

THE PATH TO DECEPTION

The following is a Biblical critique of The Path to Serenity, by Hemfelt, Fowler, Minirth, and Meier.

Minirth and Meier boasts 16 clinics throughout the United States (p5), and their books have flooded the Christian market. They place a strong emphasis on the 12-step recovery program initiated by Alcoholics Anonymous and flourishing in the Christian church today. The authors state that over 10 million people attend as many as 500,000 self-help groups every week (p4). If the program is consistent with Biblical principles, as these authors claim, then this is wonderful. *But if it leads people away from the gospel and into idolatry, then we have a dangerous deception that must be exposed!*

In writing this critique, it is not my purpose to launch a personal attack or to question either the faith or the motives of the authors. What I do intend to question is the foundation of their counseling methods, as well as the foundation of the 12-step movement as a whole. The authors claim that "we offer the unique approach of reuniting modern Twelve-Step recovery with its ancient, biblical roots," but they admit that "many Twelve-Step speakers are very vague about who God is" (p15). They claim that "the roots of Bill W.'s philosophy were firmly planted in mainstream Christianity" because of the Oxford Group and Reverend Sam Shoemaker, rector of Calvary Episcopal Church (p16). They further state that Bob Smith "was emphatic about the Christian thrust of Twelve-Step recovery" (p16). Nevertheless, they allude to the truth in these revealing words:

"There is no denying Bill Wilson was **something of a spiritual paradox**. After an experience that he described as 'finding the God of the preachers,' Bill W. never took another drink. His wife reported that one of his favorite books, which he read daily, was 'My Utmost for His Highest,' by Oswald Chambers. **Yet, in other areas his life was inconsistent.**" (p. 16-17, emphasis added)

It is beyond the scope of this brief critique to fully explore the historical beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, this has been done by other authors, who show conclusively that Minirth and Meier are wrong in their assertions about the supposedly biblical roots of the 12-step program. (See, for example, Twelve Steps to Destruction, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan; Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked, by Dr. Cathy Burns; The Useful Lie, by Dr. William Playfair.)

The authors admit their discovery that "our patients have had

difficulty walking through the Twelve-Step process into full recovery without involvement of this God of the Old and New Testaments" (p16). Unfortunately, they do not sufficiently stress the *specific* requirement that one receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; instead, they use more general language that does not clearly exclude the idolatry inherent in 12-step terminology:

"Emancipation from our addictions requires that we go beyond the confines of three-dimensional reality and enter the special healing realm of the spiritual fourth dimension." Bill Wilson states: "I was soon to be catapulted into what I like to call the fourth dimension of experience." (p. 1-14)

There is no indication that Bill Wilson ever repented of his sin and turned to Christ as Savior. His experience has much more in common with New Age spirituality than genuine Christian faith. The Christian must be very discerning about any involvement with the "recovery" program that this unbeliever initiated!

Definitions

What exactly is an "addiction" from which one must "recover?" Minirth and Meier claim that "all addictions are fundamentally control addictions" in which "over-control of events, people, and things send our lives spinning dangerously out of control" (p. 5). Two components are involved. First, there is an "obsession," which they define as "mental preoccupation or craving." Second is the "compulsion," a "behavior that lives or acts out the mental obsession" (p5). Elaborating further, "an addiction is anything that is done to change reality" (p10). Looking into causes, the authors say: "The key question is: WHY do you do these things?" (p9). In beginning to answer their own question, they indicate that "the problem is the underlying spiritual or emotional hunger, which causes you to reach for the addictive agent" (p10).

This analysis, typical of psychology, is preoccupied with *need*, in contrast to the biblical concept of *lust*. It also destroys personal responsibility for sin its claim that one is *caused* to behave in a particular manner by the claimed *need*. The Bible clarifies the true problem as God sees it:

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." Ephesians 4:17-19

In contrast to the Bible, Minirth/Meier believe that a "slow gradual healing, not a quick cure, might be what God has in mind," and therefore, "that's why people in recovery go through the Twelve Steps over and over again, many for the rest of their lives" (p13). God does not place the Christian in this position, although sanctification is progressive in nature. The Christian is commanded to *put off* the ungodly characteristics of the old life, and to *put on* the qualities of Christ! His identity as "alcoholic" (drunkard) is referenced as being *past tense*:

"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

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."
1 Corinthians 6:9-11

STEP ONE THE DECEPTION OF POWERLESSNESS

The authors endorse the 12-step view that one must "hit bottom," saying that "as terrible as 'hitting bottom' sounds, the good news is that this realization is the first step in recovery." (p25) They believe that "intervention" by others may help to "raise the bottom" (p27). Five types of "bottoms" are enumerated: physical, emotional, spiritual, circumstantial, and relational (p28). They claim that "breaking out of denial, the universal enabler of all addictions, is the major psychological task of Step One" (p30). This involves such tasks as: making a list of things that seem unmanageable (p31), naming your "addiction" (p33), looking at one's particular losses (p36), and stating it out loud to "appropriate persons in your support network" (p38), for example:

"I acknowledge that I, by my individual human effort alone, am powerless over my dependence on _____."

"As a consequence of this addiction to _____, my life has become painful and unmanageable." (p38)

This verbal statement of powerlessness and addiction is repeated at Twelve Step meetings as members continually name themselves..."he needs to name and rename it to keep the armor of denial from building up again" (p41). Citing Luke 9:23-25, where Christ calls the believer to lose his own life for the sake of God's kingdom, the authors claim that "the spiritual principal of Step One is a paradox: We gain control by giving up control" (p40).

This is a distortion of the biblical process of *repentance*. Admission to a state of *powerlessness* is substituted for a recognition of one's *willful rebellion against God*. No distinction is made between the unbeliever, *who indeed has no power over his fundamental problem of sin*, and the believer, *who has the power of Christ and is not "powerless."* Human efforts alone are indeed not sufficient. However, both unbeliever and believer must admit to sin and rebellion--the former as an enemy surrendering, the latter as a child submitting to his Father (thanks to Jay Adams for these terms). God provides both cleansing from sin *and* the power to live a new life.

