

HOPE IN THE FAST LANE? OR...HOPE IN CHRIST!

This writing is a biblical critique of Keith Miller's book, *Hope in the Fast Lane*, originally published as *Sin: Overcoming the Ultimate Deadly Addiction*. Much of the material is similar to that of his later book, *Hunger for Healing*. Because another critique is available on that book, delving in depth into each of the steps in the 12-step program, I will not repeat what has been adequately discussed there. It is recommended that this critique be read in conjunction with the other one. Both books promote the increasingly popular 12-step movement, wedding its theology to both Scripture and the theories of psychology, notably those of Freud (mentioned by Miller), as well as the conflicting model offered by Carl Rogers (not mentioned by Miller).

The 12-step movement is increasingly permeating the church of Jesus Christ, though decidedly pagan in origin, theory, and practice. Keith Miller is representative of the many Christians who applaud this lay movement and assert its compatibility with the Word of God. My intention here is not to question Miller's salvation or motives in writing, but to carefully discern the errors that are rampant in this kind of teaching. Though Scripture is often quoted, it is not used accurately, and its power and truth are diluted by blending it with both the 12-step doctrines (yes, doctrines!) and the opinions of unregenerate men such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers. It is indeed an odd brew that results, one that confuses and leads the people of God away from their sufficiency in Jesus Christ and His Word. In many ways it is worse than no help at all, because it gives a false assurance of spiritual growth. My critique on *Hunger for Healing* delves into each of the twelve steps and demonstrates how each is a counterfeit of some biblical teaching. (For a much more detailed, and well researched, book on 12-step errors, see *Twelve Steps to Destruction*, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Eastgate Publishers; also *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked*, by Dr. Cathy Burns.) The similarity is a danger, and discerning Christians who truly love the Lord and others must be on guard against such popular, but false, teachings. This critique will address several areas that are stressed in this particular book but not covered in *Hunger for Healing* and the related critique.

IS SIN A "DISEASE?"

In the modern world, even within the church, sin is no longer "in." The theories and supposed "discoveries" of the pseudo-

science of psychology have helped to perpetrate and spread this dangerous and erroneous attitude. Miller comes close to seeing the truth, yet veers off in the opposite direction with his invention of the term "sin-disease:"

"Sin and Addiction--Blood Relations

It dawned on me with an awesome certainty that when people speak of themselves as being 'sinners in need of God's healing' they are actually talking about being in the grips of the addictive spiritual disease that the Bible portrays in connection with 'sin.' I realized that this disease can disrupt our everyday lives and relationships and *never be seen to even be connected to sin.* And I saw this Sin-disease may well be the matrix for all compulsive, manipulative, and controlling behavior. In an instant of clarity I saw that what we have always called sin just might be the source, the breeding ground, of all other addictions and for the irrational destructive and addictive behaviors that are destroying our lives and institutions across the world."
(emphasis in original)

This was indeed an "instant" of clarity. That clarity unfortunately did not last long! The so-called "addictions" **are** truly sinful behaviors (a form of idolatry), as defined by the Bible, and ought to lead the sinner to the cross of Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. Miller, however, defines all sin as *disease*, and therefore points to a program of "recovery" from this supposed malady. Nothing could be further from the truth, or more deceptive. Miller lists numerous similarities between "addiction" and sin, failing to realize that they are one and the same. The worldly term "addiction" would best be dropped, but instead has been embraced. He goes on to say that "those of us who find our roots in a biblical heritage can use what has been learned about addictive behavior and its alleviation." No...absolutely not. Those who find their roots in a 12-step heritage, or in the theories of psychology, could use what has been revealed by God, in His Word, about the solution for sin. The truth has been turned upside down by those who promote psychological opinions and/or 12-step theology (yes, theology!).

