach focuses more on written and cognitive means of knowing God, while the 12 steps focus on a community experience. According to Miller, the primary difference between Christianity and the 12 steps is *how* one gets to know what kind of God he is dealing with. As we will see, the gap is much greater and far more serious than this statement recognizes. Miller inadvertently acknowledges this in saying that "the people whom God uses to teach a new spiritual way are not recognized religious leaders but those who appear to be ordinary men and women." The 12-step movement is indeed a **new** spiritual way, not "the faith once delivered to the saints." Having accomplished salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, and having sealed His revelation to man in His Word, God is not at this time creating a "new spiritual way," but calling men back to the one and only sure way of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. Any so-called "new spiritual way," particularly one which fails to even mention God's plan of salvation, must be seriously questioned and compared with scriptural teachings.

Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture. The Scripture references that lead each chapter give a false impression that this book is actually based on biblical teachings. More careful reading reveals the secondary place given to God's Word as a basis for lasting life changes. For example, in speaking about the eleventh step (prayer and meditation), the author notes that Christian 12-step members have "additional" resources in the Bible and fellowship with other believers. Far from being an "additional" resource, the Bible claims absolute sufficiency in giving us all that we need to live a life that pleases God, and we are strongly warned against anything that is added to its wisdom! (See Proverbs 30:5, 6 and 2 Peter 1:3, 4.) In his discussion of Step Six, the willingness for God to remove our "defects of character," Miller admonishes those who have tried to "fix" themselves through additional prayer, Bible study, and such. While the Bible may be studied with improper motives, such as earning favor with God for long hours of study, Miller fails to balance his warning with the truth that God's word is essential and mandatory for Christian growth. The steps regarding amends to others reveal a type of situational morality that is individually

determined, rather than standards that coincide with the commandments of God. This is particularly glaring in his comments about whether or not sexual immorality ought to be confessed to one's spouse, and whether it is wise to confess and make restitution for monetary theft. The error is repeated when he indicates that sexual relations with a sponsor would end the recovery aspect of that relationship, but neglects to mention the obvious violation of God's laws. Probably most disturbing, however, is the statement that "some people who have burned out trying to be perfect Christians would rather not read the Bible for awhile." This aversion to God's Word, the "word of life" that God's children are called to hold out (Philippians 2:16), poses no apparent problems to Miller, who heavily promotes total acceptance of both self and others under any and all conditions.

Nonjudgmentalism/Individualism. Both the 12-step program and psychology promote an attitude of unconditional acceptance that defies the teachings of Scripture. The individual, and his own uniquely determined set of standards, reign supreme. This "live and let live" attitude (one of AA's treasured slogans) may well be a reaction against the sinful tendency to self-righteously condemn others for their actions while failing to confess one's own sin. The Pharisees were denounced for such an attitude. Scripture, however, commands simply that we look *first* at our own sin (Matthew 7:1-5), and *then*, in love and gentleness, confront the sins of others for their welfare. There is no indication in the Bible that we are to give ourselves unconditional acceptance (something we are all too eager to do). Quite the contrary, "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment" (1 Corinthians 11:31). The 12 steps, as presented in this book and elsewhere, give a mixed message of examining one's own sin and at the same time accepting one's own inherent goodness.

The "True Self"--Man's Inherent Goodness. An underlying assumption of man's inherent goodness surfaces throughout the book, standing in contrast to the sinful nature revealed in Scripture. In the 12-step program, according to Miller, "it's as if our personal power, folded carefully down inside us, begins to unfold, to blossom spiritually within us, releasing energy to live creatively and lovingly." He claims this is possible because we were created in the image of God. However, man's fallen nature, as so clearly outlined in Romans 1, came about in his exchange of God's truth for a lie, and his exchange of the worship of God for the worship of created things. In speaking of the "addicted" person, Miller claims that many people, feeling hurt, abused, and rejected by Christians who condemned them for their powerlessness over their addictions, "secretly felt that inside, behind their

compulsive and inebriated behavior, they were good people caught in a powerful craving that no amount of willpower could overcome." (There is no intent here to condone an abusive or rejecting attitude on the part of Christians, who are called to restore others *in love*.) In speaking to the process of recovery, Miller presumes that Step Four (the moral inventory) "leads us into an adventure of self-discovery, as we begin to know and love the person we are underneath all the outward image and acquired trappings." He compares the whole process to that of sculpture, chipping away at everything that "isn't you," and he says that the "emerging person has always been there inside us waiting to be reborn, the feeling is that we are new people, new creations. And we finally see that just as God made us to be--we are enough." This drastically defies Scripture. Apart from Christ, we are not "enough" and we never can be. The old self must *die*, not wait to be "rediscovered" or to "emerge" from within:

"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3, 4)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:2-4)

Anonymity. The so-called "spiritual foundation" of Alcoholics Anonymous, as revealed in its Twelve Traditions, is anonymity. Groups of "anonymous" people have spread like gangrene, along with the false 12-step theology. Miller quotes the 12 steps of a relatively new group entitled "Sinners Anonymous." It is a bit amusing, in view of the biblical statement in Romans 3:23 that "**all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God," to suggest that sinners could in any way be anonymous! The entire human race is involved in sin. There is no one righteous apart from Christ. Nevertheless, this all-inclusive

group inadvertently acknowledges that the problems of "addiction" we battle are not diseases, but sinful behaviors.

One final word of caution regarding anonymity is its antithesis to Christianity. Jesus commanded us to declare Him before men, the polar opposite of anonymity:

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."
(Matthew 10:32, 33)

Disease vs. Sin. Miller has created a unique term which reflects the mixed message and confusion encountered in the 12-step movement: "sin-disease." This hyphenated word embraces two distinctly opposite concepts that have been joined together by both psychology and the 12 steps. (Both sin and sickness result from the fall of man, but there are distinct differences that must not be confused.) Miller's addition of sin to the historical disease-based view of alcohol abuse and other behaviors is an admission of the fundamentally sinful nature of the so-called "addictions." However, it does nothing to bring clarity to the confused 12-step message.

Several factors might be noted in the development of this sin/sickness dispute. First, every person, like it or not, is born with an inherently sinful nature. In that sense, sinfulness bears a hint of similarity to disease. The resemblance is only a faint one, however, since God holds man accountable for his sin and explains in Romans 1 that "men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). In addition, God has provided a plan of salvation and promise of His power in overcoming sin. Another possible source of confusion is the fact that sinful behavior, such as abuses of the body using alcohol or drugs of food, often leads to the development of true disease. However, one must not confuse the consequence of sin with the original sinful acts.

Miller does acknowledge that the source of our painful emotions is sin, and that many have forgotten what it is all about: putting self in the center in place of God. However, his message is nevertheless an odd welding of sin and sickness. He talks of conscious *and* unconscious kinds of sin, a distinction that fails to emerge in Scripture. He notes the paradox that we are responsible for sin but powerless to defeat it on our own, but fails to point clearly to Christ as *the one and only way* of salvation and power over sin. The Bible does speak clearly about sin--its origin, its consequences, our responsibility before God,

and His plan for overcoming and walking in righteousness and holiness before Him. Never does Scripture even vaguely suggest that sin is a form of "sickness." Disease is mentioned numerous times in the Bible, always as a concept clearly distinct from sin. There is no promise that diseases will all be healed, though some are, and there is no indication that we are liable to punishment for being ill. Sin is distinguished from sickness in God's promise of redemption, as well as the certainty of our liability for punishment apart from Christ. This sin/sickness issue is certainly one of the major reasons that Christians must view the 12 steps with discernment.

Resemblance to Biblical Teachings. The author assures us that **or him** "there is no question that the 'Higher Power' of the Twelve Steps is the same God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." In view of the claim of Jesus to be **the** Way, **the** Truth, and **the** Life, this supposed reassurance leaves a dangerous opening to other "higher powers" that one may choose at will. In fact, Miller later asserts that "it doesn't matter. Start with whatever you have to as a Higher Power. Try the group, a sunrise, or a doorknob." Echoing many Christians in the 12-step movement, he claims that many discovered that their "higher power" is actually the same God that Christians believe in, and eternal life to them is a "bonus." But note Paul's warning:

"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Eternal life is not a "bonus," nor do people accidentally stumble into a belief in the true God revealed in the Bible!

Miller goes on to say that the 12-step "higher power" is **"amazingly like"** Jesus Christ (emphasis added), bearing a **"haunting family resemblance"** to Him (emphasis added again). This "power" is characterized by always loving and forgiving, giving people new starts to get into recovery, rigorously honest, moral, courageous, strong, never abusive, and loyal whether people deserve it or not. While these characteristics may hold true, they fail to include such "negative" traits as God's wrath, righteousness, holiness, and justice. There is no proper fear of God in the 12-step theology. Even more important, however, is the observation that similarity is exactly what makes this program so very dangerous:

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan

himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

(2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

There is no intent here to accuse either Keith Miller or any other individual of being a false apostle. God alone knows the heart, and my reading of this book without personal acquaintance leaves the impression that Miller is genuinely devoted to Christ. However, the passage ought to send chills up our spines as we review the 12-step program as a whole. The "loving higher power" of the 12 steps, which nowhere point to the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ, is a masquerade. The striking similarity is indeed, to use Miller's term, "haunting." People are deceived through this resemblance that embraces a counterfeit of biblical truth without the cross. Similarity must sound a loud alarm to the discerning Christian!