The chapter on Step One also stresses the "need" for affirmation, from others as well as oneself. Believing that "fear of rejection and abandonment is at the base of all addictions," the authors claim that "we need to feel affirmation from others that it's okay to acknowledge our addictions" (p41). As one attends 12-step meetings:

"Being accepted by a group to whom we've told the 'awful' truth is a beautiful, grace-filled moment in the recovery process. Instead of feeling rejection, we feel people moving closer to us." p. 43

This is a deceptive substitute for being "holy and blameless" in the presence of *God* (Ephesians 1:4) because of the agonizing crucifixion of His Son. This substitute glosses over the seriousness of sin in God's sight, offering acceptance in place of atonement. The Christian is accepted by God in spite of his sin, at a great price; his sin is *paid for by the blood of Christ*, not accepted by God. "Unconditional acceptance" by other humans can deceptively mask the need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Even worse is the authors' counsel to write oneself a "letter of forgiveness and compassion about the unmanageability in his life" because "we are also having to combat shame" (p43):

"Facing unmanageability puts us at extremely high risk to start self-shaming and self-blaming. This letter is the antidote." (p. 43)

The authors warn against "legalistic, self-shaming preaching," asking instead that you "express understanding to yourself" (p44). Explaining that most people "have made valiant efforts at trying to change certain patterns by their own willpower," they believe that you must "express empathy about the pain and difficulty at failed past efforts at self-control" (p45). You should "recognize. . .at the time you were doing the very best you knew how. . . ." (p45). Looking into the past, they claim that "often our addiction originates out of painful emotional patterns that were established early in our childhood experiences" (p46). Skirting the obvious shift of blame inherent in their analysis, they quickly add that "it's not that we seek to blame that original family, but that we must avoid self shame" (p46).

The idea of self-forgiveness has no basis whatsoever in Scripture. Self-love and self-forgiveness are integral aspects of man's sinful nature. The problem lies not in forgiving or empathizing with self, but rather in acknowledging the need for God's forgiveness. Isaiah, one of God's major prophets, would shudder at today's anti-biblical emphasis on 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

It took *burning coal* to take away Isaiah's guilt and atone for his sin (Isaiah 6:7) before he could be called by God to speak on His behalf. It takes the shed blood of Jesus Christ to take away our guilt and atone for our sins--not a letter of "self-forgiveness," a "hitting bottom" without admission of sin, or a plea of "powerlessness" that replaces repentance.

STEP TWO THE DECEPTION OF "INSANITY"

This steps focuses on restoration to "sanity." The authors offer us two definitions of "insanity." One of these is "doing the same thing over and over again but somehow expecting different results" (p50). The other is a "sense of brokenness, incompleteness, or alienation from God, not a severe mental illness" (p66). "Sanity," its opposite, is the "return to a whole, complete relationship with God and a whole, complete sense of our identity" (p66).

Man is indeed alienated from God *by his sin*. The problem, however, is not "incompleteness," as we are whole persons before God. The problem is one of *rebellion*. Words such as "powerlessness" and "insanity" mask the nature of that rebellion, leaving one with the impression that a person is not truly responsible for his condition.

The authors tell us in this chapter that:

"All humanity has lost God, all humanity has tried to substitute other gods for Him, and all humanity must again find the authentic God." (p. 51)

Again, the idea of "losing" God masks deliberate, willful rebellion against God and His standards. Nevertheless, the authors go on to describe four ways in which people often "lose" their relationship with God.

Two of these skirt the truth of the matter. First, "the addictions themselves became false gods or idols, which were pursued and worshipped" (p51). Similarly, "all addictions are founded on, to some extent, a belief in magic," and therefore "we limit God's ability to work in our lives because we are relying on the addiction, rather than on God" (p60). The true nature of "addiction" is *idolatry*, and it is vitally important to correctly name the problem as such. Idolatry is a major theme throughout Scripture. It is fundamental to all sin. It is certainly not a "disease" from which one must "recover," but rather a basic *sin* from which one must *repent*.

Amidst this discussion, the authors quote Bill Wilson again, who professed belief in a "mighty purpose and rhythm" and "vast laws and forces at work:"

"When they (ministers and world's religions) talked of a God personal to me, who was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory. I had always believed in a Power greater than myself." (p. 53)

Note the focus on "laws" and "forces" and "power greater than myself," rather than the personal God of the Bible to whom all humans are accountable. Note the *knowledge* of God's existence along with the *rebellion* evident in this quote, which confirms the truth declared by Paul in his letter to the Romans:

"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. For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Romans 1:20-23

The authors distort this truth in a subtle manner:

"The loss of the true God and His replacement with substitute gods results in the loss of our true identity and its replacement with a false or 'survival self,' which we try to maintain by the practice of our addiction." (p. 54)

God is not lost! Man is lost, because he has turned away from God to follow his own selfish inclinations. It is God who must make the first move to redeem man; Minirth/Meier have reversed the process. Man is *spiritually dead* apart from God's intervening power. He is in desperate need of a *new* identity in Christ, not the discovery of a "true" identity that he somehow carelessly misplaced like a lost set of keys.

Another manner in which man supposedly "loses" God is when "the escalating unmanageability of your obsessive-compulsive lifestyle has convinced you that 'there is no God in whom I can trust'" (p59). Thus, they say, "our patients become disillusioned ...because God doesn't seem to rescue them from their addictions" (p59). They go on to say that "recovery" is not an instant transformation: "Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the 'educational variety' because they develop over a period of time" (p59, quoting A.A. "Big Book").

Once more is the familiar failure to acknowledge man's rebellion, his unwillingness to obey God's commandments. It does take some time to develop a godly lifestyle; sanctification is progressive, involving the power of the Holy Spirit and continual practice of obedience along with diligent study of God's Word.

