

## A RESPONSE TO THE 12 STEPS IN A CHRISTIAN SETTING

The 12-step movement is a matter of growing concern and heated debate among Christians today. In the past week, I have received two pieces of correspondence representing both ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, a woman writes that she has received help from the 12 step program. She believes the 12 steps are based on biblical principles and cites a specific verse for each step. But just two days later, I received a note from another woman who became suicidal attending a 12-step group, because it failed to offer her any hope.

My response is not one made in haste, nor is it a mere intellectual exercise. I have spent many years not only in psychological counseling, but also participating in various 12 step groups, some Christian and some secular. (I can still recite some of their liturgy!) The hopelessness of *both* of these systems led me to seriously explore their theological underpinnings. (My conclusions concerning psychology are described in other writings.) After much reflection on the Scriptures, the 12 steps, Christian writings *about* the 12 steps, and the general practices of such groups, I am forced to conclude that the steps themselves are not truly grounded in Scripture, and that the practices of the meetings are unbiblical.

Please don't misunderstand. Christians are called to minister to one another in many ways. Problems are not to be ignored or hidden under a phony smile. I'm not one to say, "Take three Scriptures and call me in the morning," or "Pray more, read the Bible more, and everything will be wonderful." It is, of course, crucial to do both of these things (study Scripture and pray), but Christians must spend *time with each other* in prayer and Bible study, helping one another to understand and apply God's Word. *The question to be addressed here, however, is whether the 12-step program is either necessary or appropriate for achieving this purpose.*

Bear in mind that the 12 steps were not written until the 1930's, which means that the Christian church did without them for nineteen centuries following the death and resurrection of our Lord. This omission is clear evidence that the 12 steps are not *necessary* for Christian living and sanctification, in view of the Scripture's clear statements of its sufficiency for such (2 Peter 1:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are left, therefore, with examining whether the 12 steps are *appropriate* for use within the Christian

church. After some general comments concerning the program, an examination will be made of each successive step and the Scripture verse that has been associated with it.

## **General Observations and Comments**

Before analyzing the verses attached to the steps, there are several general observations I wish to make on the basis of my own experience in these groups and the recommendations normally made by Christians who attend them and promote use of the steps.

**Pragmatism--"it works."** Christian support for the 12 steps is often based on the subjective experience of being helped, rather than a thorough examination of the underlying theology. Some challenges need to be made here. What kind of "help?" Was it primarily an experience of being accepted, and/or of feeling better, perhaps because someone else has experienced similar problems? Did this experience truly help you to become more like Christ? Did it help you live to glorify God rather than to please yourself? Did it really help you learn to deny yourself for the sake of the gospel? "Help" must have the appropriate *goals* before it can be affirmed as true help in the biblical sense.

**The Whole Counsel of God.** Christians need the whole counsel of God, not merely a list of 12 Scriptures isolated from their context. God's Word cannot be reduced to a set of 12 principles (or any other particular number); it is much richer and fuller than any set of "12 steps," *even if* it were granted that those "steps" were all scriptural. Later I will examine the 12 Scriptures matched with the 12 steps, to determine whether there is true equivalence. I believe there is not, but even if there were, those particular passages should be studied *in context*, along with all the rest of the Bible.

Furthermore, it is not possible to place a set of Scriptures in a particular order as is done when verses are matched with the 12 steps. For example, "step 12" is matched with the exhortation in Galatians 6:1ff to restore another believer fallen into sin. That passage is addressed to "those who are spiritual," encompassing *all believers*. (All believers are spiritual by definition; Romans 8:9.) Obedience to that passage cannot be postponed until 11 other "steps" are first taken.

Also, the *one essential "step"* of salvation is entirely omitted from the 12 steps, even in this "Christian" version. Perhaps, in a Christian group, salvation is presupposed for members. Yet many such groups claim that evangelism is one of

their main purposes. This implies that unbelievers are admitted to the group, and it further implies that it's possible for them to work the "steps" (or scriptures, in this case) apart from regeneration. Biblically, that's wrong (Romans 8:7-8).