Christianized Twelve Steps. It doesn't take a high degree of discernment to see the flaws of 12-step theology in a secular setting. The Word of God is not acknowledged, and idolatry is encouraged in the broad "higher power" terminology. However, Christian groups are sprouting which claim to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and authority of Scripture. Maybe...Christian groups are sprouting, yes, but whether they fully embrace the sufficiency and authority of Scripture is open to question. But for purposes of this discussion, let's assume that a Christian group acknowledges both the Lord and His Word. It then becomes more difficult to answer their objections to the steps. Nevertheless, there are a couple of serious problems with using the 12-step approach to life.

First, Christians have the *whole counsel of God* in His Word. The 12 steps never mention salvation, which is the *one step* essential to eternity, and of far greater significance than any set of "steps" regardless of number or similarity to biblical truth. Thus, a false "salvation" is promoted, and also complicated by using 12 steps where **one** (the one never mentioned) is needed. Moving from salvation to sanctification, Christian growth--being conformed to the image of Christ--cannot be reduced to a formula. The entire Word of God must be studied and applied faithfully. In studying an excellent workbook for Christian growth, *Self-Confrontation* (published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation in Rancho Mirage, CA), there are 105 biblical principles enumerated. Even so, there is a caution against adopting the idea that God's Word can be reduced to any particular

number of principles. The 12 steps reduce the Word of God and thereby jeopardize one's growth in Christ, shortchanging the person who truly wants to grow in holiness and live to please God.

A second major concern is the conformity to a secularly developed model. As Christians, we are commanded to **not** be conformed to the world:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2)

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."
(1 John 2:15)

It would take a great deal of reworking for the 12 steps to properly reflect biblical truth. Even so, we would be building on a model created by unbelievers. This is not only unnecessary but dangerous when we reflect on our status in the world:

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as **strangers** here in reverent fear." (1 Peter 1:17)

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20)

The Christian is to be holy, consecrated, set apart (1 Peter 2:9). It is therefore inappropriate to imitate the world's "recovery" programs.

Having noted some background and primary concerns in reviewing the 12-step program, we will proceed to critique Keith Miller's book by documenting in more detail the errors in each of the steps. It might be helpful to quickly review Appendix 1, where the steps are reproduced along with a brief biblical critique.

STEP ONE: POWERLESSNESS...OR POWER IN CHRIST?

"We admitted we were powerless over Sin, that our lives had become unmanageable."

Keith Miller entered the 12-step program and embraced its teachings because his "faith wasn't working" for him anymore. It was difficult for him to admit his "powerlessness" because, in his words, "I had Christ." He claims that Christians often do not realize that they, too, are powerless and need help--with their spiritual and emotional pain, anxiety, confusion, and the so-called "spiritual disease" that underlies behaviors that the world calls "addiction." Speaking for Christian 12-step members in general, he claims that "we have become ready to admit that our **religion** is not enough to handle the compulsive fear and pain we can't get rid of" (emphasis added). Miller lists numerous behaviors that characterize the "unmanageable life" of Step One:

- Loneliness--because the person cannot reveal his true agenda of wanting to control others;
- Loss of feelings--attempts to numb painful feelings through control;
- Broken relationships and resentments, accompanied by a denial that one is attempting to control;
- Feelings that are exaggerated and uncontrollable;
- Making rules for others but not keeping them in one's own life;
- Forgetting to do things which nurture relationships;
- "Geographical cures" (an area for discernment because of God's command to "**flee** temptation");
- Fear of authority figures;
- Confused sense of reality;
- Attraction to seminars and books which feed the delusion of power and control;
- "Addictive" behaviors.

These are real problems that people face. However, it is disturbing to hear a committed Christian imply so strongly that Jesus Christ is *not enough* to overcome and handle these and other issues. In this initial step of the "program," both Christians and unbelievers unite in their admission of "powerlessness." The Bible, in contrast to the 12 steps, sharply divides these two groups in the matter of power to overcome sin:

"...everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it

forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:34, 35)

"You see, at just the right time, when we **were** still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6, emphasis added to stress past tense)

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you **used to be slaves to sin**, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18)

"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." (Romans 8:7-9)

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."
(1 Corinthians 10:13)

"I can do everything through Him (Christ) who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

These passages bring clarity to the issue of powerlessness. Sin is indeed a bondage, a form of slavery. The unbeliever has absolutely **no power** but is enslaved to sin. The 12-step program can only bring an illusion of power for the unbeliever who embraces a "higher power" other than Christ. There may be temporary relief or a switch from one sinful behavior to another that is less objectionable, but there is no lasting power over sin, and more importantly, there is no salvation from the eternal consequences of that sin. Note, in contrast, the past tense of Romans 5:6 above: "when we **were** still powerless." The Christian moves from slavery to sin into slavery to righteousness. God's powerful promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures every Christian of His faithfulness in temptation, and also issues a strong warning to the believer who pleads powerlessness. While Miller quotes Romans 7:15-20 to substantiate his claim to being powerless as a

Christian, and every one of us could readily identify at times with this passage--he fails to develop a view which includes Paul's surrounding words in Romans 5, 6, and 8. Note particularly the words which follow Paul's lament, words which point to the overcoming power of the cross:

"What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24, 25a)

It is essential to note that the believer's power is *only* in Christ and *never* apart from Him. After admitting such helplessness, Miller claims that 12-step members must learn to discern between what can be changed in *our* power in contrast to those areas where we are powerless. Jesus made no such distinctions:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do **nothing**." (John 15:5)

Miller also devotes a great deal of space to the matter of control: "Fear of control makes us liars who do not know that we lie." In the 12-step program, "we give up our delusionary control in order to gain a reality-oriented self-control." Compare this with scriptural teachings:

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39)

As Christians, we are called to give up control to our *sovereign* Lord, losing our own lives for His sake. As we walk with Him, a self-control in our lives will develop as a fruit of that relationship. Even that is not rooted at all in the efforts or abilities of self. The so-called "addiction" or "powerlessness" is at root a form of idolatry. Man has exchanged the worship of God for the worship of created things (Romans 1:25). The person who trusts in an idol (alcohol, food, work, another person, or whatever) does not set out to serve, worship, or yield control to that idol, but rather to *use* it for selfish ambitions and desires. However, all sin--and idolatry heads the list--develops into bondage, as the Scriptures quoted earlier show so well. The person who does not properly worship and acknowledge the Lord...bows down to his idol. What began as an attempt to use--control--becomes an experiences of being controlled. From a biblical perspective, this is what takes place. We must, nevertheless, hold to the position that the Christian has no

business claiming powerlessness. While he must never pridefully assert his own efforts to overcome, he must humbly acknowledge that his Lord has already abundantly provided the strength to withstand any and every temptation to sin. Only the unbeliever may claim powerlessness, and then, his one genuine hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This still doesn't cover all of the flaws with Step One. This step is a sinful substitute for the requirements of God: godly sorrow, repentance, acknowledgement of sinfulness and disobedience to a Holy God's commands. All of this requires far more genuine humility than a simple statement that basically says "I can't help it" and then redefines sinful actions as disease. The Christian, set free from sin, would do well to heed the warning of Peter before considering membership in a 12-step group:

"They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.'" (2 Peter 2:19-22)

STEP TWO: SANITY OR SALVATION?

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Step Two focuses on two basic issues: the willingness to believe in a power greater than oneself, and the restoration to sanity. The concerned Christian must raise serious questions in studying this step. Does it matter *what* power, or is any "higher power" sufficient to make a beginning? Is "restoration to sanity" equivalent to salvation?

The author confidently asserts that the only requirement here is "a **willingness** to believe--no content, no creed, no church affiliation, no religious experience, just a willingness, a sense of openness to a 'Higher Power'" (emphasis added). He claims that this "willingness" precedes conversion to Christ along with the sense of powerlessness, and that this "prior step" is left out of

contemporary discussions of Christian conversion. In addition, this "key of willingness" has opened a "large doorway" to specific faith in the living God of the Bible. As we saw earlier, Miller is not particular about the identity of this "higher power"--it must simply be greater than oneself.

This is a highly dangerous viewpoint. God may, in His sovereign design to save a person, use his 12-step involvement to draw him to the truth. We must bear in mind, however, that God regularly uses that which was intended for evil to accomplish His divine purposes. God uses severe trials, persecution, and abuse to conform His people to the image of Christ, and to draw them into a deeper dependence on Him. That does not validate the means in and of itself. It does not suggest, for example, that we ought to persecute another in order to send that person running to the Lord. God uses whatever He will. Just because a few people are led to the Lord within the context of the 12 steps...does not in and of itself validate those steps or the program in general. There are numerous others whose 12-step involvement substitutes for church fellowship and leaves them false assured, blissfully unaware that they are not right before God. The "higher power" and broad "openness" of the 12 steps are more of a pathway to eternal destruction than to the real way of salvation that is offered through Christ alone. Miller supports his view by quoting Mark 9:39-40, where Jesus says that "he that is not against us is for us." However, reviewing this passage in context, the person to which His disciples referred was casting out demons *in the name of Jesus Christ*, not under some vaguely defined "higher power." This distinction is crucial to understanding and applying Christ's words here.