Miller bases his "sin as disease" concept on three criteria established by the American Medical Association for disease:

1. a definable onset
2. symptoms
3. a predictable outcome

While this may be valid for genuine (physical) disease, it is absurd when applied in the spiritual realm. Using these factors, Christianity itself could be defined as a "disease" (and indeed it has been, by Sigmund Freud and Albert Ellis, to name just two--and Miller freely credits Freud's theories in his book):

1. a definable onset: conversion to Christ.
2. "symptoms:" fruit of the Spirit, qualities of the new self in Christ.
3. a predictable outcome: eternity in heaven with the Lord.

Obviously this is ridiculous. Yet it is equally ridiculous to claim that sin is a disease. The Bible lends no support to the "disease" view of sin, and it clearly distinguishes between true disease and sin. We have no good reason to do otherwise. One wonders why Miller, or anyone else, would go to such unusual lengths to redefine sin as sickness, particularly since Miller claims to hold the view that people are responsible for the behaviors that result from the "sin-disease." The only explanation that emerges is that he wishes to promote the practice of the 12 steps, and that movement has already redefined numerous sins as disease, beginning with AA's redefinition of drunkenness as the so-called "disease" of alcoholism.

The disease view of sin adds no clarity to the issue, and greatly misleads people who are struggling to find help with the problems of living. It is not a kindness, but a cruelty, to direct people into "treatment," when what they really need is repentance and deliverance from the wrath of God, offered through Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection.

DENIAL OR DECEIT?

The concept of "denial" is discussed at great length in this book, and reappears repeatedly throughout the pages that follow. Unlike some of the well-known Christian psychologists who fail to credit the source of this unbiblical idea (Minirth and Meier, for example), Miller openly credits Sigmund Freud with the "discovery" of the "unconscious" mind. This begs the question: Why did our Creator, in promising us "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), fail to make so much as a passing mention of this important aspect of His creation? Probably because it doesn't exist! The concept is foreign to Scripture, and science cannot prove this vaguely defined entity either. It must be noted here that the word "unconscious" has an ordinary meaning that differs from Freud's definition. A person may be knocked unconscious in an accident. Also, many everyday tasks may

be performed without conscious thought of every move--driving a car, for example. There is an "unconsciousness" at work here. Freud, however, sees the "unconscious" mind as something of a big, black hold that absorbs our painful memories and feelings, then becomes the driving force behind our sinful actions and attitudes later in life. This destroys responsibility.

There is a diabolical cleverness in the invention of the term "denial," because it takes a sharp biblical scalpel to distinguish it from the deceitfulness and hardening of the heart revealed in Scripture. Psychologizers appear to loosely equate (or rather substitute) the "unconscious" with the "heart," and "denial" with "deceitfulness." These concepts, however, are anything but equivalent. The heart, as that term is used biblically, refers to the nonphysical part of man--the whole inner man, including thoughts, intellect, motives, emotions, will, desires. It is set over against the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7) and the lips (Isaiah 29:13). Although only the Lord is fully able to judge the heart of man (Jeremiah 17:10), using His Word as a "two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), there is nothing "unconscious" about the heart of man. Man is held fully responsible before God for his sinful actions. The heart may be *hardened* through continual practice of sin, but even that hardening is rooted in conscious, deliberate rebellion against God and His commandments. Let's look at some of these relevant verses:

"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7b)

"The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'" (Isaiah 29:13)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.'" (Jeremiah 17:9, 10)

"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)

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and

spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

Miller also quotes Romans 7:25 to equate the "flesh" with the "unconscious." This again is in error. The flesh in this passage is the sinful, unredeemed nature of man, the "old self" which is to be put off at conversion and reckoned as dead. It is absurd to believe that the old nature is "unconscious." Were that so, it would make no sense for God to tell us that "men are without excuse:"

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:20)

Some of Miller's confusion is no doubt rooted in his failure to acknowledge the reality of the devil, the "god of this age," "prince of the power of the air," and other such titles. Instead, he sees "sin" as an actual personality:

"Throughout this process our Sin tries to get us to 'deny' that we are putting anything in God's place or that we are powerless to handle the situation."