The fourth and final road to "losing" God is the far from biblical truth: "Abusive relationships with our earthly parents have distorted the emotional pictures we hold of the Heavenly Father" (p55). The authors explain further that "since parents are our earliest representations of God, we see God through their actions toward us. It's almost as if we are seeing Him through a distorted set of glasses" (p58). In actual counseling, the authors stress the popular "inner child" concept, engaging one client in a "therapeutic monologue with the imaginary presence of his dad" (p57), explaining to him that "the little boy who hid under the table from his dad was also hiding from the wrath of God" (p57).

There is no Scripture whatsoever to support the Freudian view that relationships with earthly parents determine the character of one's relationship with the Lord! This extremely dangerous idea originated in the mind of militant atheist Sigmund Freud, yet continues to deceive Christians today. Also evident here is Minirth/Meier's failure to acknowledge the true *wrath of God*, attested to by much Scripture. The Christian has been delivered

from that wrath by God's sovereign grace.

Also disturbing and unbiblical are the authors' comments on the "we came to" portion of this step:

"This part of the step must be made by force of will" which means choosing to "place our addictions in a sufficient state of surrender so that we can begin to make rational choices. Only a small percentage of the brain is under conscious control. We are responsible for this part of our thought processes. The vast majority of brain function is subconscious. This large domain of subconscious functioning we can choose to reprogram through our Twelve-Step recovery program." (p. 62)

The authors *assume* here the theoretical model developed by Freud regarding the unconscious. No documentation is cited to show scientific evidence for what they assert as fact. The Word of God is consciously and volitionally oriented, giving no credence to the idea that *most* of our brain functioning is subconscious. Despite the professed emphasis here on responsibility, such statements effectively dilute man's responsibility before God. They fail to note the sinful desires of man's *heart*. At the same time, they fail to stress the absolute necessity for divinely initiated action in order to give man saving faith and thus the power to live a godly life.

The authors note that prior to the formation of A.A., Ebby remarked to Bill W.: "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" (p63). Echoing the thought, Minirth/Meier ask their clients: "If you are not at peace with God, describe the god you would like to believe in" (p64). They claim that "it's no coincidence that the God that they describe is the God of the Bible who loved people just like us, in all our brokenness" (p64). Descriptions often include "a god who will love me no matter what I do" (p64).

This line of reasoning leads directly to *idolatry*, which is the nature of the *problem*, not a *solution!* While it is true that God demonstrated His love for us "while we were yet sinners," by sending Christ to die for our sins (Romans 5:8), it is a distortion of God's grace to see Him as a cosmic, somewhat senile, indulgent grandfather figure who overlooks sin.

To their credit, though not consistent with their other teachings, the authors note that God forgave David's adultery because he was truly repentant. This is a glimmer of truth amongst much error. Unfortunately, the "god" created by the Twelve Steps is an idol, not the holy, righteous--yet merciful--God of the Bible.

STEP THREE THE DECEPTION OF IDOLATRY

This third and crucial step involves turning one's will and life over to the care of God. While there is certainly a strong element of truth here, serious problems arise in the phrase, "God as we understood Him," which opens wide the pathway to every conceivable idolatry.

The authors do begin their analysis with what appear to be valid points regarding submission to God. They say that "it is not necessary to bombard our problems with our willpower but rather to bring our will into agreement with the will of God" (p71). It is true that sheer human effort, striving in the flesh, does not effectively provide power to overcome sinful habits. It is also true that the believer must submit to the will of God. As the authors state, "Our first act in taking Step Three is submitting to God" (p71). They define submission as "simply coming to understand that it's God's world, and He can run it" (p72). To this point, one can hardly argue, although it is perhaps a bit presumptuous when they counsel you to "give the universe back to Him" (p72), rather than to humbly acknowledge His absolute sovereignty.

The most serious difficulties arise when we examine the authors' approach to the counselee's understanding of God. They offer several "suggestions" that reveal a belief that one may "choose" a particular God to one's own liking. For example, "If you don't have a God who's working for you, borrow ours" (p73), and "Give yourself permission to believe in a God who is bigger than life" (p74). Lumping Christians and unbelievers together, they claim that both limit God--some as an impersonal force or "first cause," others by defining Him in terms of rigid legalistic rules. They urge: "Don't you want to choose the God who can perform the miracle that is needed?" (p75). It is almost as if one could go to some theological marketplace and select whatever "God" is most suited to his own desires. Such an attitude is an affront to God's righteous, holy character. God is *who He is*, not a cosmic caterer. Further, the authors do not direct the reader to God's Word as the source of final revelation concerning His character, and they neglect to mention that God makes certain demands on His people.

Also distressing is the primacy of emotion in selecting a view of God. The authors state that "we...approach our patients very pragmatically, seeing as they are still searching more with their minds than their hearts" (p74)--as if the mind were inferior to the emotions in this critical task of understanding God! They claim further that "the road toward a personal encounter with this God must be a journey of the heart, rather than a journey of the

mind" (p76), and they urge the reader to "trust and believe" the "warm feelings" of 12-step meeting encounters (p76). This is a *dangerous* form of trust because it is a trust in the flesh rather than in the Lord.

Feeling orientation are underlies their statement that "the big obstacles to recovery are guilt, shame and resentment" (p77). One can appreciate their attempt to point toward the true God, when they state that only the *Christian* God "offers an antidote to this dual package of shame and resentment" (p77). They cite the case of a woman who "just couldn't imagine that God would forgive her for consciously causing such pain" (p77). As her therapists, they "finally...realized that she had such incredible guilt about what she had done that she had to be assured that God would allow her to become a totally new creation under His transforming touch" (p78). Yes, the true God does transform His children into new creations, and He offers the only "antidote" to guilt, shame, and resentment. However, the overall orientation of these authors is to stress the *feeling* of guilt, the *feeling* of shame, the *feeling* of resentment. No such focus exists in Scripture, where Christ offers the final sacrifice to *actually* remove sins and accomplish redemption, regardless of feelings. Feelings can be extremely deceptive, and are the last line of attack for a truly biblical counselor. One must focus on God's Word--first the way of salvation, then the process of sanctification as the believer increasingly walks in obedience. Good feelings will in all probability *follow*, but they do not lead the way!