Miller's discussion of this step includes an extensive section devoted to the concept of "insanity," including habitual irrational behaviors, stressful and frantic feelings, craziness, anxiety. He claims that there is a "conspiracy of silence about such fearful feelings--especially in the church." He equates the phrase "walking in the light" (from 1 John 1:7) with sharing of feelings in a 12-step group--"living in the light of the group's presence."

The words of John refer to walking in obedience to God's commandments, living in the light of **His** truth. The result of this walk with the Lord is loving fellowship with one another. The verse has nothing whatsoever to do with the popular modern advice to ventilate all of one's negative emotions in a group bonded together by a common sin. Such practice has more in common with gossip and slander than walking in the light of God's truth and love. The term "insanity" is a questionable substitute for

sinfulness--one of several substitutes offered by the 12-step program. What must be restored is our right relationship with God as our Creator and Heavenly Father, through salvation in Jesus Christ, not our "sanity." This step is thus seriously defective and cannot be embraced as reflecting biblical truth.

STEP THREE: SURRENDER WITHOUT SALVATION

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

Surrendering one's life to the care and rule of the true living God is indeed a part of Christianity. Miller does rightfully point out some problems of living that challenge the concerned Christian in discernment of this step:

- (1) The most basic problem of the "alcoholic" is his need to control and his self-centeredness.
- (2) The "caring Christian" can be a disguise for manipulation and control.
- (3) Some individual attempt to control by their intellectual understanding of a problem.
- (4) Some Christians treat God as **their** servant, called to do their will, reversing God's call to deny oneself and become **His** servant.
- (5) Christian conversion calls for a revolutionary change, and the radical nature of this change is not always taught to new believers.
- (6) One's concept of God may need to undergo drastic changes.

These problems, which are legitimate, can be addressed thoroughly through a knowledge and understanding of God's Word, and certainly **without** the 12 steps:

- (1) The basic problem of man is his sinful rebellion against God, and he does frequently place himself on the throne in place of God. The 12-step program, however, encourages new form of self-focus, particularly evident in the clearly selfish motives for "carrying the message" (Step Twelve).

(2) God looks at the *heart* and motives of the "caring Christian." The 12-step program attempts to eliminate intervention in the lives of others, whereas the Bible establishes some rightful authority and commands that we look *first* at our own sin, *then* go to confront and restore our erring brother.

(3) Scripture warns against merely hearing the Word of God and not following it up with practice (James 1:22-25).

(4) Christ's call to His disciples extends far beyond the 12-step commitment:

"Then He said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.'
(Luke 9:23, 24)

(5) There is indeed a revolutionary change that should be evident in the conversion experience. There is a *death* of the old self (Romans 6). The 12 steps, however, do not go nearly far enough in pointing to such radical change. There is *nothing* of this "death of self" in any of the steps. Instead, as Miller indicates so many times, there is a "true self" that is supposed to emerge when one's "defects of character" and "protective layers" have been removed.

(6) One's concept of God must grow through study of His revelation of Himself in His Word. The 12-step concept is radically deficient and in serious error by promoting the phrase "God as we understood Him." We never fully know the mind of our Lord, but we trust in Him and know Him more fully through the Bible. Miller talks of "firing old gods" and unwittingly displays an arrogance--to think that any mere man can "fire" God.

The recurring theme in all of this is control. Miller claims that there was "no Christian discipline in the groups to which I belonged that showed me how to face the control issues of my Sin-disease." He wasn't told that he must surrender his desire to control other people, places, and things. Mere words of decision do not accomplish the surrender of one's whole life and will to God.

Surrendering total control is indeed a part of one's walk with Christ, and the tendency to grab that control is a part of

man's inherently sinful nature. But while this step points toward a genuine Christian teaching, it is incomplete. There must be an understanding of the sovereign control of God, which contrasts sharply with the "kind old grandfather" image of God that prevails in 12-step groups (and this book). God's holiness, majesty, righteousness, and justice, even His wrath, must be acknowledged alongside His mercy, compassion, love, goodness, kindness, and forgiveness, characteristics that are much more popular. A full view of God develops the proper fear (reverence, awe, worship) of the Lord, and that in turn directs God's child toward surrender. Study of His Word also teaches God's command that we place our complete trust in Him and the promises He gives to those who fear Him. The trust, dependence, and surrender envisioned by Scripture are awesome compared to the weak substitute of the 12-step program. Finally, surrender has to be accompanied by *salvation*. When a person recognizes and meditates on the fact that he has been delivered from the wrath of God, saved from the eternal consequences of sin that would otherwise await him...then it is possible to respond with a heart of gratitude, praise, and surrender to the awesome, loving Father who accomplished that through the shedding of the precious blood of His Son. Surrender without the assurance of salvation, and without the full view of a God who is both loving **and** righteous, merciful **and** just, is bound to be superficial, subject to destruction because it is not built on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ.

STEP FOUR: SELF-CONFRONTATION OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE?

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

This step, with some revisions to ensure that the Word of God is used as the standard for evaluation, is one of the least objectionable. The serious Christian must examine his life before the Lord, remembering that only God fully knows the heart (Jeremiah 17:10), and the Bible is a two-edged sword discerning the thoughts and motives of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). In addition, it is imperative that the hope of the gospel message be embraced alongside this knowledge of one's own sinfulness. Otherwise, this step would undoubtedly lead to despair and the destruction of hope. God's forgiveness and cleansing are essential.

Miller discusses this step in terms of three basic purposes and then gives several suggestions in completing the step properly. His comments go far astray of the biblical view of self-confrontation before a Holy God.

The first purpose he notes is a deeper **self**-knowledge which leads to **self**-acceptance and **self**-love. He says that 12-step members have "decided to believe that God (along with some perceptive people) has accepted us in our self-centered powerlessness." One learns that he is "forgivable" and no worse off than anyone else. This is pure delusion. This deeper self-knowledge to which he refers can only lead to an awesome recognition that we can never meet the righteous standards of a Holy God. A quick look at Scripture shows that such confrontation of one's condition before God will dispel any notions of **self**-acceptance:

"'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'" (Isaiah 6:5)

"'My eyes had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'" (Job 42:5, 6)

Knowledge of self ought to lead to repentance, not the mistaken idea that God accepts us without conditions. He accepts us *only* on the condition that we accept the sacrifice He has provided in the death and resurrection of Christ. We are not inherently "forgivable," but forgiven purely according to God's infinite grace, love, and mercy, at the cost of the precious blood of Christ. While we have *all* sinned and come short of the glory of God, being "no worse off than anyone else" is used in this context as a way to minimize the seriousness of our guilt before God. We are even told to "banish the myth that you should have been perfect." This is inconsistent to God's call to repentance and admission of our disobedience. If we "shouldn't have been perfect," then why would God have needed to send Christ to die on our behalf on the cross? Miller's conclusions are founded on the unbiblical presupposition that man possesses an inherent goodness, a "true self" that is pure. This is simply not in line with biblical truth.

The second purpose, highly inconsistent with the self-acceptance and self-love indicated previously, is to face the truth about our own behavior--our deceit and self-justification. Indeed we must, but this is only possible using the sure, eternal standard God has declared in His Word. We must also embrace the truth of Jesus Christ and God's plan of salvation, or we will be utterly destroyed.

Third, Miller lists three basic "instincts"--sexual, social, and financial/emotional--which he claims would make us happy "if we just experienced them in a normal way." Although the Lord may give us wonderful blessings in these areas when we obey His commandments, in contrast to experiencing them "in a normal way," the foundation for happiness (better termed joy) is in our walk with Christ regardless of outward circumstances. Miller does indicate the dangers of fear and resentment, which he defines as anger focused on punishing an offender or seeking revenge. He does go astray in claiming that "normal anger" mobilizes strength for fighting or making a legitimate defense. He fails here to distinguish between righteous anger, a rarity for sinful human beings, and sinful, self-focused anger (the kind likely to pursue a "legitimate" defense). Going back to the three "instincts," greed and selfish desires in these areas truly do lead to sinful behavior and attitudes. A biblical examination of one's heart would surely include these categories, though they are not all-inclusive.

Some of Miller's recommendations in proceeding with the inventory are worth examining with a view to biblical discernment. One concern is his focus on feelings, typical of both psychology and 12-step groups. He even uses the term "born again" to refer to a change in feelings--highly misleading, since Jesus spoke of being "born again" to mean receiving salvation in Him. Miller insists that you must "feel your feelings as you go" and even recommends listing *all* resentments that can be remembered during your entire lifetime, a highly questionable practice that may stir up hatred rather than cleanse. He suggests the feeling-oriented approach of taking one's own time with this step and not rushing, as if there were all the time in eternity to make this self-examination, because the program is one of "progress but not perfection." This last phrase is not consistent with the Christian "program" of sanctification, being conformed to the image of Christ. There is a holiness and perfection to be pursued, though we are not entirely without sin during this lifetime.