The Bible tells us that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers to the truth of the gospel:

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts men of sin and leads them to repentance and salvation:

"When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."
(John 16:8)

The Holy Spirit also has a key role in leading the believer into a knowledge of God's truth, and providing him with the power to overcome sin:

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13a)

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"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 8:8, 9)

Miller faults the church for its attitude toward "addicts" who do not have the "will power" to overcome their "addiction," but fails to recognize the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a **Christian** to overcome. It truly is not "will power," the unaided efforts of self, that provides power over sin. It is *God's power*. The church must carefully instruct its members in the "how to" of overcoming sin in the power of God, and evangelize the unbelievers, who *do not* have any power whatsoever over sin, but are held in bondage. (The issue of "powerlessness" is discussed at length in the other critique, in the chapter on Step One.)

"Denial," as that term is used in psychology, frequently refers to a denial of key emotions such as anger, resentment, or fear. The deceitfulness of the heart has to do with a denial of responsibility for sin (either in attitude or action), or a denial of God's truth. (The word denial here is used in the ordinary sense, not as defined by psychology.) "Denial" thus exalts emotions, typical of psychology. Miller blends the two concepts somewhat, but this does not clarify. It only confuses. "Denial" claims that a person *cannot* see his sin. Deceitfulness reveals that he *will not* see. The latter offers hope, while the former destroys it.

Miller talks about the result of sin (or "sin-disease" as he calls it) being death. This is indeed true, but his focus is on the unpleasant consequences of sin (including physical death), rather than the eternal, *spiritual* death that is the ultimate result of sin in the life of a person who never receives Christ. He thus misses the real seriousness of the problem of sin. My criticism of psychology, and also of the 12-step program, does not grow out of a belief that the problems they address do not exist. Quite the contrary. The problems of life are extremely real and eternally serious in their consequences. These false solutions miss the grave nature of those problems--the need of man to be delivered from God's wrath and the eternal fate he would otherwise suffer.

Miller claims that "denial" is an attempt at self-acceptance. The deceitful heart does indeed accept oneself all too easily. Strangely enough, however, a repeatedly stated goal of 12-step practice is unconditional self-acceptance. These absurd teachings fail to recognize that God does not merely accept us unconditionally. He accepts us based on the shed blood of Christ, and our subsequent repentance, receiving Christ as Lord. He accepts us *despite who we are*, not...just as we are without conditions.

Concluding our remarks about denial, we must address the particular passages cited by Miller as evidence of the reality of this concept. This will help to differentiate between true biblical concepts, and unsubstantiated psychological concepts invented by the minds of unredeemed men such as Sigmund Freud.

In 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25, we are told the familiar story of David's affair with Bathsheba, followed by his murder of her husband Uriah. God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David's sin through the use of a parable. Miller contends that David was "in denial." Scripture does not support this view. First, we are not given details as to what was going through David's mind, or about his emotions, during this time. However, his secrecy, and his carefully planned and executed murder of Uriah, indicate a full awareness of the sinfulness of his actions. Why would a man "in denial," driven by unconscious motives to sin, go to such lengths to cover up? The same question could be asked about the drunkard who hides bottles or lies about his drinking, the person who secretly consumes boxes of chocolate candy, and other deceitful methods of avoiding responsibility and admission of sin.

In Exodus 32 is the account of the infamous golden calf, which Aaron agreed to form for the Israelites--an idol to be worshiped. These people were not "in denial," driven by "unconscious" motives to sin against God in this manner. God was very angry with them, and called them a "stiff-necked" people. Their disobedience, their sin, was a deliberate rebellion against the Lord, and a failure to trust Him fully. The context lends no support to the "denial" theory.