A faulty view of redemption surfaces in this discussion. They claim that: "If we don't accept the Savior, we will constantly try to become our own codependent redeemer. Many of our addictions are crude efforts at self-sacrifice and self-redemption." (p78) Indeed, man does attempt to "save" himself in many sinful ways (the term "self-sacrifice," however, hardly fits.) The authors rightly state that only in accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ are we freed from our sins. However, they conclude that "through this (redemption) we can be freed from our *false shame* and find the *true personality* God created for us" (p78, emphasis added). This destroys the core of the gospel, because our shame is not false; it is real! And it is not a "true personality" that one finds; rather, he must grow into the image of *Christ*.

Motivation present yet another problem, as the authors urge that "our desire to save ourselves from our addictions must be so great that we will step out in faith" (p79). This self-serving motivation is not one that Scriptures promotes or condones. Rather, the believer must desire to *please God*, to honor and glorify *Him*, not merely to avoid the painful consequences of sinful behavior; this is the worldly sorrow that lead to death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Finally, the authors parallel the "promises" of the A.A. "Big Book" with the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5. There are rough, surface level similarities. However, that spiritual fruit is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit, which is not possessed by unbelievers. A.A. is open to every idolatrous form of spirituality, every concept of "god" one might imagine. Whatever "fruit" or "promises" may appear, do not be deceived. It is like the plastic apples and bananas one sometimes encounters in a decorative arrangement on someone's coffee table. It's not the "real thing!"

This step is a deceptive substitute for knowledge of God through His inerrant revelation, and submission to His sovereign control and commands.

STEP FOUR THE DECEPTION OF "INVENTORY"

Of all the steps, this is the one which perhaps comes closest to biblical truth. If the "moral inventory" were an honest examination of one's heart using *the standards of God's Word and relying on the Holy Spirit*, it would not be objectionable. However, Minirth/Meier's analysis destroys any hope of such a biblical pursuit.

One of their primary errors is expressed in counsel they have given to a client regarding motivation: ". . .you'll be doing it to find yourself--and God--in that order. Because of the pain and loss of self-esteem in your childhood, you never had a chance to find the real Martin when you were growing up" (p82). They stress finding *self*, claiming that "you may be estranged from yourself" (p101), and specifically place it in a higher priority than finding *God!* As if it were possible to truly know oneself *without* knowing God as He reveals Himself in His Word.... As if one were estranged from *self*, when the Bible states man's fundamental problem as separation from *God*.... In contrast to clear teachings in Scripture about putting off the "old man" and putting on the "new man" in the likeness of Christ (Ephesians 4:22-24, Romans 6:1-14, Colossians 3:1-10), the authors state:

"Almost all dependent persons have lost their true identity because they grew up in dysfunctional families where they were forced to assume false survival roles." (p83)

This emphasis on "true identity" defies Scripture. The believer has a *new identity* in Christ and is not called to look within for a hidden "true self."

The authors list seven "steps" for the inventory, steps which

lead away from confronting one's own sin, focusing instead on the sins of others. These steps are as follows (p88-89):

1. Tell your own "story" and write it down. This they claim to be "a very healing thing to do" (p87).
2. List your "dependencies, codependencies, addictions."
3. Look for the "roots of your addictions" in these four types of abuse: active, passive, emotional, and negative messages.
4. List major life relationships.
5. Note the guilt *feelings* related to these people.
6. Look for the good; this includes "positive permissions granted self."
7. List resentments, then go on to identify the underlying anger, then the hurt and fears that produced that anger, and finally, the **unmet needs that produced fear**.

There is no way around the fact that this list provides a golden opportunity for blame-shifting, and little room for a biblical evaluation of one's own sinful behaviors and attitudes. Even the listing of resentments follows a pattern which destroys personal responsibility by placing the blame on "unmet needs." They define resentment as "simmering anger" which is felt "over and over again" and caused by the "fear that our needs will never be met" (p109). The authors make a frank statement of this cause-effect relationship:

"God's Word cautions us to exercise moderation in the fulfillment of our human needs. If our emotional and spiritual neediness is too great, then we cross the line into addictive dependency on a person, substance, or behavior." (p90)

God's Word does discuss the need for moderation, but not specifically in connection with "needs" as these psychologists have defined needs. Scripture defines genuine need sparingly, and continually exhorts believers to rely on the Lord, not self. The authors do give some appearance of maintaining a valid purpose for all this, as one of their primary goals is to avoid repetition of past behaviors:

"Worse, the dysfunctions that first occurred in the family of origin may now be repeated, and so 'the sins of the fathers are visited on the children unto the third and fourth generations.'" (p83)

"A major purpose in walking through Steps Four and Five is **to identify and release this pain from the past** so that we do not remain in self-destructive lifestyles." (p84)

Emphasis on "pain from the past" replaces the biblical concept of repentance. This is sadly evident throughout their extensive discussion of abuse. It must be stressed that child abuse is a serious evil, and there is no intent here to condone or minimize the sinfulness of such behavior. However, it is unbiblical to focus on past abuse as the cause of present sinful patterns. To do so delays or destroys the glorious hope of the gospel, the forgiveness that is provided through Christ.