Miller promotes reliance on the "higher power" of one's choice in doing this step, suggesting that one's eyes be kept on Jesus "when walking on the waters of the unconscious." It is true that our eyes must be always on Jesus, on God's plan of salvation, when examining our hearts before the Lord. However, it is important to note that the concept of "unconscious" grows out of psychological theory. It is not mentioned in Scripture. What we really must do is hold up our lives to the light and truthful standards of God's Word, not delve into the "unconscious."

One fairly useful suggestion is that we focus on our own sins, even in recalling our resentments, resisting the urge to focus on sins that others have committed against us. While it is true that we are to *first* acknowledge and confess our own sin, and that this is essential to assuring our salvation, the 12-step program is deficient in biblically responding to the sinful actions of others. Some--maybe many--of the people who seek help in 12-step programs have experienced serious abuse in earlier times, possibly during tender childhood years. There is no intent here to promote a victim mentality, or to minimize the necessity of examining one's own sins. However, a full biblical view leads the person to a godly response to persecution--a forgiving spirit, a love for one's enemies, and efforts toward restoration of others and reconciliation. Psychology promotes more of a self-defense and self-justification than the 12 steps, but the 12 steps do not handle matters of real victimization adequately. The subject is never properly addressed.

Step Four is a "step" in the right direction, much more than some of the others. However, it must still be regarded with concern and discernment. God's Word must be the authoritative standard for judgment, and the hope of the gospel must be embraced to avoid total despair. Self-love and self-acceptance are not the ultimate goals of the evaluation, but rather the problems. Sinful man is all too eager to love and accept himself, and he does so quite naturally without lessons. The goal is rather to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:5) and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), as well as to accept the salvation that God has provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

STEP FIVE: REPENTANCE OR RELIEF?

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

Confession is an integral part of both Christian conversion and ongoing growth in the Lord. The child of God must confess first to Him, and then to others he has sinned against. The fifth step of the 12-step program sounds similar but is deficient in its methods and motives. It is an inadequate counterfeit.

The primary motive given for this step is *relief*, reflecting the major reason that most people enter the 12-step program...desire to be relieved of the emotional pain they are

experiencing. Miller states that the 12 steps give what alcohol (or some other *idol*) was supposed to provide: relief. This is not a godly motive. It more closely approximates the worldly sorrow that leads to death and results from suffering the consequences of sin, rather than the godly sorrow that leads to repentance and new life:

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."
(2 Corinthians 7:10)

Miller claims that confession has largely been eliminated from the church, that since the Reformation Protestants believe it is no longer necessary. This, he supposes, is "part of our delusion, the way the disease works." He fails to mention that the Reformation eliminated the requirement that one go before a priest to confess. Any child of God may go directly to **Him**. The use of a priest is similar to the 12-step method of confession, designed for relief rather than genuine repentance and subsequent change of lifestyle.

The method, nonjudgmental listening from one who is not involved in the original sins to be confessed, is neither biblically based nor productive. Miller bases his model on James 5:16, but reading that verse in context shows that it relates to *physical* illness, and confession before ordained elders of the church, not an exercise before uninvolved parties designed merely for relief. Miller says that "being heard" is experienced as love and acceptance from God, and that the other person is there merely as a witness, not to give advice or suggest solutions. While it is true that compassionate listening is an essential part of Christian ministry (James 1:19--"everyone should be quick to listen"), that listening is not productive, and in fact may be harmful, if not followed up with godly counsel. Step Five is said by Miller to be a "spiritual filter for toxic memories, thoughts, and behaviors of the past that continue to sabotage and poison our lives and relationships in the present." Such sinful thoughts and behaviors (not "toxic") require thoroughly biblical counsel. Mere listening, without counsel that gives hope and help, can lead to further despair. Other problems are also evident in holding this step up to the light of God's Word. "Confession" to an uninvolved party can be a subtle form of gossip. The "confidentiality" required is not a biblical concept. While privileged information should never be disclosed carelessly, it could be necessary to bring in church leaders or others--for example, if the steps in Matthew 18:15-20 are indicated for a person continuing in

unrepentant sin. The model of confession anticipated by this step is highly defective from a biblical perspective.

We can also observe in Miller's chapter on this step the problem of *similarity*. He claims that the 12 steps take the difficult-to-read New Testament principles and put them into the language of "what happened this morning." While it may take some diligent effort, study, and teaching to relate biblical truth to modern life, it is certainly not impossible, and the 12 steps don't even begin to cover this territory, nor do they reflect New Testament teachings. Miller points to the "understanding family" of the 12-step group, which includes many unbelievers. Meanwhile, as Christians, we belong to God's family and are brothers and sisters in Christ. A false "family," based on common sin rather than common salvation under one Heavenly Father, has replaced God's design for His church. Most disturbing is Miller's use of the term "conversion" to describe Step Five, and his equating it with Christian repentance. Some Christians may take this step with a true attitude of repentance (only God knows the heart), but the step itself, with its emphasis on "relief," doesn't equate with repentance. And it certainly is nothing like conversion, or "new spiritual birth" (another term used to describe Step Five), which necessarily requires receiving Jesus Christ as Lord. Miller says this form of "new birth" is finding out you are "acceptable and lovable." The Christian's "new birth" is finding out that you are *not* acceptable, and *not* inherently lovable, but that God demonstrated His love by sending Christ to die for you while you were yet His enemy, a sinner (Romans 5:8). His acceptance is based on the shedding of Christ's blood, and that infinite grace is cheapened by the idea that we are somehow acceptable without any conditions whatsoever.

Again we are faced with the erroneous idea of finding one's "true self" and the beginning of **self**-acceptance: "As our denial cracked open we began to realize who and what we like and what we want to do and be." The Christian has to realize who he is apart from Christ (sinful, an object of God's wrath), who he is *in Christ* (a new creation, God's child, co-heir with Christ), and what **God** wants him to do and be. The "true self" teaching is one of the most dangerous concepts to be promoted by pagan, popular psychology and the 12 steps. It erodes the greatness of our salvation in Christ.

One example given by Miller begins to point the way to true Christian confession. A husband arrives home early from a business trip, only to observe his wife involved sexually with the man next door. He sees her, but she doesn't see him. Miller

correctly observes that she must confess that sin to her husband in order that their relationship be restored. What is also true, but not mentioned, is that the husband has an obligation to confront her, in love and gentleness (admittedly not easy!), for that same purpose of restoration. There must also be confession to the Lord. Unless the sin is not forsaken, it need go no further. The required confessions are to God and to the one offended, not to uninvolved parties for "relief" (others may have to become involved to provide godly counsel and assist in restoration of the marriage, but this is a much different purpose for outside involvement.) God promises to be faithful in forgiving our sins when we confess them. He will remember them no more. He also promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness and cleansing--these are the valid purposes of confession, not relief. Miller says that "human wholeness" is about being "perfectly imperfect." God says this:

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Confession, accompanied by a broken heart of repentance, is the beginning of the Christian process of sanctification.

STEP SIX: REMOVE...OR RECREATE?

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

This step involves an attitude--the motive of one's heart in seeking change. Miller does head us in the right direction in acknowledging that it is God's power, not our own efforts, that make transformation possible. He is also correct in stating that one must be willing for God to remove *all*--not just some or most--"character defects" (better termed *sin*). Our total commitment to the Lord is important and necessary.

There are problems in his discussion of desires. He says that "whenever our desires exceed their natural purpose, we are involved with sin and character defects." (Note: The word "and" in this quote implies a distinction between "sin" and "character defects.") It may be true that something good may be desired for wrong reasons, or substituted in place of God (James 4:3). God's good gifts may be distorted. Sex is an excellent example. It is also true that we may enjoy our sins and hesitate to give them up.

We must go beyond Miller's analysis, however, and recognize that our desires are sometimes *evil desires*, or lusts:

"...your old self, which is being corrupted by its *evil desires*..." (Ephesians 4:22, quoted earlier)

"But each one is tempted when, by his own *evil desires*, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:14)

"Through these (His glory and virtue) He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by *evil desires*." (2 Peter 1:4)

For example, homosexual desire is not "natural," but evil in God's sight. The same could be said about cravings for excessive alcohol, other sexual sins, and so forth.

Miller tells us that we have the "freedom in Christ" to choose cancer (a strange example, since this is genuine disease) or make other choices that do not honor God. He urges us not to attempt to control others so that they make the "right choices." In all of this, he goes much too far in suggesting that God allowed our desires to go unchecked. We have "freedom in Christ" *from* sin, not *to* sin:

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." (Romans 6:18)

We are slaves to righteousness in Christ, subject to His commands. Certain choices no longer exist for the Christian. As for intervening in the lives of others to influence their choices, Scripture does not necessarily forbid this, but rather insists that we first handle our own sin, and also examine our motives for confronting others. Is it ministry, motivated by Christ's love, or manipulation, motivated by love of self? The true disciple of Christ is His bonds slave, making a total commitment to Him and demonstrating His love toward others.