Isaiah 6:9 is also claimed by Miller as support for "denial:"

"He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their

eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." (Isaiah 6:9, 10)

This is admittedly a difficult passage to interpret. A full understanding calls for a discussion of the sovereignty of God, and that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, one must recall that God's people have engaged in repeated, deliberate sin, resulting in a hardening of their hearts. God has already pronounced judgment. This is a far cry from Freud's theory of the "unconscious" and "denial," concepts which conflict with the responsibility of God's people (and all people) for their sin.

Other examples could be added and discussed (Matthew 3:13, Mark 8:18, and Isaiah 42:18-20), but these should suffice to distinguish between the ungodly theories of Freud, which attempt to destroy responsibility for sin, and the biblical concepts of deceitfulness and hardening of the heart, which establish man's accountability before God because of the deliberate nature of sin.

PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY

A portion of this book is devoted to the discussion of prayer, Bible study, preaching, worship, baptism, communion--practices of the Christian faith. Some of the comments are not objectionable, and Miller does evidence here his faith in Christ, but some serious problems do arise.

The section on prayer is good in stressing thanksgiving and honest admission of one's own sin. However, too much emphasis is placed on "hearing" God *without* the accompanying recognition that God reveals Himself primarily through His Word. Miller also falls into popular psychological error in claiming that he listens to God through his own "inner child." This is absurd. First of all, man is not divided into adult/child, or parent/adult/child, as many psychologists claim. We are whole persons before God. Secondly, this is merely a way of listening to one's own thoughts and desires, *not* to the Lord. Such talk is characteristic of an error that runs throughout *Hunger for Healing*, along with many modern psychology books, that there is a "true self" which is buried under layers of hurt, "defenses," and such. That conflicts sharply with the biblical perspective that the old self must *die* (see Romans 6, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3) when the person becomes a new creation in Christ. Furthermore, it borders on New Age heretical teachings of the "god within" to claim that listening to one's "inner child" is a way of listening to **God**. The "true self"/new self concept is discussed more fully in the other critique.

Miller upholds Scripture reading as important and valuable, but he does not hold to its claimed sufficiency (2 Peter 1:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Proverbs 30:5-6), and he does not accurately quote or interpret the Bible. He also notes that at times he must give himself a break from reading Scripture. This makes about as much sense as taking a break from breathing, sleeping, or eating food, activities essential to continued life. He claims that ideas about God were "very primitive" and "crude" at first, and therefore, "we can't take the early history as being the Hebrews' final word about God." This attitude does not square with the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, which is God-breathed, not the word of man (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The Bible is God's revelation of Himself, not man's idea of God. God does not change, and we are not in a position to make such judgments about Scripture, all of which is given by God to instruct, convict, correct, and train us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). In spite of Miller's attitude as just expressed, he claims that "important truths about God can be discovered in any part of the Bible." This statement is true, but inconsistent with the position previously stated.

Freud comes back to haunt us in this section, as Miller tells us that we "unconsciously digest" the perspectives of God through "Moses, Jesus, and the other actors in the story." (Terms such as "actors" and "story" are highly questionable in their potential implications.) The Holy Spirit has been given to guide us into all truth, but there is a *conscious* digestion of God's Word, one that takes diligent, faithful study and meditation. Freud's ever-present "denial" surfaces once more when Miller speaks of the Pharisees and other hypocrites being in "denial" about their "sin-disease." Such men had wicked, deceitful hearts and wanted to appear righteous before other men, but they were surely not driven to sin by unconscious motives caused by childhood trauma, as proposed by Freudian theory. Jesus discerned and confronted the sinful condition of their hearts. He did not ship them off to psychoanalysis for "treatment" of their "illness."

Miller rightly tells us that everything we need for salvation is in the Bible. This, of course, is true. He goes on to say that "'salvation' includes the power to face and recover from the disease we are examining." We can expand that original statement by noting that everything we need for "life and godliness" is in the Bible. This includes eternal life as well as living our earthly lives in a manner that pleases God, *without* the addition of the psychological opinions of men. Miller's statements continue to treat sin as "disease," and that, of course, distorts the whole meaning of the cross. It is in fact an insult to the

cross. Would the precious blood of our Lord be shed so that we could "recover" from a "disease?" No, that blood is shed to pay the high penalty that is incurred for willful rebellion and disobedience to God's commands.