**The Holy Spirit: The Agent for Change.** It is the Spirit of God who makes possible both salvation (Ephesians 2:7-9) and sanctification (Romans 6-8). It is commonly argued that because persons have been "helped" in a 12 step program, attendance at such groups should not be discouraged. Similarly, it is argued that sometimes unbelievers come to the Lord in that setting. In both instances, the sovereign power of God is demonstrated, not the theological soundness of either the steps or the practices of 12-step groups. God is able to save and to sanctify *in any setting* He chooses. His power (using His Word) is the agent for change, not a group, a counselor, or any human means, though he may use these. (Even truly biblical counselors must guard against usurping the role of the Spirit.) Sometimes His power is demonstrated most effectively when He works *in spite of* or even *through* the sinful acts of men. He accomplished the act of redemption through the hands of sinful men (Acts 2:23, 4:27-28). He disciplined the ancient Israelites using wicked, pagan nations. Such sovereign divine actions are not an endorsement for man's sinful acts. Similarly, the fact that God works in the life of a person attending a 12-step program does not provide an endorsement for the program or the steps, developed by ungodly men who rejected the gospel (Bill W. and Dr. Bob, founders of AA, were both unbelievers). Likewise, that does not imply that Christians ought to seek out counseling (individual or group) that is rooted in the theories of unregenerate men.

**Fellowship Based on a Common Sin.** The 12-step fellowship is based on a *common sin*, whereas fellowship in the body of Christ is based on our *common salvation*. Two *Christians* with different struggles have far more in common than a *Christian and unbeliever* sharing a struggle with a similar sin (drunkenness or whatever). Sometimes there can be wonderful ministry from one believer to another with similar struggles, but there is no biblical requirement to have struggled with the same sin in order to exhort another Christian (2 Corinthians 1:3-7, verse 4 in particular).

**Sin or "Addiction"?** The whole 12-step concept is grounded in the assumption that "alcoholism" and similar behaviors are actually *diseases* or "addictions." The term "recovery" reflects this focus on *sickness* rather than *sin*. This clouds the issue of sin and moral accountability before God, in spite of the apparent emphasis on self-examination.

**Once an "alcoholic," always an "alcoholic."** This error grows out of the sin/sickness confusion, and defies 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which emphatically states that "such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified...." Sins like drunkenness, gluttony, and other habitual behaviors can be forgiven and cleansed. They are not to characterize the Christian for the rest of his earthly life.

**Lack of Leadership; Exclusion of the Pastor.** Twelve-step groups specifically lack leadership; they are "self-help" groups. Groups meeting in churches often exclude the pastor from any leadership role; this is recommended in some of the Christian literature on the subject (see my critique, "Path to Deception," reviewing Minirth-Meier book, *Path to Serenity*). This undermines God-ordained leadership in the church, and violates scriptural exhortations to such leaders, as well as to those under their care (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17).

**Unbiblical Communication.** The 12 steps claim to place the emphasis on confession of one's own sin. However, much sin involves interpersonal relationships, and group communications can be a subtle form of gossip or slander. This violates scriptural teachings such as Matthew 18:15-20, wherein sin is to be confronted *privately* at the outset, and others *in the church* (not the unbelieving community) are to be involved only according to specific guidelines. There is no biblical allowance for revealing the sins of others before groups of uninvolved parties, *particularly* where unbelievers are present; to do so is sin. Even revealing one's own sin is something to be done privately *to the person sinned against*, not a general audience.

**"Hitting Bottom" Prerequisite.** The 12-step concept generally assumes that it is not possible to help another until he "hits bottom" and admits helplessness. The Scriptures *command* intervention when a brother falls into sin (Galatians 6:1ff; Matthew 18:15-20). Unbelievers, on the other hand, are to be *evangelized*. They cannot be helped to overcome specific sin until they come to Christ; apart from Him, they have neither the desire nor the ability to do what is pleasing to God (Romans 8:7-8).

Recently, the concept of "intervention" has developed. At first glance, this may appear more biblical, but it is not. A group of persons, generally family and friends of the "addicted" person, gathers together to confront him; usually some "professional" is present and plans have been made for the person

to be removed to some "recovery" program. This arrangement violates biblical commands about confronting sin *privately*, something that ought to be done by each individual who has been offended; then one or two others, and finally the entire *church*, become involved if he refuses to listen. "Intervention" is led by a "professional" counselor rather than the pastor, and there is no thought for *church* involvement according to Matthew 18 commands.