Miller mentions that the motive for change in the lives of most 12-step members is pain, not the desire to become a better Christian. This is a serious problem with the program. As followers of Christ, we are instructed to live our lives to please God, not to please ourselves. Pleasing Him will involve some pain, some endurance through trials and persecution, but with the knowledge of His sovereign purposes being accomplished, and with the comfort of knowing that we are being conformed to the image of

Christ in the process. The discussion of this step misses out on proper godly motivation.

The most serious deficiency in this step may be its implication that some of self may remain after this removal of "character defects." Again we are faced with the presupposition that there is a "true self" that is good. This is inconsistent with the scriptural teaching that *all* of the old self is crucified with Christ. More than mere "removal," we are being recreated by our Lord:

"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:2b, 3)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3)

STEP SEVEN: REMOVAL OF SHORTCOMINGS...OR REMOVAL OF SELF?

"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

This step is described as an experience of being "born again," but as usual, without the gospel of Jesus Christ or the necessity for a complete death to self. There are several major problems for discussion: the definition of humility, the problem of loving/accepting self unconditionally (again), and the full scriptural process of putting off/putting on as we undergo "disciplined training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Miller tells us that the 12-step program defines humility as "seeing ourselves as we actually are, good and bad, strong and weak, and acting authentically on these truths." It is also a "clear recognition of who we are followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be." Our problems lie in pretending to be more than we are and maintaining expectations of self that are too high (grandiosity). God must become the "owner of the business," and not merely our "helper." Previously, "in our heads we wanted God's will, but our daily decisions said we wanted our own will." Miller sees this drive to be in control as part of our "disease." We need to learn that we are not the central power in life and cannot attain good feelings by our own strength.

There is certainly some truth in all of this. God looks at the heart, the inner man, and sees how it differs from the outward appearance as expressed by our words. He does expect to be the "owner of the business" of our lives. Our own power, of course, is inadequate to please God or to develop God's peace, joy, and other good feelings which characterize the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). The problem that emerges, as it inevitably does throughout these steps, is the assumption that there is some inherent good in the self apart from Christ. Miller claims that we discover the "latent power that God has put in us" when we admit we are powerless, and he supposes that we must love ourselves before we can help others--something that is supposed to result from this step. The Bible assumes that we already do love self, and that is the problem, not the goal, in preparing to help others. God promises to lift up the person who humbles himself under His mighty hand (James 4:10). Miller's definition, however sincere, is inadequate in claiming some latent good residing in self. A total death to self must take place, followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God does not, as Miller claims, "accept you as you are, warts and all." If He did, Christ's crucifixion would have been unnecessary. God accepts us on the condition that we receive salvation through Christ, and then He transforms us totally, putting the life of Christ in us:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

This step is a substitute for the biblical concept of disciplined training in righteousness, which involves the "putting off" of the practices of the old nature, followed by a "putting on" of the qualities of Christ. Miller talks about putting in "new positive information." While some of this is helpful (considering the many blessings for which we can thank God), most of it is simply self-statements, rather than putting on the qualities and practices that reflect Jesus Christ. The step itself never mentions the "putting on" side of the process:

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." (Colossians 3:12)

Miller quotes Luke 11:26 in describing this step. In that passage, Jesus casts a demon out of a man, but when demon returns with seven of its cohorts, the man's condition is even worse. This is an excellent passage to expose the concern that Christians

ought to have over the 12-step program in general. People come and cast out their "demons"--alcohol, drugs, food, and other sinful behaviors (idols). Since Christ is not Lord of this program, and the Holy Spirit does not come to indwell those who embrace a "higher power" of their own choosing (an idol), the original "demon" is replaced with the erroneous teachings and idolatry of the 12 steps. The person's *spiritual* condition is worse than it ever was, because he lives under the delusion that his "higher power," his idol, has given him the answer. He remains blissfully unaware of the condition of his eternal soul.

STEP EIGHT: AMENDS - SUBSTITUTION FOR RESTITUTION

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

Keith Miller tells us that the 12-step process is very different from the model for spiritual growth that many of us have seen at home and in the church. While our human models may indeed be sinful and not perfectly represent the teachings of Scripture, the 12-step process is far removed from a true application of biblical principles. Steps Eight and Nine both concern making "amends" to others, and both substitute for the biblical processes of forgiveness and restitution.

According to Miller, our former religious teachings implied that after coming to Christ, a person is "cured" and does not sin anymore. There is a confusion here between the death of the "old man," and the ongoing process whereby we put off the *practices* of that old self. At conversion, we are delivered from the eternal consequences of sin. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ (Romans 6:1-14). We are given the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to not sin, and we begin a disciplined training in righteousness.

One of the major problems with this step, as with all the others, is the failure to acknowledge God's Word as the standard for determining who has been harmed and how. The Bible instructs us in this area, and also directs us regarding confession to others, seeking and granting forgiveness, and when to make restitution. Although a professing Christian, Miller advocates an individual determination as to whether one has harmed other people. This is a dangerous and unbiblical practice.

Another major flaw is the claim that we can "wait until ready" for this step. Miller even advises that the prior seven steps may take two to three years before this eighth one is

approached! In contrast to this taking of one's own sweet time, God places an urgency on the restoration of relationships, to the point where we must interrupt our worship to go and be reconciled:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23, 24) Note: Oddly enough, Miller quotes this very verse in his introduction to Step Nine!

The 12-step attitude of individual readiness reveals another deficiency, shown in Miller's statement that this step "is not primarily for the benefit of the other people." This fundamental selfishness in the 12-step program is anything but biblical. The person who forgives and seeks forgiveness will ultimately benefit in the process, but that is a fruit, a "fringe" benefit if you will, not the primary purpose:

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Miller claims that *before* we can love others, we must do whatever we can to heal the broken and bruised relationships of the past. While it is true that we must diligently attempt restoration of broken relationships through seeking forgiveness and developing a forgiving spirit, the Christian cannot claim a lengthy period of preparation *before* being able to demonstrate love to others:

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." (Romans 5:5)

There is some good discussion in this chapter about examining our own sin first, and going to others with a forgiving spirit, relinquishing any right to seek our own vengeance. This is in line with Scripture, although the 12-step program regularly disregards the reality of God's wrath:

"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

Some additional clarification is needed here, however. Forgiveness is a promise to "remember no more," as God has promised with regard to our sins. We are to *first* look at our own sin and ask forgiveness ("take the plank out of your own eyes"--Matthew 7:5). *Then* it may be appropriate to help "remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5), in a spirit of gentleness, seeking to restore him (Galatians 6:1). While Miller is correct in his stress on seeing our own part in damaged relationships, he fails to give the complete picture that includes restoration of the other person, along with reconciliation of the relationship.

Finally, we again have the basic "good self" theme that prevails throughout this program:

"Because of our new sense of self-esteem, of being good and worthwhile (because of grace) even in our imperfection, we can afford to catch these things" (sins).

This statement is rather odd in view of the way 12-step thinking turns sin upside down so that it becomes a "disease." The Christian need not fear the label of *sin*, because he has the cross of Christ, not because he is "good and worthwhile." The basic depravity of man is ignored in Miller's statement, as it is in popular psychology and the 12-step program generally. Miller goes on to say that facing buried guilt and resentment is a major step toward "being comfortable with ourselves." Truthfully, an accurate assessment of our sin should bring about exactly the opposite, the knowledge that one *cannot be* "comfortable with self" in that sinful condition. God's grace and mercy are necessary because we are *not* inherently good and worthwhile, not because we are. Miller tells us that the "sin-disease" is "a disease of denial and deceit." "Denial" is a psychological concept that claims we are driven by *unconscious* motives to sin, and it is therefore not in line with Scripture. Deceit, however, is consistent with the Bible's teachings about the heart of man, which is "deceitful and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). And we can see it here. Man deceives himself into thinking that his sin is "disease," and that God's grace is given in response to man's goodness. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Lord is deeply concerned about the restoration of our relationships, as evidenced by the numerous "one another" passages. He is concerned that we seek forgiveness and make restitution where required, and that we are willing to forgive and restore others at every opportunity. In contrast to the self-

focused concern of the 12 steps, God desires that we bring glory to Him and demonstrate His love to others as we look at our sins in relationships with other people.

STEP NINE: MORE SUBSTITUTIONS

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

This step is the actual making of "amends" to those the 12-step member determines he has harmed. Miller claims that being a Christian does not *require* this step. He is correct in one sense. Being a Christian does not require working the 12-step program at all--a program which is basically a counterfeit of biblical Christianity. On the other hand, the Lord *does* command His child to seek forgiveness, make restitution where required, and make every effort toward reconciliation of broken relationships. Following such commands is a "fruit of repentance," visible evidence that the person really does love the Lord:

"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." (1 John 3:10)

This demonstration of love is not optional. The 12-step program has a tendency to place no demands on anyone. It is a "*suggested*" program of recovery. The God of the Bible does not make "suggestions" (imagine the 10 "suggestions" in place of the 10 *commandments*!) for sanctification. He gives commands that are to be obeyed by those who love Him. Miller mentions the call to love one's enemies, and the biblical truth that love is an action, not merely a feeling. These comments are good, but again, not optional for the Christian.