Miller's whole view of God is sadly incomplete. He portrays God only as loving, consistent with the 12-step "higher power" that resembles a senile old grandfather. While God is surely loving, merciful, and compassionate, Miller fails to also see His justice, righteousness, and wrath. He claims that God is leading people to "bless themselves." This is not the God of the Bible. He does bless those who trust Him, love Him, serve Him, and obey Him (the "righteous"). But unlike modern psychologists, who exalt self in place of the Lord, He does *not* call on us to "bless ourselves," probably because we already do that quite naturally. A related error is Miller's idea that we are in "no hurry" to study and absorb God's Word. While it is true that one could study diligently for a lifetime and never know all there is to know about Scripture, this lackadaisical 12-step attitude does not grow out of the Bible. Note the warning in Hebrews:

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:11-14)

Paul had similar concerns in addressing the Corinthian church:

"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

These are not "take your time" statements!

When we come to the area of how to study Scripture, Miller resorts to a right brain/left brain discussion (a concept without scientific merits), and claims he must separate his devotional reading (where he has a "loving and listening" attitude) from analytical study. The Bible doesn't make this distinction. What

is true, however, is that hearing of the Word must be followed by practice. Many Scriptures bear that out (James 1:22-25; Philippians 4:9; Matthew 4:24-27). Mere reading and study without *obedience*, a concept foreign to psychology and the 12-step program, results in major problems and dishonors the Lord. It is also important to search out Scriptures that have particular relevance to any specific problems being experienced, and to discover the "how to" of applying these passages. This may require the help of a pastor or other mature believer, but it is not a "right brain/left brain" exercise.

Miller recommends that other reading, in addition to Scripture, is helpful. This general point cannot be argued. However, such reading must be done with an attitude of discernment (particularly in a day when Christian bookstore shelves are loaded with psychological theory, deceptively coated with Scripture). It may help one's understanding of Scripture, or it may lead a person away from the Bible--as do the various 12-step materials and books of psychology which attempt to integrate ungodly theories with the Word of God. Miller recommends, for example, reading the books of Scott Peck. A close reading of his best known book, *The Road Less Traveled*, reveals a blatant statement that a human being can **become God**. Books of this nature are certainly not highly recommended reading for the discerning Christian. All outside reading must be undertaken with extreme caution and discernment.

Proper quotation and use of Scripture is a major problem with this book. Three particular examples will help to make this clear.

Here is how Miller quotes Romans 7:15-20, to support the 12-step "powerlessness" doctrine of Step One (discussed much further in the other critique):

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." (Romans 7:15, 17, 18b, 19, 20 [claimed by Miller as Romans 7:15-20])

Note that certain key verses were omitted (replaced with dots):

"And if I do want I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good" (verse 16).

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (flesh)" (verse 18a).

Twelve Step theology does not lend itself to the omitted verses. There is no agreement regarding the law of God to be obeyed (verse 16). Popular "self-acceptance" theory and practice is diametrically opposed to the biblical truth of verse 18a, which was split in half so that the objectionable portion was not quoted. Furthermore, as discussed in the critique of *Hunger for Healing*, this whole passage must be read in proper context, considering chapters 6 and 8 of Romans. The Christian is not "powerless over sin" as is the unbeliever, but has been set free from sin to "walk in the Spirit," living in obedience to Christ. Chapters 6 and 8 make this quite clear.