The authors discuss four categories of abuse, which at times stretch the definition to such an extent that any sin suffered by a child becomes an excuse later in life. The most obvious abuse is what they term "active," which includes physical violence and sexual molestation. The authors note that "the vast majority of abuse occurs under the pretense of discipline, so it is easy to see how these people may deny they were ever abused" (p92). (Denial, founded heavily in Freudian speculations, undergirds much of what these authors teach.) To their credit, they do acknowledge that "there is nothing wrong with punishment; in fact, the physical reinforcement of boundaries is actually reassuring to a small child" (p92). However, their view of discipline is not rooted in biblical commands to parents. Also, there is a growing tendency to push even biblically mandated corporal punishment into the arena of abuse. The authors exalt psychological counseling for sexual abuse, rather than seeing the responsibilities of the church:

"If you think you might have experienced sexual abuse, we feel you should consult a counselor as soon as possible. You could call **your local church for a referral** or ask your family doctor." (p93, emphasis added)

Note their view of the church as merely referring the individual **elsewhere**, rather than assuming the God-given responsibility to provide biblical counsel.

"Passive" abuse is a dangerous, wide-open area. The authors define it as "any failure to meet a child's needs" (p93). There are seemingly no limits here, particularly in view of their expansive definition of "needs." Parents do have clear responsibilities before God for their children, but when this sort of broad definition is offered to adult counselees, it is a dangerous invitation to shift blame almost endlessly.

A third area of concern is "emotional abuse," wherein the parent is "emotionally 'married' to the child and the child is required to provide emotional companionship that should be supplied by the spouse" (p94). Certainly this ought not to be done. It reflects a love of self along with a lack of love for God and others. But again, an adult counselee must be cautious in

using such a *past* situation to escape responsibility for current sin.

Finally, "negative messages" is another category that is far too wide and subject to blame-shifting manipulation. The authors show their Freudian colors in the examples they provide. One woman client, who had two abortions, supposedly did so because of the childhood message from her mother: "You are not supposed to be here. Dad wanted a boy." They explain that "she was symbolically reliving that message each time she generated life and then terminated." (p94-95) While her childhood years may have indeed been difficult, this is a horrendous effort to escape responsibility for the sin of murdering two unborn children. *The authors actually do their client a disservice by excusing her sin rather than pointing her to the Cross.* Similarly, another client repeatedly married abusive husbands: "She subconsciously sought to punish herself for the false shame she carried over being an incest an rape victim" (p99). Notice the "subconscious" element in the counselee's motivation, which opposes the entire thrust of Scripture, and again, the shifting of blame. The authors teach that "the key is finding the pattern--the experiences that repeat" (p99). They briefly note the hope described in Romans 8:28, but caution against minimizing the losses and justifying abuses committed against you, which they claim you *must* grieve (p107). People do indeed repeat sinful patterns, and these patterns must be recognized and changed. The sins of others are serious, and Scripture gives instruction on confrontation and restoration of others. But the "key" is in godly repentance, not psychological blame-shifting.

The authors do at least make brief mention of guilt for sins against others:

"Authentic (true) guilt is good when it reminds you that you have sinned against God, others, or yourself. True guilt is good when it reminds you to ask God to forgive you and motivates you to forgive yourself. True guilt is also good when it motivates you to make a tactful and appropriate confession to a person you have harmed." (p105)

This is as close as they come to a biblical view, and even here there are problems. Asking forgiveness from God and/or others is appropriate, but forgiveness of self is **not** biblically commanded or even condoned; this is an unbiblical concept. Also, the distinction between "false guilt" and "true guilt" is neither biblical nor helpful. Guilt is defined by God's standards, not by *feelings*, as indicated by these authors.

The authors compare the Step Four "inventory" to that of a store. They focus largely on what they call "damaged

merchandise," defined as "any childhood situation that blocked or limited our receiving love from one or both parents" (p91). We have already examined the theological flaws in their view of abuse. They move from "damaged merchandise" to the recommendation that you "look for the good" in yourself and "think about the kind of friend you might be to yourself" (p102)--doing nice things for yourself, forgiving yourself, being compassionate toward yourself, and being your own best friend. This "looking for the good" is supposedly based on the exhortation in Philippians 4:8, which actually says **nothing** about this type of extreme self-focus. Then, quoting Melody Beatty in Codependent No More, they say that "treating ourselves badly is as much a moral issue as treating others badly" (p106). (This book demonstrates an extreme self-worship and is highly unbiblical.) There is a limited amount of self-care that is proper, such as proper physical rest, food, exercise, and devotional time with the Lord. However, this self-care is undertaken in order to properly serve and honor God, not in order to indulge and feel good about self. The proponents of "codependent" theory have gone much, much too far in their recommendations to focus on and care for self ahead of others.

Finally, the authors recommend a "strong underpinning of prayer" for the inventory, because "without this undergirding of divine security the trauma of looking back over all the old pains, anger, and resentments can be devastating" (p86). They support this exhortation with an example of a young man who committed suicide. Prayer, of course, is essential in the life of the believer. Indeed, it is devastating to look at *one's own sin* (never mind the "old pains" of the sins of others) without the hope of the gospel. However, note well the fact that 12-step groups typically define God as a vague "higher power" with no reference whatsoever to the Bible or specifically to Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. The authors fail to identify this very serious danger. Even in groups that claim to be Christian, God is viewed more as a senile old grandfather who winks at sin, rather than the holy, righteous Creator who demonstrated His love and mercy by sending Christ to die for our sins. "Recovery" groups substitute unconditional human acceptance for the divine mercy that comes within the framework of God's holiness. Thus, their teachings might well come under the heading of "another gospel" (see Galatians 1:6-10).

In the conclusion of the fourth step discussion, the authors say that "you can rely on God and your own subconscious to bring answers--it's your job to ask the questions" (p115). Not really. Without God's inerrant, infallible, it is impossible to even conceive of the right questions. And it is a grave error to rely on one's own "subconscious" for answers. The believer must trust solely in the Lord, and he must examine himself using the standards of His Word and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

STEP FIVE THE DECEPTIVE CONFESSION

This step introduces the act of confession to God, ourselves, and another human being. Confession is a key concept of the Christian faith, but the 12-step version distorts its purposes, as well as standards for determining guilt.