Several problems emerge in Miller's discussion of Step Nine...the ever present focus on self, unbiblical ideas concerning the role of reconciliation in this process, and his urging that we *not* bring religion into our attempts to make amends. Each of these areas needs a closer look.

The 12-step program is fundamentally centered on self, regardless of its appearance. Here are several of Miller's conclusions, typical of 12-step thinking and practice, that reveal this unbiblical focus:

** He claims it is "worth the rejection" risked in going to make amends, because of the serenity and self-acceptance that is gained. Although going to seek forgiveness and reconciliation should lead to peace, at least with the Lord if all biblical principles and procedures have been followed, the motive here is selfish. There is no consideration of the other person's welfare.

** There is a claim that you ought to "make amends to yourself." Miller talks about an "unreal adaptive self," compared to the layers of an onion to be peeled away to reveal the "true self." This is similar to popular psychological opinion that you must "forgive yourself." There is no biblical command to do so. Man is already far too willing to forgive and excuse himself.

** Miller claims that a sponsor can stand in for a person who cannot be contacted due to death or other circumstances--or that it can be done in prayer. This supposedly "removes guilt and negative energy from your heart." Forgiveness is meant to be other-focused, not done for relief. The one kernel of truth here is that confession should be made in prayer to the Lord if the individual who has been harmed is deceased or otherwise unavailable, because every sin is an offense against the Lord.

In discussing the role of other people in this step, Miller claims that "reconciliation is not crucial," and the reaction of the other person "does not control your recovery." If the individual is a spouse, the attempt at amends may result in restoration of the marriage or divorce--no discussion of the biblical grounds for divorce, whether or not the spouse is an unbeliever, the role of church leadership, or church discipline. There is a *little* truth in his comments. We are commanded to behave in a godly manner, even if all possible efforts at reconciliation ultimately fail. However, our efforts are not limited to one brief encounter where one seeks to make amends for the sake of his own relief. The process that God requires is far more involved, and may lead to the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 (church discipline). The response of the other must not control our responses. We must always obey God. But when we do obey God, the process is other-oriented and glorifying to God, not an exercise designed merely for one's own relief and "recovery."

It is particularly disturbing to note Miller's statement that the "Big Book" (AA's "bible," given a level of authority that rivals or exceeds Scripture in 12-step groups) advises against

"leading with religion" when making amends. While it would be wrong to use one's faith as a manipulative technique to ensure a positive response, the Christian must give glory to God and be a witness for Jesus Christ. Here and in Step Twelve, the program's "warnings" against sharing of a specific faith...are unfathomable for the person who wants to serve and honor Christ.

Miller concludes his chapter on Step Nine by repeating the "promises of the 12-step program," which include: New freedom, new happiness, disappearance of uselessness and self-pity, interest in others, disappearance of economic insecurity and fear of people, and the ability to intuitively handle life situations. This program is truly a *religion* unto itself. It is a substitute for the one way to God, faith in Jesus Christ. The promises given by our faithful Heavenly Father to those who are His children are infinitely higher than what might be gained by this program--particularly the promise of eternal life with Him:

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."
(2 Corinthians 1:20-22)

STEP TEN: "TRUE SELF" ... OR NEW SELF?

"Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

This step is faintly similar to the biblical truth that we must continue to judge ourselves and recognize that our strength is in the power of the Holy Spirit, never in our own unaided efforts:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power."
(Ephesians 6:10)

"But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment." (1 Corinthians 11:31)

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Miller even makes mention of the fact that Christ's death and resurrection free us from sin (although sin is not a "disease" as

he claims). It is unfortunate that this truth is not central to the "program." As with Step Four, it must be cautioned that God's Word is the only reliable standard for this daily "inventory," better stated as a continuing confrontation of one's own sin. Reviewing the chapter on this step, there are three specific problems for discussion. One is his focus on the present, discounting the past *and* the future. Second is his statement that we are "cleaning house" for a "new tenant"...not the indwelling Holy Spirit, but the "true self." Third, he stresses *feeling* forgiven and acceptance of self. (This objection is really getting old, but it must be repeated to stress the enormity of this dangerous aspect of the 12-step program.)

Miller tells us that "spiritual life is focused in the present. Nothing creative or loving ever took place in the past or the future." Furthermore, "God only operates in the present." This is false. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are accomplished historical facts which took place in the past, thus assuring our salvation. Our hope as Christians is solidly placed primarily in the *future*:

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."
(Romans 8:18)

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:2-4)

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20, 21)

It is true that we must look at ourselves biblically in the present time, but the accomplishment of our salvation is in the past, and the hope we have is in future glory. This eternal focus enables us to endure the trials of our present lives. Psychology regularly fails to take this eternal, future-oriented view that is central to the Christian faith.

In this "house cleaning" of Step Ten, Miller claims that we are getting our human home ready for a "new tenant." He makes a strong point of insisting that this "tenant" is *not God, but*:

"...the precious child of God bearing our name, the person God made in His image to be the occupant of our life. This childlike person has been buried all these years under the domination of the disease--the abuse, denial, pain, guilt, and broken relationships of the past."

It sounds so appealing, so logical, but the Bible clearly offers a different message, one with infinitely more hope:

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)

"For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29)

It is now Christ who lives in us! God is conforming us to *His image*, not our own.

Finally, Miller claims that "as we begin to *feel like* forgiven, accepted people with gifts to use, we step into a new experience of hope and self-acceptance," and "when we see our *true selves*, confess, and are forgiven, we begin to accept ourselves as we actually are with all our imperfections." The Lord's forgiveness is much, much more than a *feeling* (thank God). It is a fact, regardless of our unstable, unreliable feelings. The gospel message of hope has been turned upside down in the statements just quoted. Self-acceptance, "with all our imperfections," is not the goal or end result of Christian sanctification (Ephesians 4:24, quoted earlier).

Miller does mention gratitude in this discussion, and in this point he is correct. The Christian must maintain an attitude of praise and thanksgiving, not for the "true self," but for God's gracious offer of a "new self" in Christ.

STEP ELEVEN: PRAYER AND MEDITATION...TO WHOM? ON WHAT?

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out."

Every committed Christian will agree that faithful prayer and meditation are central to ongoing growth in one's walk with the Lord. The Bible stresses these areas repeatedly. However, the

12-step version is not a true reflection of biblical practices. With only a vague "higher power" of one's own choosing, and meditation without the Word of God as a foundation, we are left with an incomplete substitute.

Some of Miller's comments regarding prayer are wise. He cautions, rightly, that our prayers are sometimes tainted with our own convictions of what is best, and he stresses the requirement that our prayers be submitted to the will of God. He does take this viewpoint too far, however, by suggesting that it is "too dangerous" to pray for: specific answers to our questions, a particular outcome, an end to our pain, financial security, or vocational success. We must surely guard against wrong or selfish motives for prayer (James 4:3), but at the same time, we are encouraged to come before the throne of God with confidence in making our requests:

"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him."
(1 John 3:21)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6)

The Scriptures stress our obedience, submission to God, and attitude of thanksgiving in these verses. The 12-step program makes an assumption that the "addicted" person is somehow "different" from the rest of mankind, and therefore in need of "special" rules that do not apply to "normal" people. This contradicts Scripture. We are all equally sinful and inclined to deceitfully live for self until changed by the power of Jesus Christ. Miller underlines the word *only* in this step, saying we should pray *only* for the knowledge of God's will and the power to carry that out. These are worthy prayers, and demonstrate the attitude that should accompany all prayer, but God opens the door much wider in allowing our requests--not because He is going to always do what we want, but because we are new creations in Christ, we are His children, and we are growing in conformity to the image of Christ. Miller does mention the importance of gratitude in our prayers, and this emphasis is to be applauded (see Philippians 4:6).

This chapter addresses the important topic of receiving guidance from the Lord. Miller claims that there are some areas where we can only learn by "trial and error," although God would

never go against His written word in giving direction. The most unfortunate aspect of this whole step is the failure to acknowledge the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible instructs us to meditate *on God's Word*, not merely engage in "positive visualization" (as Miller suggests), or repetitiously say "higher power" or even Jesus (also suggested by Miller). Miller briefly mentions Bible reading, but only after listing various 12-step publications first. The secondary place of Scripture is one of the most serious concerns about the whole program, but it is particularly glaring when we come to meditation. If we do not meditate on the Word given to us by God for that purpose, then what exactly is proper material for meditation? One's own thoughts and theories? The opinions of man? A blank slate, mindlessness (similar to Hinduism and Transcendental Meditation)? Some excerpts from Psalm 119 will help summarize the key role of Scripture in meditation:

"My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on Your promises." (Psalm 119:148)

"I meditate on Your precepts, and consider Your ways."
(Psalm 119:15)

"Though rulers sit together and slander me, Your servant will meditate on Your decrees." (Psalm 119:23)

"Let me understand the teaching of Your precepts; then I will meditate on Your wonders." (Psalm 119:27)

"I lift up my hands to Your commands, which I love, and I meditate on Your decrees." (Psalm 119:48)

"May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on Your precepts." (Psalm 119:78)

"Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long."
(Psalm 119:97)

God promises His blessing to those who meditate on His Word:

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."
(Psalm 1:1-3)

Miller claims that this step introduces us to a "Person," rather than a philosophical "higher power," and this is quite different from the Christian approach of his youth. Yes, there is a Person, and His name is Jesus Christ. The Twelve Steps, however, do not acknowledge the Person of Christ, His life, death, and resurrection, or the need for a personal relationship with Him. The Bible claims that our knowledge of **Him** will give us **everything** we need for life and godliness:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3)

STEP TWELVE: CARRYING THE WRONG MESSAGE

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

This final step of the "program" reveals most clearly its fundamentally pagan nature. It is an "evangelistic" step which is founded on selfish motives. There are three separate elements here for discussion: the "spiritual awakening," carrying "the message," and practicing "these principles" in all of our affairs.