In his final section on "telling other people," Miller includes a discussion of the recently developed practice of intervention. He uses as support Matthew 18:15 and 16:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

In order to properly interpret these two verses, we must also look at the rest of the passage, verses 17-20:

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Miller claims the first two verses as support for a *group* intervention, in direct opposition to the *private*, one-to-one nature of the initial confrontation. He then insists that a "professional" counselor *must* be involved. The Scripture, however, is discussing the full process of *church discipline*, a concept unknown in the 12-step program (which is outside the care and authority of the church in any event). If the one-to-one efforts fail to bring the person to repentance, then *two or three*

others are to be added. This is still not the large "group" Miller suggests, and nowhere in Scripture is it required that a "professional" counselor be involved. Instead, the process proceeds ultimately to where the entire *church* is involved, and the unrepentant individual may be excluded from church fellowship in order to bring him to repentance. Miller's use of this passage is improper and inaccurate.

The final example is taken from the other book, *Hunger for Healing*, where Miller quotes Matthew 7:3-5 to support Step Eight. That familiar passage concerns the necessity of getting the "log" or "plank" out of one's own eye before going to help a brother take the "speck" out of his eye. While Miller claims to be quoting the full three verses noted, he cuts off the last half of verse 5: "...and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." This conveniently twists the passage to fit the common 12-step practice, advocated persistently by Miller, that one must never give advice, counsel, exhortation, or solutions to another person.

The 12-step program is *not*, as Miller and others claim, based on biblical truth. These examples and comments are an indication of how far the program deviates from upholding the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

CORPORATE WORSHIP: "GARBAGE DISPOSAL?"

Miller's chapter on corporate worship has some good comments in it, aside from the obvious error of calling sin "disease." It is the kind of writing that poses some problems, but it is tough to untangle and separate truth from error.

Some of the activities of worship, such as music, candles, and reading, are claimed to be designed to "get beneath our intellectual defenses and denial into the intuitive and emotional center where the Disease wrestles for control of our lives." Besides problems with the "denial" and "disease" concepts in general, this statement places too much importance on emotional experience. There is nothing wrong with an experience of God's presence and intimacy with Him. However, it is typical of psychology and 12-step thinking to put such emotional experience above correct doctrine and obedience to God's Word. Emotions are unreliable indicators. Lasting joy and peace characterize the fruit of the Spirit which results naturally from an obedient walk with the Lord. Caution must be exercised in evaluating emotional experiences, which may substitute for habitual practice of God's Word. Also, worship is directed to *God*, not merely designed as a

form of emotional relief for our benefit alone. Miller does, however, conclude his chapter with a statement recognizing that worship should focus on God rather than on our sins.

The "garbage collector" concept introduced here draws some concern. Worship does include a confession of sin to the Lord, asking His forgiveness and cleansing. This is not, however, analogous to "dumping" our sins onto God. As in Miller's discussion of Step Five in *Hunger for Healing*, there is an unbiblical emphasis on "relief." Although there is a wonderful freedom that comes out of our new life in Christ, our purpose is to please and honor God when we confess our sins, putting off the practices of the old self and putting on the qualities of Christ. We are reconciled with Him in confessing and receiving His forgiveness. It is not merely a "dumping" of sins or of guilt *feelings*, so typical of 12-step meetings. This "garbage collector" mentality can encourage repeated practice of sin and repeated "dumping" onto God, substituting for real transformation.

The 12-step program often emphasizes "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection," and so does Miller in this section. He says that "the Disease kept telling me that I should 'always do it right.'" There is a laxity in this basic attitude that must be questioned in light of Scriptures such as these:

"As a prisoner in the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1)

"But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15)

A false perfection in the eyes of man is something to be avoided. No human is ever without sin in this life. The question to be asked, however, is this: Do we fear (and strive to please) man...or God? So-called "perfectionism" attempts to please man, including self, and definitely leads to problems in living. However, striving to please **God**, growing in obedience and godliness, is a worthy goal of every Christian. The "progress not perfection" attitude is one that does not consider the real issues involved. It can all too easily lead away from the "disciplined training in righteousness" that God requires of His children.