The issue of motives is central to understanding how this fifth step counterfeits Christianity. One major problem is the authors' emphasis on *feelings* as a motivation for confession:

"The feelings of remorse are bottled up inside us and confession is the only way to release the pain of our authentic guilt and the anger and resentment from our false guilt." (p120)

"Confessing the exact nature of our wrongs to God releases us from our **feelings** of guilt." (p124, emphasis added)

A selfishly motivated relief is what drives the 12-step practice of confession. Minirth and Meier confirm this in their counseling of clients. They describe one case:

"She came to appreciate the absolute necessity of having some means to spiritually release her guilt. Those of us with addictive personalities either find a means to purge this guilt from our minds and hearts or the guilt accumulates as a vast toxic residue." (p125)

Besides the feeling orientation, the authors defy biblical purposes for confession in their focus on *self*: "Confession helps the person who's confessing, not the person who's listening" (p119). They recommend such self-affirming statements as, "I forgive myself so I can heal," and "I accept myself as a human being with character defects" (p128). In looking at how you may have contributed to your own life's problems, they offer this example: "By always thinking of others first and denying myself" (p123). (This flatly ignores Christ's command to deny self!) Their counsel is overly concerned with extending compassion to oneself and avoiding the fear of condemnation (p127). The Christian, however, is to seek *God's* forgiveness (not *self*-forgiveness), and *God's* compassion. He is no longer under condemnation because of the righteous work of Christ (Romans 8:1), but the 12-step program does not recognize the absolute **necessity** of salvation in order to avoid condemnation. Apart from the saving power of Christ, man is an object of God's wrath, and he cannot escape God's judgment by extending compassion to himself!

The authors' understanding of guilt is biblically deficient, even though they do, finally, recognize the need to examine one's own sin: "We also need to acknowledge the specific ways in which we have wronged others by the practice of our addictions" (p121). Also to their credit, they make brief mention of the *idolatry* present in so-called "addictive" behaviors: "Obviously one of the things you have done against God is to replace Him with your addiction" (p120).

However, the authors minimize the real seriousness of sin. They state that God is not going to "zap" you for your sin (p125), and they say that "the word *sin* comes from a Greek word which means 'missing the mark'" (p125). One Greek word for sin does indeed have this meaning, but there are several Greek words for sin with different nuances. And "missing the mark," in God's sight, is a serious matter indeed. It is worthy of death! Minirth and Meier seem to flippantly dismiss sin as if it were a minor, perhaps unintentional, mistake. Scripture describes sin as a deliberate rebellion against God, as man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). God indeed will "zap" you (a euphemism for judgment and inflicting of His wrath) if you do not repent and trust in Christ, receiving God's mercy. These biblical truths simply cannot be ignored or glossed over.

The authors compare "authentic guilt" to a "burglar alarm" which is triggered as the natural consequence of sin (p125). Indeed it is, but much more space ought to be devoted to a discussion of how the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the believer's heart, using God's powerful Word (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Hebrews 4:12), as well as the dangers of searing the conscience through continued practice of sin (Hebrews 3:13).

Theological "alarms" must sound, meanwhile, when the authors distinguish "authentic guilt" from "false guilt:"

"Most people who take Step Five only deal with their authentic guilt. However, we give equal weight to grieving through all of the relationship and life situations that have instilled a sense of false guilt in us." (p128)

This "false guilt," in their opinion, has "the same power to damage us emotionally" (p128). Minirth and Meier believe that you must undergo the "five emotional stages of the grieving process" and "acknowledge wrongs in the family of origin" (p129). Their recommendation is to "let all those buried feelings come to the surface" in order to be free of them (p131). Then, they counsel:

"Say, 'I realize that the following feelings are really false guilt, not authentic guilt. If someone else should deal with this issue, I hand it back to him or her.'" For example: "My

feeling is that I can never please God and that I don't deserve His salvation." Client then "hands back" her "false guilt" to her grandmother, whose condemning voice had haunted her. (p132)

The basis for the authors' focus on "false" guilt is in their concept of "love hunger," as discussed more fully in a critique of *Love is a Choice*: "Yet a hunger for love is an inborn part of every person that is as basic as the physical need for food" (p130). Appealing and rational as this idea might appear, it reverses the biblical view that man is fundamentally a sinner in need of redemption, not a victim of the sins of others who needs to be "healed"--even though many individuals have truly suffered at the hands of others. Rather than look honestly at how a person may have sinfully *responded* to the sins of others, thus incurring "authentic guilt," the authors counsel *against* confession:

"Making a general confession like this about areas of false guilt merely results in a destructive compounding of our addiction shame base." (p127)

This is a real disservice to counselees, who ought to seriously examine their sinful attitudes and response patterns, as well as consider biblical requirements to confront and restore *others*. "False guilt" is a false category that is defined subjectively, in terms of feelings, rather than the standards of God's Word.

It must be noted that the authors do inject some very good comments in the midst of their erroneous teachings. They note three elements of confession that are truly biblical: (1) examination of one's conscience; (2) sorrow at "having offended the heart of the Father;" and (3) determination to avoid sin (p126). Scripture does instruct you to examine yourself before God, to sorrow over offending *God*, and to turn away from your sin. It is sad that these biblical truths are not prominent in Minirth and Meier's teachings, but rather conflict with most of what they are saying. It is also terribly confusing to readers to be faced with such a mixing of truth and error.