**New Age Connections.** My objections to the 12 steps are not based *primarily* on the union of the steps with New Age theology, although that does sometimes occur. A particular danger, however, even when blatant New Age teachings are not present, is the fact that 12 step ideology is specifically designed to encompass all religious preferences without distinction. Any "higher power" can be plugged in. This is remarkably similar to the New Age blurring of distinctions, religious and otherwise. Remember that the true God of Scripture does not align Himself alongside idols, and He calls believers to be holy, to "come out from among them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18), even while seeking to evangelize the unbelieving world.

**Works-Righteousness.** The 12-step program, in contrast to much current psychotherapy, appears to place a needed emphasis on personal responsibility. However, the result is a moralistic approach that ignores the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian sanctification, a type of works-righteousness. The steps have nothing in them about God's *grace*, either in removing the penalty for sin, or in the progressive sanctification of the believer. This is a fatal omission that destroys hope.

**Conclusion.** *Perhaps not all of these practices apply to your Christian or church-based group.* The above observations are made on the basis of personal experience *and* reading of literature by Christians who promote the use of the 12 steps (Minirth-Meier books; publications of Overcomers Outreach in Whittier, CA). Maybe your group *does* involve the pastor. Perhaps you recognize sin as sin. Let's suppose for a moment that *none* of these objections apply to your group. And let's assume, for the sake of argument only, that your steps have been revised so that they're truly biblical (if that can be done). *Then why even call it a "12 step" group?* In that event, your group would depart so radically from the traditional beliefs and practices of the 12 step movement...as to be in a wholly different category of meeting. Why, then, cling to the notion that it's a "12 step group" and why defend the steps with such determination? Why not recognize it as a Christian fellowship or study group? The Christian has the inerrant Word of God, infinitely superior to the man-made "wisdom"

of the 12 steps. Why force God's holy Word into the man-made 12-step mold? Why this love of the world (James 4:4), which is hostility toward God's sufficient provision for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4)??

## Step by Step Analysis

The purpose of this section is to:

1. Examine each Scripture *in its context*, briefly addressing its meaning; and
2. Evaluate whether the Scripture, in each case, is truly equivalent to the "step."

These same Scriptures are associated with the steps in *The Twelve Steps--A Spiritual Journey*, published by Recovery Publications in San Diego, CA.

**1. "We admitted we were powerless over (alcohol or whatever), that our lives had become unmanageable."**

**"I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (flesh). For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Romans 7:18**

Scripture teaches the total depravity of man, and the total inability of man *apart from regeneration* to do what is pleasing to God (Genesis 6:5, 8:21; Psalm 51:5, 143:2; Romans 3:9-23; Ephesians 2:1-3; John 3:6, 6:44, 65; Romans 8:5-8; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 7:17-28, 12:33-35, 15:16-20; 1 Corinthians 2:14, 12:3). This verse in Romans 7 must be viewed in the context of chapters 6 through 8 in Romans, dealing with sanctification. The 12-step concept of "powerlessness" is inappropriate for both the believer and the unbeliever, but for different reasons:

1. The inability ("powerlessness") of the unbeliever is far *more serious than allowed by the 12 steps*. He is enslaved to sin, **dead** in sins and trespasses, darkened in his understanding and the futility of his thinking. He is truly "powerless," so much so that he is unable, apart from divine initiative, to take any step whatsoever toward his own salvation, although he is nevertheless fully responsible before God for his sin. He is unable to move on to belief, and he is unable to make a decision to turn his life over to the *true God of Scripture* (though perhaps to a "god" [idol] of his own making). (Note Scriptures above for support.)

2. The believer must, of course, acknowledge his total dependence on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, he cannot claim to be "powerless" as required by this first step. The apostle Paul argues clearly, through the use of three analogies in Romans 6:1-7:6, that *Christ has broken the power of sin in the life of the Christian*. (See Romans 6:4, 6, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 7:4, 6; 8:4, 9).