"RECOVERY MEETINGS" -- FALSE FELLOWSHIP

Miller bases his endorsement of "recovery" meetings on the well-known "where two or three are gathered" phrase found in

Matthew 18:20. We reviewed this in context earlier. This statement of our Lord was in no way a call to "recovery" meetings, but was a promise of His presence during the exercise of biblical church discipline. The passage is not even a call to form small prayer meetings, and that is ordinarily the way it is used. (There is no intent here to discourage small prayer groups, only to make the point that Matthew 18:20 has another, very specifically defined, purpose when studied in context.)

The 12-step "recovery" group concept is antithetical to biblical one-another ministry within the church. It is a counterfeit of Christian fellowship and discipleship. An examination of this section of the book should clarify some of the basic problems.

One major issue is the unbiblical idea of public confession. Not that public confession is always unbiblical. It may become a part of formal church discipline in the final stages of that process, and it may be required where a sin is already public knowledge. However, the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 indicates that knowledge of a sin should be kept as narrow as possible, and only as wide as necessary to resolve the matter at hand. The 12-step public confession method is practiced in order to obtain "relief," and can all too easily deteriorate into a subtle, seemingly legitimate, form of gossip and/or slander.

Some will object to this last statement on the basis of the confidentiality supposedly required in such meetings. However, even if nothing is repeated outside of the meeting (an outcome which is in no way guaranteed), there are still a number of uninvolved persons present who are hearing confessions that do not involve them. Scripture requires confession to the Lord (always), and then to those who have been injured. This is done for the purpose of forgiveness and reconciliation, not "relief." (See discussion of Step Five in the other critique.) Furthermore, absolute confidentiality is not a biblical concept. Although a matter should never be repeated thoughtlessly, and trustworthiness must be maintained, it may be biblically necessary, for the welfare of the person entangled in sin, to bring in other persons. This is required by Matthew 18:15-20. (For an in-depth look at this passage and its application, see *Handbook of Church Discipline*, by Jay Adams.)

Miller has great praise for "recovery" groups, claiming their superiority, at times, over help that can be obtained from persons trained in theology or psychology. He quickly adds a footnote, however, to caution that some people require "professional"

therapy. All of this should be compared with the statement of Paul to the Romans:

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

Mature Christians may be (should be) equipped to counsel and admonish one another, and certainly without training in psychology, a field whose theories are founded on presuppositions diametrically opposed to the Word of God. Admonition, however, is "taboo" in 12-step meetings. Miller cautions against any offering of advice, answers, or solutions. Such counsel would be too "judgmental!" Unfortunately, no advice, no answers, and no solutions equals **no help**. Miller, however, claims that such counsel would lead a group member to believe that "one 'cannot be a first-class person in this group' if one continues to have problems, failures, and 'inappropriate feelings.'" This disregards the person's need to solve those problems, overcome those failures, and eventually experience the fruit of the Spirit (joy, peace, and other characteristics). Here is an example of what ought to be seen as a colossal waste of time:

"It is not necessary to have a 'position solution' to be helpful. As a matter of fact I am sometimes strengthened most when someone has the same problem I'm facing and is stuck in it but still taking the necessary steps to get help. Above all, the group should *not* try to 'fix Jack up' and tell him what he should do. The *stating* of a problem has real healing value and relieves much stress" (emphasis his).

While such activity may bring a temporary "relief," something that is repeatedly held up as a goal (maybe an idol) of 12-step practice, the long-range tendency is to destroy hope. The person who is struggling with problems of living needs direct, authoritative, godly counsel from God's Word. Such counsel as this brings **hope** and **help!** The 12-step approach brings only a fleeting type of "fix," and could easily encourage a person to remain indefinitely in sinful patterns. Miller goes on to support the "recovery" meeting concept by stating that "*no one* knows what another may need to hold him- or herself together for the time being." This attitude reveals the typical disregard for God's Word that one finds in 12-step thinking. **God** does know what each person needs, and He has given us the counsel of His Word to search out the appropriate answers, and to instruct one another.