In discussing the need to go to another human being, the authors compound their errors. They claim that "we must lower our psychological defenses and become emotionally vulnerable" (p127); "for once in our lives we're going to open the deepest, darkest secrets and reveal the most sensitive pains to another human being" (p136). Quoting the 12 and 12 of Alcoholics Anonymous, they note that "somehow, being alone with God doesn't seem as embarrassing as facing up to another person" (p136). One of the primary purposes for this disclosure is to "break out of loneliness" because many "addicts" are "suffering from terminal uniqueness," the feeling of being different from other people (p136). During this encounter, the "layer of shame dissolves" and

our perception of past wrongs is softened: "They were wrong, but they were not as monstrous as we have led ourselves to believe" (p137).

There are a couple of serious flaws in all of this. Biblically, sins are to be confessed to those who *need to know*, particularly the person who has been sinned against, and if necessary, a pastor who can provide godly counsel. Fellowship with other Christian is not to be based on an outpouring of hidden emotions or unnecessary disclosure of sins to uninvolved persons. Perhaps even more seriously, however, Minirth and Meier's comments show once again that they minimize sin. Sin is actually much *more* "monstrous" than what humans beings are naturally inclined to believe. It is vitally important to acknowledge that fact in order to appreciate the glorious news of the gospel.

The authors establish three criteria for choosing a person to hear your confession. The first, "some degree of detachment," (p140), is definitely unbiblical. They suggest that "a therapist or counselor by their very professional role may offer the needed detachment" (p140). Much space could be devoted to refuting this; numerous New Testament "one another" commands, and the example of Paul, demonstrate how far such "detachment" is from biblical love. The second criterion is that the person ought to be "absolutely trustworthy" and not repeat the matter to others (p140). To some degree this is true. *However*, if you were to continue in the same sin(s), that person might be required to exercise church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20). Absolute confidentiality, as the authors suggest, is not biblical. The third criterion is that the other person "will not shame or condemn you" (p140). While biblical love does require gentleness and humility, not a self-righteous condemnation or shaming of another, a good counselor may have to *lovingly* confront sin. The atmosphere of Step Five works against such biblical confrontation.

Forgiveness is mentioned briefly as the "final stage" of the "grieving process" (p135). The authors warn: "The caution at this point is that there must be genuine grief in order for the forgiveness to have integrity" (p135). This is *not* a biblical requirement for forgiveness! God *commands* forgiveness on the basis of what He has done for you in Christ. It is not conditioned on one's feelings!

Responsibility and blame are discussed in a manner that masks the real hope of Scripture. A "popular recovery slogan" says that "no one is to blame, but everyone is responsible" (p133). This distinction is neither clear nor helpful. Biblically, everyone is born in sin, needing God's redemption. Psychologists do indeed blame others, despite protests such as this slogan. Yet after all of their blame-shifting tactics, they cast the full burden for change back onto you:

"We take a step beyond identifying what happened to us and take adult responsibility for who we are today, regardless of what happened in our past." "Now you are responsible for making changes in your personality." (p134)

This seems at first like a good step away from the authors' general orientation of perceiving man as a victim. However, consider the following comparison:

Psychotherapy

1. It isn't your fault that you are where you are today. You are a victim of the sins of others.
2. But...it's now all up to you to change.

God's Word

1. Yes, you are responsible for where you are today. You have sinned, and you were born with a sinful nature.
2. But...salvation is totally *God's* work. Sanctification is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and God gives you everything you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4). You have a responsibility to change, but God works in you to produce changes in your character.

The authors cite Proverbs 28:13 in closing their chapter on Step Five: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Indeed this is true, but that confession must be made primarily to God, then to biblically appropriate persons, and sins must be determined in accordance with God's standards. Step Five fails to provide a biblical framework for the application of this proverb.

STEPS SIX AND SEVEN THE DECEPTION OF WILLINGNESS

These two closely related steps involve "being *willing* to have God remove *all* character defects that underlie your addictive behavior" (p145), examining "those areas of feelings or behavior that do not seem to yield to logic or willpower" (p145), and then humbly asking God to remove these "defects." It involves "admitting to God: 'Even though logically I know I shouldn't be doing this, and even though I've tried to exercise willpower over it, I can't break out of this in my own power. I need YOUR help'" (p145). There are some areas of truth amidst the authors' discussion of these steps, along with error. Certainly the

believer needs God's power to overcome sinful habits. However, these steps are basically a counterfeit for the biblical process of sanctification.

In discussing the problem areas, it will be helpful to "translate" into biblical terms. That is vitally important, because in doing so one is made aware of the real seriousness of the problems being observed, as well as God's solutions. The most obvious and critical error in terminology is the use of "character defects" or "shortcomings" in place of **sin** or **sinful habits**. The authors' failure to emphasize sin, and their minimization of it, pervades the entire book.

The authors believe that fear makes it difficult to "release our shortcomings" (p146ff), because of familiarity (p146-147), development in childhood of "dysfunctional patterns" as "survival mechanisms" (p147), "internal blackmail messages" (p147), and the "payoff" usually offered by these behaviors. They note that "your addiction creates the illusion that it will satisfy, but it *can't* and *won't*" (p147). Biblically, they are observing the sinful fear of man and **idolatry**. The "addiction," actually an idol, truly does not satisfy. Idolatry is a very serious matter to God. It is a subject that occupies much space throughout Scripture. It is unfortunate that these authors fail to call their counselees to repentance for this sin, but blame "love hunger," which they consider a legitimate need: "At the very basis of any character defect is that huge unresolved love hunger that drives a person to an addiction in the first place" (p149). Although this is appealing and may *seem* to be right, the Bible clearly emphasizes one's own sin and issues a call to *repent*.