In addition, there is a question concerning the identity of the speaker in Romans 7; is it Paul prior to his conversion, or Paul as a Christian? Certain statements cannot fit the believer, such as "sold as a slave under sin." Romans 6 refutes this. Yet the unbeliever does not have the desire to obey the law. In view of Paul's emphasis on the Jew and Gentile in Romans, and the unique transition period of that age, it is my exegetical conclusion that this section describes *Paul as a Jew*, having the law but not having the ability to keep it. God used the theocracy established in Israel to demonstrate conclusively the inability of man to keep the law apart from the Spirit, and thus to pave the way for the entrance of the gospel message. Note, however, that even if Romans 7 is viewed as the struggle of the believer, numerous statements in Romans 6-8 affirm that the Christian is *no longer* enslaved to sin as he was prior to conversion.

Romans 7:18 is more a general statement of the depravity of the human heart, rather than a blanket statement of "powerlessness" applicable to believers and unbelievers alike.

## **2. "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."**

**"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose."  
Philippians 2:13**

This statement of the apostle Paul comes in the context of his exhortation to the Philippians to continue their *obedience* even in his absence. It has nothing to do with an initial step of belief, which in 12-step ideology is barely beyond the state of utter powerlessness and has nothing to do with saving faith. The Philippians already believed in Christ as Savior, were already set free from the power of sin, and were hardly powerless, or Paul could not have exhorted them to this high level of obedience.

In a Christian context, *belief* concerns placing trust in Christ as Savior. It means believing that Christ, God incarnate, died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead (Romans 10:9). This saving faith has only the barest superficial

resemblance to the "belief" required to progress through the 12 steps.

"Restored to sanity" is not equivalent to Christian sanctification, which involves being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:10).

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

**"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1**

This exhortation to *Christians* comes after an extensive systematic presentation of justification by faith (salvation) and progress in that faith (sanctification). It is not an initial decision to "turn over" one's will and life to the care of God, but rather is given to those who *already* belong to God's family and are ready to progress in their level of commitment.

Note, again, the comments under step 1 concerning the inability of the *unbeliever* to make such a decision. He cannot do so. The Christian has been saved by *God's gracious decision*, not his own (John 1:13; Romans 5:6; Ephesians 1:4-5, 2:7-9).

The verse that follows, Romans 12:2, goes on to exhort the believer not to be "conformed to this world." Squeezing Scriptures into the pagan 12-step mold, and into the psychological counseling model, is one way in which Christians today are indeed "conformed to this world" and form a forbidden alliance (2 Corinthians 6:14).

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

**"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord." Lamentations 3:40**

It is true, of course, that God's people must examine themselves before the Lord and return to Him when they have sinned, asking forgiveness of Him and of others sinned against. Scripture, however, clearly teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who is the agent and driving force behind such examination, using the powerful Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). He promises to *complete* the believer's sanctification (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The verse cited is from the Old Testament, prior to the general distribution of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant. It is in the context of divine chastisement, which may also be



experienced by Christians today (Hebrews 12:4-11). It is crucial to remember the role of the Spirit today; because of the deceitfulness of the human heart and of sin (Jeremiah 17:9; Hebrews 3:13), it is impossible for any person to actually make a "complete and fearless moral inventory" such as required by the steps. The Christian, faithfully studying the Word, must rely on the Spirit to bring needed conviction of sin.

The *standard* for self-examination is a key issue. For the Christian, that standard must be Scripture, not personal opinion. Perhaps Christians 12-step groups acknowledge the standards of Scripture, but with the influx of psychology and its conflicting standards, this can't be uncritically assumed.

Additionally, the Christian knows that Christ has taken away his guilt on the cross. Nowhere does Scripture require a new believer to make a catalogue of all his past sins, or a listing of all his current "character defects." As the following step analyses will demonstrate, sanctification is presented as a progressive "putting off" of the "old man" and the "putting on" of the "new man" in Christ. Again, the *Spirit* is instrumental in this process. As presented, this step amounts to a type of works-righteousness.

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

**"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16a**

The context of James 5:16 is one in which a believer is suffering from physical illness. He is exhorted to call on the *elders of the church*, not a general group, and certainly not a group including unbelievers. Physical illness may be totally unrelated to a specific personal sin in some cases, but at times, personal sin is a factor. This passage addresses the latter situation and instructs the person to confess that sin *to the elders of the church* so that he may be healed.