Membership flexibility, persons floating in and out of groups at will, is cited as another characteristic of "recovery" groups. This contrasts sharply with being under the care, authority, and discipline of a Bible-believing church. It impedes the accountability that would help restore an individual and assist him in living a life that is pleasing to God. In addition to this serious defect of 12-step practice, there is no ordained leadership as there is in the church. Leadership rotates, such as there is, and it is not true leadership with God-given authority to shepherd the lives of God's people. Such looseness leaves people adrift in their sins and struggles. This group model has nothing in common with the model for church fellowship that is demonstrated in the New Testament.

"Recovery" groups are certainly no place for the serious Christian who wants to grow in his walk with the Lord. Miller tells us of those who may be "threatened" in a "recovery" group, complaining about the lack of Bible study, possibly even attempting to turn the group to such a "cognitive" exercise. While he agrees that the study of Scripture is important, he clearly gives it a place that is secondary to "recovery." The discerning Christian must not do so. This type of loose, nonhelpful group is no substitute for the close involvement, admonition, and shepherding that God has commanded for His church.

TELLING OTHER PEOPLE...COMPLETING THE "CURE"

Near the end of the book, Miller discusses the 12-step motives and methods of carrying its "message" to others. In discussing Step Twelve in the other critique, I have explored at greater length the selfish motives and false "message" inherent in this counterfeit "evangelism." The same basic errors arise here, but a few additional comments are in order.

The 12-step technique of helping others involves primarily "sharing experience, strength, and hope" solely from one's own life. This contrasts sharply with the godly counsel mandated by the New Testament, where we are required to admonish in accordance with scriptural truth and lovingly restore those who fall into sin. Paul's instructions in Colossians, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians 5 give us clear insight into the biblical view of responding to those who are caught in sin and need the ministry of the body of Christ:

"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)

"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)

"What business is it of mine to judge those **outside** the church? Are you not to judge those **inside**? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'"
(1 Corinthians 5:12, 13 [emphasis added])

Note: It would be helpful to read 1 Corinthians 5 in its entirety and to see these verses in context.

Our basis for such counsel and evaluation is the Word of God, not personal experience. Motives are love for Christ and concern for the welfare of others, not self. Nowhere does Scripture advocate the 12-step teaching of waiting until another has "hit bottom" to intervene on his pathway to destruction.

Miller repeatedly stresses the 12-step requirement to look only at one's own problems and not attempt to force changes in other people. There is some truth in his statements. The Bible instructs us to honestly confront our own sin before God *prior* to intervening in the lives of others, and it is God, through His Holy Spirit, who convicts people of sin, brings them to salvation, and transforms them into new creations in Christ. However, unlike the 12-step "live and let live" philosophy, Scripture outlines clear roles and responsibilities in the lives of others, particularly for those who are called to church leadership (pastors and elders).

Miller concludes his book by claiming that the 12-step way is not a "popular" way:

"This kind of surrender and continual confrontation of the Disease that we are discussing are not emphasized in all churches. People who espouse this attempt at rigorously honest living appear to many to be pushing another of the fads that sweep through history periodically, leaving division and spiritual bruises everywhere in their wake."

Since publication of this book, the 12-step program has grown like wildfire in its popularity, infesting the church with its

unbiblical teachings. Unfortunately, it indeed *is* a "popular way." It is the narrow way of Jesus Christ, and holding to the sufficiency of His Word as a foundation for living and counsel, that is not a currently popular way. However, it is the **only way** to be reconciled with God the Father and share in the inheritance of eternal life:

"Jesus answered, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)

My purpose in this writing is to urge the thoughtful, concerned Christian to adhere to the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), rather than to embrace the false religion promoted by the 12-step program. It is there that one will find a true surrender to the Lordship of Christ, and an honest confrontation of sin that will wipe out its power and consequences for eternity.

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