The 12-step program does not equate being spiritual with being "religious," but "refers to being in touch with and living on the basis of 'reality.'" For example, a spiritual woman is "in touch with her own reality, her own feelings, her own controlling and diseased behaviors and character defects as well as her own preciousness and gifts." There are numerous problems with this statement:

* "Reality" is individually determined and defined, and has nothing to do with God's unchanging character or eternal laws.

* Emotions are exalted, in contrast to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and obedience to His Word.

* Behaviors are termed "diseased," rather than sinful, and sin is again redefined as "character defects."

* Again we see the "true self" concept which stands in opposition to the gospel truth that there is to be a *new self*

in Christ. One could satisfy the above definition of being "in touch" with one's own "reality," yet be living in direct disobedience to God and have no saving relationship with Christ.

Miller mentions that a "spiritual awakening" is brought about in part by reading "the Big Book, the Bible, and other literature." Note once again the secondary role of Scripture, and the exaltation of AA's "Big Book" to a level that equals or exceeds the Bible. According to Miller and the doctrines of the 12-step program, a spiritual awakening:

- * is "awakening to seeing and dealing with reality in one's own life and in relationships with other people and with God."

- * "means different things at different times."

- * is an "increasing conviction that God is trustworthy and that 'the program works.'"

- * may be a single experience or a more subtle process over time.

- * is an "awareness of our own self-worth."

- * is sometimes a broader experience that God is not only with you, but is everywhere leading people toward "the program and the Church."

Miller goes on to say that this "spiritual awakening" is based on the senses and emotions, rather than "theological evidence," i.e., a change in philosophy. He compares it to getting one's "God-given mind back" and supports his conclusion with Romans 12:2. According to the Twelve and Twelve of AA, it is being able to do, feel, and believe what one could not do, feel, and believe on his own strength. It is a new state of consciousness and being (sounds more like New Age than biblical Christianity), honesty, tolerance, unselfishness, peace of mind, and love. Whatever could be wrong with all of that?

A great deal is wrong. Nowhere does the Bible base our conversion or sanctification on our unreliable emotions. Nowhere are we told to trust in our own individualized "reality." Our mind is to be *renewed*, according to Romans 12:2 and other Scriptures. We are not receiving back some God-given mind that we already possessed all along. There is too much stress on "the

program,' which is not in any way essential to Christian growth. God is leading people toward *Him*, not toward "the program," though He may lead people into His church family. Our spiritual growth definitely **is** based on a change in philosophy, and the so-called "theological evidence" of the Word of God, given for our growth, maturity, and edification. The contempt for Scripture shown in this and other statements, and the corresponding exaltation of emotions and individual experience, is extremely disturbing.

This portion of Step Twelve must be discerned with a recognition of the reality of spiritual warfare. The 12 steps know nothing of that warfare, or the existence of evil spirits that war against the souls of men. Any "spiritual awakening" apart from Jesus Christ, *the ONE WAY of salvation*, is highly suspect. One may "awaken" the wrong spirits. We saw in the introduction how Satan, and his associates, disguise themselves as angels of light. This program is based on a trust in any power that is greater than oneself. When that power is *not* Jesus Christ, it is an idol, and the power behind all idols is Satan himself (1 Corinthians 10:20). The "spiritual awakening" of this step is undoubtedly one of the most dangerous and deceptive aspects of the entire program.

The second concept of this step is a false evangelism, "carrying the message." Christians are called to carry the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. That is decidedly *not* the "message" of this twelfth step. In fact, note cautiously some of the advice given to those who go out on 12-step calls:

- * Do *not* persuade with theology, but "let pain do the persuading."
- * "Never preach or 'exhort.'"
- * "Just share and support without pressure."
- * Don't give advice or talk theology to people in pain.
- * Tell the person, "If you've got a better place to go, go there."

Miller tells us that "people being helped don't have to believe your theology in order to enter the Twelve-Step family." Of course they don't have to believe *your* theology. However, to ensure eternal salvation, which is of far greater importance than any 12-step program, they *do* have to believe *God's* theology as revealed in His Word. It is definitely *not* uncompassionate or

uncaring to present the truth of the gospel to people in pain. And when carrying the right message of Christ, one would never suggest that the individual go to some "better place" if he thinks he knows of one. There are basically only two places from which to choose, eternal life or eternal death. We are commanded to preach the Word, in season and out of season, and to "exhort." Note carefully the words of Paul regarding our approach to people in pain:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

(2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

We are to comfort and we are to share the Word of God in a gentle, loving spirit, but we are never, never to withhold the truth of Jesus Christ from someone who needs help.

A serious deficiency with this carrying of the "message" is the blatant self-focus. The purpose is clearly stated to be keeping oneself sober--or whatever--Miller says "spiritually alive." The author assures you not to "get discouraged if a person doesn't respond, because there are plenty of others who are in enough pain to be ready." The 12-step call is "successful" if you remained sober, regardless of the "results" in the other person's life. This is antithetical to the presentation of the gospel. Our Lord called us to *deny self* in following Him and declaring His Word:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34, 35)

The motive for Christian evangelism is Christ's love. We love because He first loved us. The motive for 12-step false "evangelism" is the love of self. What a crucial and enormous difference!

Finally, Step Twelve encourages us to "practice these principles in all our affairs." The 12-step program is said to be a "way of life." It is basically a false religion, not a neutral program that is designed merely to assist in one isolated area of

life, such as a struggle with drunkenness. The Christian has the principles given to him by the Lord, and it is *these principles* that he is to "practice in all of his affairs:"

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9)

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."
(Colossians 3:9, 10)

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

SPONSORSHIP: COUNTERFEIT DISCIPLESHIP

The author claims that sponsorship is a model that is mentioned in the New Testament. Unfortunately, he has confused 12-step sponsorship with the Christian view of discipleship in the body of Christ. The former is a sad and inadequate substitute for the latter.

Sponsorship mimics Christian discipleship in the equality of the relationship. Before the cross of Christ, we are all equal. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We all require salvation. We each have access to the word God has given to direct his people. This equality before the Lord is a much better model for helping relationships than the therapist/patient relationship where one is an "expert" and the other a "sick" person who is pitied, discredited, and charged a fee for the therapist's time. That model certainly has no basis in the New Testament.

However, 12-step sponsorship goes too far by failing to acknowledge the role of leaders in Christ's church. God calls and ordains pastors and elders to be shepherds of his people, to teach them and to exercise a delegated, though limited, authority. There is no place for such leadership in the 12-step program. Miller notes Paul's statement to those he taught that they ought to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7). He then says that "the arrogance that statement implies today has no part in Twelve-Step sponsoring." Indeed it does not, but it *does* have a place in the church of

Jesus Christ, in spite of Miller's comment that we would consider it terrible today if a minister instructed us to follow his example. High standards are established, particularly in 1 Timothy and Titus, for church leaders such as pastors, elders, and deacons. It is also noted that Paul called himself the "chief of sinners," and that minister of today would do well to share more of their personal struggles rather than giving an appearance of perfection. Though leaders must be honest about their own humanity, it is apparent that the 12-step concept of sponsorship is far removed from the New Testament teachings on the role of spiritual leaders:

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Miller claims that "there aren't many manuals on how to have such a relationship," i.e., a sponsor/sponsee relationship where people share life and "grow to be wise and good people together." This distressing statement fails to credit the wisdom of God revealed in His Word, which instructs us in great detail on how to develop godly relationships. The prevalence of "one another" teachings is a testimony to the adequacy of the Bible in this area that God considers to be of prime importance. Noting the newly developed "Sinners Anonymous" groups, Miller claims it is "too new to have experienced old-timers to sponsor," so the group uses a "buddy system." This is utterly ridiculous. There are many "experienced" sinners in the body of Christ--pastors, elders, and others mature in their faith, competent to teach, preach, and admonish others:

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)

Paul wrote this bold statement centuries before the establishment of the 12 steps!