This has little (if anything) in common with 12-step methods of confession. In the 12-step context, a broad confession is made to one other person of one's own choice, not the elders of the church, not even (at this point at least) those who have been directly sinned against. The issue of physical illness is not specifically relevant. The situation is entirely different. Confession in the 12-step setting is often for the purpose of "relief" rather than to ask forgiveness of those who have been

sinned against. James 5:16, studied properly in context, is *not* a call for general confession of sins among members of a 12 step group, or even among members of a church. Numerous Scriptures address how, when, and to whom confession should be made; James 5:16 is *one* very narrow situation.

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

**"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." James 4:10**

There is no question that Christians are to walk in humility before God, submitting to His Word and to His work in their lives. But this "step," again, does not do justice to the unique role of the Spirit or to the manner in which sanctification progresses. First of all, "defects of character" is a poor and confusing way to describe *sin*. The Christian is already a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17); radical change has *already* taken place in God's initial act of regeneration. His sin has been forgiven and removed, "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). In view of what Christ has already accomplished on the cross, the believer is exhorted to "put off" the "old man" and "put on" the "new man" (Ephesians 4:17-32 [note 22-24 specifically], Colossians 3:1-17 [note verse 10 in particular]). Sanctification is *progressive* in nature, not a one-time "removal" of "character defects," nor a two-step event in which the believer first "becomes willing" in order that God might act. *God takes the initiative. He acts first.* Then the believer is empowered, by the Spirit, to "put off" and "put on" as required by biblical exhortations.

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

**"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9**

The comments under step 6, concerning the process of sanctification, are also relevant here. The process is not one of asking God to "remove our shortcomings" (another poor substitute for *sin*).

Step 7 is a counterfeit of Christian sanctification, as discussed under step 6. In 12-step ideology, there is *absolutely nothing* about the necessity to be cleansed of sin by the blood of Christ. There is a focus in 1 John about the work of Christ in making propitiation for our sins and cleansing us by His blood; that is the heart of salvation.

It is evident from other passages that the Christian should confess his sins on an ongoing basis and *ask forgiveness* from God and others who have been sinned against. However, step 7 has *nothing* about seeking God's forgiveness, either at the time of conversion or later in one's Christian walk.

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

**"Do to others as you would have them do to you." Luke 6:31**

The context of this Scripture is a section instructing the believer to love his enemies, to do good to those who persecute him (Luke 6:27-38). It is not a text that suggests the compiling of a list of persons we have "harmed" (a term that substitutes for the biblical concept, "sinned against"). The Scripture and step here do not correspond. See step 9 for further discussion concerning the believer's obligation to seek forgiveness, and if applicable make restitution, to those he has sinned against.

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

**"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**

The term "make amends" has replaced the biblical view of acknowledging sin (in accordance with God's standards), asking forgiveness of both God and the other person, and demonstrating the fruit of repentance by making restitution. Nothing is said here about reconciliation, a key issue in Matthew 5:23-24.

Also, the passage from Matthew 5 is urgent in nature! Placing it at "step 9" in a list of 12 successive steps is thus inappropriate.

This Scripture has no "except when to do so would injure them or others" escape hatch. By whose standards is such a determination to be made? God's standards or man's standards? Sometimes the process of reconciliation cannot be completed because the other party is dead or otherwise inaccessible, for example, when contact has been lost over a period of years; but that is a circumstance that differs from determining that an attempt at reconciliation would *injure* the other.

A distinction does need to be made between overt acts of sin and sins of the heart (for example, lustful thoughts). There is no biblical requirement to confess to another person sins that are *only* of the heart, such as a lustful or other evil thought. In this instance, or where the person is inaccessible, confession should be made to God alone.

The whole concept of *forgiveness* is strangely absent from the 12 steps (being replaced by "making amends"), most likely because the work of Christ on the cross is absent, leaving the program with no basis whatsoever for either seeking or granting biblical forgiveness. The Christian has sufficient counsel in the Scriptures to seek and grant forgiveness, and he has the experience of God's forgiveness as his foundation and model (Ephesians 4:32).

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

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

Refer again to comments on step 4 concerning "inventory," and previous discussion of the role of the Spirit in bringing biblical conviction. Refer to step 9 concerning forgiveness, which is not equivalent to "when we were wrong, promptly admitted it," but encompasses *so much more*. Similarly, the modern apology, "I'm sorry," is a sorry substitute for biblical forgiveness.

Keep reading: 1 Corinthians 10:13 gives the Christian both *warning* and *assurance* that he isn't "powerless." The warning (which encompasses 10:1-12) and assurance must be considered together.

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

**"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Colossians 3:16a**

The context of this half-verse concerns interpersonal relationships. Note how the verse continues..."with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16b). The verse does not correlate with the eleventh step.

Christians do, of course need to pray, meditate *on God's Word* (Psalm 1:1) and grow in relationship to Him, the latter not being

equivalent to "improving our conscious contact with God." Knowledge of His will comes fundamentally from the prayerful study of His Word. Meditation must have *content* (the Word of God), not an emptying of mind that is encountered in Eastern and New Age religions. The *power* to do the will of God has *already been given* to the Christian, as discussed under step 1.

The Scripture is rich in its teachings on prayer, meditation, and knowledge of God in general--much richer than any 12-step counterfeit (which has no basis in Scripture). The believer does not need this "step" in order to pray and meditate on God's Word.

Also, prayer and meditation on the Word are essential from the time of salvation. These important Christian disciplines are not something to be relegated to eleventh place on a scale of one to twelve. In fact, sanctification, relationships with others, and such are intimately connected with the believer's faithfulness in prayer and Bible study, from the time of conversion.

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

**"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." Galatians 6:1**

Once again, there is no correlation between the step and the Scripture stated here.

"Spiritual awakening" is not the equivalent of salvation. Unbelievers are spiritually *dead*, not asleep. They must be brought to spiritual *life* by the power of God, not "awakened."

This is an "evangelistic" step in the context of the 12-step program, one that involves the carrying of a specific "message" about "recovery." That "message" is definitely *not* the message of the Christian gospel.

Practicing "these principles"--principles grounded in 12-step ideology, not Scripture--in *all our affairs* shows how pervasive the program truly is. It is a form of *religion* that encompasses all of life. The Christian already has a treasury of biblical principles by which he is to live his new life as a believer. Those biblical principles, more often than not, directly conflict with the "principles" of 12-step theology. For example, compare "easy does it" with Paul's afflictions for the gospel in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 and with exhortations in 1 Peter concerning

persecution; compare "live and let live" with Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 6:1ff or Matthew 18:15-20.

The Scripture cited is one that involves restoration of another believer who has fallen into sin. This is not equivalent to carrying a 12-step "recovery" message to someone *outside* the group, but restoration of someone who already *belongs* to God's family. It is not a "step" to be postponed until a series of other "steps" have been performed, but a command to every Christian who is faced with a fellow believer entangled in sin.

## **General Evaluation and Conclusion**

Once again, I emphasize that my conclusions are not made in haste, but only after attending countless 12-step meetings over a period of approximately 20 years. I have found their philosophy and practices to be incompatible with the Christian faith. In fact, the 12-step program is a *counterfeit* of that faith and of the church. Counterfeits are always designed to look very similar to the "real thing." Otherwise they would be all too readily recognized as fake. The 12 steps offer counterfeit salvation, counterfeit sanctification, counterfeit forgiveness, counterfeit fellowship, counterfeit discipleship, counterfeit evangelism, and counterfeit "scripture" in their regularly read literature such as the "Big Book." The resemblance between the 12 steps and Scripture is merely superficial. It is a dangerous illusion.

Christians have the whole counsel of God given in His Word *many centuries* prior to Bill W.'s invention of the 12 steps. God's full counsel, rich treasury of wisdom that it is, cannot possibly be reduced to any set of "steps," nor can Scripture be forced into a succession of "steps" to be taken in order. To attempt to do so is much like having a million dollars in the bank and drawing out only 50 cents to live on for the rest of one's life. Christians dare not settle for anything less than the fullness of what God has given in His eternal, inerrant Word.

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