One of the serious problems with sponsorship is the teaching that a sponsor should "make suggestions but hardly ever volunteer advice." Miller further says that "my own rule of thumb is to

love them and be as honest as possible without shaming or blaming." Certainly one should never become self-righteous, condemning, or pretend superiority toward another. However, we are called to exhort, admonish, rebuke, and counsel one another. This is evident throughout the New Testament:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:13)

"Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt." (Leviticus 19:17b)

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." (Proverbs 27:5, 6)

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3)

Miller cites an example of a sponsoree who considers herself a "total failure" because her son is having problems in school. The sponsor's response is to encourage the woman to "not be so hard on herself" (thus minimizing the seriousness of sin). She encourages her with the statement that "you're precious and wonderful just the way you are, no matter what kind of trouble your son is in. Besides, nobody can keep a child from getting into some trouble." A godly response would be to take the woman's statement of failure very seriously, and consider how she might obey God's requirements in parenting. The woman is exaggerating to some degree and obviously self-focused, but this encouragement of total unconditional self-acceptance is antithetical to Christian discipleship and teaching. Twelve Step sponsors are apparently called to validate feelings but not to offer counsel that would assist the other person in making changes that are honoring to God.

Another problem area is Miller's advice that husbands and wives should never sponsor one another, because one would either be blind to the other's "character defects," or too tempted to control. This totally ignores God's teachings that the husband is to exercise spiritual leadership in the home, and that includes a

responsibility toward his wife. Also ignored are God's teachings about the relationship between husband and wife.

Selfish motivations are evident in sponsorship, typical of the program in general, and following the precedent set in Step Twelve. Sponsoring others is a requirement designed to benefit primarily the sponsor, not those he is supposed to be helping. This clearly differs from Christian discipleship. Self-focus is also evident in Miller's comments about "firing a sponsor." He says, "it can be helpful to face your sponsor directly, if you can, because it might do the sponsor some good--and the experience might help your recovery--but you are not out to take care of that person or to prove how brave you are." This "me-first" attitude is diametrically opposed to the biblical concern for others that we must evidence in our Christian lives:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
(Galatians 6:1,2)

The Twelve Step program is a false religion, worshiping a false god ("higher power"), promoting a false "bible" (the "Big Book"), counterfeiting biblical principles (the steps and traditions), carrying its false message through 12-step "evangelism," and here, imitating discipleship in its sponsorship plan.

BOUNDARIES: GOD'S PROTECTION OR SELF-PROTECTION?

Miller tells us that "a boundary is an invisible protective fence around our personal God-given space. Boundaries keep people from abusing us." He even claims that such protection of self is necessary to serving God: "God knows that if we do not have good boundaries, we have great difficulty doing God's will," because we are busy "doing everyone else's will." This assurance is given for the benefit of those who might have an "irrational" fear of surrendering to God because He might rip away their "unsure boundaries" and allow no privacy or individuality.

This entire concept is foreign to Scripture. It is borrowed from pagan psychological concepts developed by those who knew nothing of putting one's total trust in the Lord, or of the death to self that takes place in the life of a believer. Scripture repeatedly reassures us of God's protection, calling us to abandon ourselves to His care. He is our safety, not some invisible

"boundary" erected to protect our selfish interests. This is particularly evident in Ephesians, where we are told of the armor of God, designed to protect us, not from other people, but from the onslaught of wicked *spiritual* forces:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes with the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Some comments are in order about the opening statements. Those who are busy "doing everyone else's will" (typically labeled "codependents") are not living to please *God*, relying on His protection and care, but are living to please *self*--to gain approval, to avoid embarrassment or conflict, for example. They fear man, rather than fearing the Lord. It is not a "boundary" that is needed, but a turning of the heart toward the Lord. As for surrendering one's life to God, there is indeed a ripping away that takes place, a death of the "old man," as Christ comes to live in us. We are to be conformed to His image, not maintain individuality or demand our privacy.

It gets worse. Miller suggests that in dealing with "major offenders," those who manipulate, it is appropriate to erect a "wall of anger" that "will often give you the energy to take care of yourself." Walls of fear, disappearance, and anger are all appropriate under these circumstances, he claims. This is in direct opposition to God's call to overcome evil with good, and to respond to anger with soft words, not harsh ones:

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."
(Romans 12:14)

"'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:20, 21)

With the prevalence of this type of anti-Christian teaching, it is no wonder so many people are lonely, estranged from others, and hurt by broken relationships.

God is deeply concerned about our relationships, and the closeness He desires for His children has no place for self-defensive "boundaries." Husband and wife are to be "one flesh" (Miller has boundaries even here, even in the sexual union of a marriage). There is a unity in the body of Christ, a close caring that is unknown to the 12-step program. The apostle Paul would no doubt have been labeled a "codependent" who lacked proper "boundaries." Check out the Scriptures and then consider how God expects us to relate to others:

"The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'" (Genesis 1:23)

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:1-6)

"Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:28, 29)

The idea of boundaries is a dangerous, unbiblical concept which can destroy the unity in the body of Christ. The Christian who loves the Lord, and seeks to love others as much as he already loves himself, must reject it.

CONCLUSION

I want to stress once again that this critique is not designed as a personal attack on Keith Miller, but is intended to discerningly question a model that is spreading like wildfire in the Christian church. The 12 steps grew out of the minds of pagans and are not rooted in the truths of Scripture, which must be spiritually discerned by those who know Christ as Lord. This is a deceptive program which offers "help" but ignores salvation. The concerned Christian must hold the 12-step teachings up the light of Scripture, and prayerfully observe the warnings that have been given about false teachings, such as:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene."

(2 Timothy 2:15-17a)

The false doctrines of the 12-step program are indeed "spreading like gangrene." It is time for the Christian church to renounce its heresies, and return to the one true Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, faithful to the truth He has revealed in His Word. The child of God hungers, not for "healing" or a nonexistent "disease," but for righteousness!

APPENDIX 1

STEP BY STEP COMPARISON

SINNERS ANONYMOUS

1. "We admitted we were powerless over our Sin--that our lives had become unmanageable.

The Bible draws a clear line between the Christian believer, and the unbeliever, in terms of power to overcome sin. The unbeliever has *no power over sin*, but the Christian is assured of sufficient power (Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:13). This step ignores the need to acknowledge sinfulness and disobedience to God's commandments. It ignores the whole concept of repentance, requiring instead a statement that basically means, "I can't help it."

2. "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

This step, and the 12-step program in general, fails to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, substituting what ought to be clearly seen as idolatry. Even if Christian groups acknowledge Christ as *the* only way of salvation and power for change, the step substitutes "insanity" for sinfulness. We need to be restored to the right relationship with God, through receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, not "restored to sanity."

3. "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

We (our "old man") are crucified along with Christ (Romans 6, Galatians 2:20). This step sounds remotely similar but ignores the need of man to be delivered from the wrath of God through faith in Christ. There is a form of "surrender" without true salvation.

4. "Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves."

This sounds almost biblical, but it is impossible without the authoritative standards of God's Word, which discerns the thoughts and motives of the heart. God alone can discern the condition of a person's heart (Jeremiah 17:10). Even if this step could be undertaken correctly apart from Christ, it would be devastating and bring about despair. The full knowledge of one's sin must be accompanied by the hope of the gospel.

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

The stress here is placed on getting relief from pain and psychologized guilt *feelings*, rather than salvation from the consequences of real guilt defined by God's standards. The Bible never claims that we must confess to an uninvolved party for the sake of such relief. We are to confess our sins to God and to those we have sinned against, in terms of sin...not sickness.

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

"Character defects" is another substitute for sin. There is no understanding here of the *death* of the old nature and "putting off" of its practices, the need for repentance, or the denial of self required to follow Christ. It presupposes that there is some good within self to be retained, which there is not.

7. "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

"Shortcomings" is one more redefinition of sin. This step is a substitute for sanctification which does not acknowledge the requirement to faithfully study and apply God's Word. It faintly resembles the "put off" of Scripture without the corresponding "put on," and as in Step Six, there is no concept that the entire "old man" must die.

8. "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."
9. "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

In addition to the Steps' neglect of God's Word as the authoritative standard for determining who has been harmed and how, the biblical concepts of forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation are absent. "Amends" is a vague term which substitute for restitution.

10. "Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

We do need to examine our hearts before God and to admit our *sins*, confessing to our Heavenly Father and others we have sinned against. This step ignores the Bible as a standard for evaluation, fails to include the biblical concepts of

forgiveness/reconciliation (again), and substitute for sanctification.

11. "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out."

We are to meditate on *God's Word*, which is absent from the 12-step program or considered an "additional resource." This is a substitute for diligent study and application of the Bible. there are no standards for prayer.

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

This step is a *major* problem. It is a substitute for evangelism, carrying the "message" of the 12 steps instead of the message of the gospel. "Spiritual" is a loosely defined term in the context of the 12-step groups, having nothing to do with Christian growth and sanctification. Groups are based on one particular common sin, rather than the bond of being brothers and sisters in Christ, saved from sin by God's grace. The practice of "these principles" is not equivalent to walking in obedience to God's commands. The focus and purpose of this "evangelism" is clearly *self*, the maintenance of one's own "sobriety" or whatever, rather than obedience to God, service to the Lord, and concern for the welfare of others.

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