Several major "personality defect patterns" are described by the authors (p149ff). Again, their observations must be translated into biblical categories before one can understand solutions that honor God. They first note "chronic depression," which they wrongly equate with "low self-esteem" (p149). Depression can result from any number of causes, which may or may not be sinful. There may be areas of unconfessed sin, unbiblical responses to the sins of others, failure to trust God, or a physiological problem. Another pattern noted is chronic anxiety, which "puts you under tremendous stress" and may lead to an "addiction" in one's efforts to "self-medicate" (p151). Biblically, this is a failure to obey God's commands to trust Him and approach Him with prayer and thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6-9). The third pattern observed is the "naive, passive personality" who may become a "partner or enabler," join a cult, or enter into "religious addiction" with the attitude that "everything is going to be okay and God will handle it all and spare me from pain" (p153-154). This last statement is a distortion of the believer's hopeful attitude in the light of God's sovereignty. Fourth is the

"compulsive/controlling/driven personality" (p155). Again, a biblical analysis would include the failure to trust God, plus a failure to submit to Him. Another pattern is the angry, explosive person who attempts to control others. The authors claim this is an attempt to (1) cover insecurity, "which is the core issue beneath all bombast and explosions"; (2) indirectly grieve the pain of one who is "lonely, scared, hurting" (p156). Scripture warns against human anger in numerous passages (James 1:19, 20 and others), but nowhere teaches that it "covers insecurity" or provides a way to grieve pain. Such explanations are more in line with the blame-shifting theories of psychotherapy. Finally, the authors describe a "pathologically dishonest personality" (p157) who demonstrates "blatant emotional dishonesty, being unwilling (or unable) to tell the truth about their **feelings**" (emphasis added) although possessing a "cash register honesty" about facts (p158). Minirth and Meier claim that about "ninety percent of the pathological dishonesty we treat is in the emotional area" (p158). Scripture does teach honesty, but absolutely **nowhere** is this honesty related to **feelings** as opposed to facts. God emphasizes speaking the truth in **love** (Ephesians 4:25). There are times when it is neither loving nor biblically necessary to be blatantly honest about one's feelings, which could be sinful. Scripture emphasizes the honest confession of actual sin without focus on emotion.

The authors rightly call attention to the need for humility, which reminds us that "human power alone is very limited to deal with character defects" (p163) and "helps us appreciate the immensity of God's power to transform lives" (p164). Another reason for humility, they teach, is that "our shortcomings--character defects--are major, not just minor mistakes or weaknesses" (p162). This is true, but their argument would be greatly strengthened by a proper view of **sin** (and correct naming of it), something which they minimize elsewhere.

Their discussion of humility notes the "pompous tendency to see oneself as far more magnificent and grand than one really is" (p162), yet includes a caution not to confuse humility with humiliation (p163). They claim that "humility does not equal low self-esteem" and that "low self-esteem produces grandiosity and false pride, while the better our self-image becomes, the more humble we will be" (p163). Scripture does not support these conclusions, but rather warns against *high* self-esteem:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." (Romans 12:3)

In concluding their discussion of Step Seven, the authors

outline a nine-point plan for removing "character defects." This plan includes:

(1) The continual re-acknowledgement of "your basic character defects," in order to "push back the veil of denial. They claim cannot be done too often (p165). This contradicts the believer's hope (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

(2) "Hand the defects back to God's care" (p165). God does provide the power for change, but again, this continued focus on "defects" actually denies His power for lasting change.

(3) "Specify very carefully what needs to be changed for just this one day" (p166). Focus here is on small blocks of time.

(4) "With great specificity, ask God to touch the parts of you that need to be healed or transformed" (p167).

There is nothing wrong with specific prayer, but the authors fail to note that God's Word must determine the exact changes to be made, and the Holy Spirit brings conviction through that powerful Word.

(5) "Act your way into better thinking and feeling," or "fake it until you make it" (recovery slogan), because "at first it will feel awkward and even wrong to go through the motions of doing what you know is the proper action," but "if you will take the proper action over and over again, the good feelings will gradually catch up with you" (p168). This is the first time that the authors are actually willing to set aside feelings, and they are thus closer to the biblical truth that one must obey God's commands regardless of feelings. Unfortunately they fail to stress *God's commands* as being "the proper action."

(6) "Being willing to bear discomfort" (p169). Here, they claim, "you can use willpower to an important degree" (p169), even though the 12 steps generally focus on the weakness of willpower. The Christian must indeed be willing to "bear discomfort"--*for the cause of Christ*. However, the believer's sanctification is *not* brought about by willpower, even though he must consistently take actions and obey God's Word. Instead, the Holy Spirit provides the power and brings about the changes in character that God requires (Galatians 5:16-24). By contrast, the unbeliever *cannot* make changes that are pleasing to God (Romans 8:7, 8). The 12-step program fails to distinguish between Christian and unbeliever!

(7) "Thinking secure thoughts" is recommended through use of

3 x 5 cards (p170). It is wise to think good thoughts, as God commands in Philippians 4:8 and 9, but the authors make no mention of focusing on God's Word and *His* thoughts; the examples they note tend to be *self*-focused.

(8) "Develop new habits and patterns with repetition" (p171). This is as close as the authors ever come to the "put on" commands that always follow the biblical "put off" commands of God. New, godly habits are critical in the putting off of the "old man." However, notice that the actual wording of the 12 steps *never mentions the development of new patterns*. Also, the authors fail to note that Scripture is useful and essential for "correction, and disciplined training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:17).

(9) "At the end of the day, stop and thank God for any and all of the smallest incremental changes" (p171). This is certainly a wise thing to do; God commands the believer to give thanks at all times, for all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

The authors indicate that "character defects are not removed quickly or easily," that "you don't achieve or finish any of the Twelve Steps, you *practice them*" (p160). For the Christian, these steps are a sorry substitute for sanctification. Scripture has given *everything necessary for life and godliness* (1 Peter 1:3, 4; 1 Timothy 3:16, 17). God's Word is sufficient; these "steps" are not. The believer has a rich source of wisdom for making changes that are pleasing to God, and he is promised the power of the Holy Spirit; godly changes are *the fruit of the Spirit*. There is no need whatsoever to turn to this pagan recipe for change, which has neither consistent standards nor the Holy Spirit's power.

STEPS EIGHT AND NINE THE DECEPTION OF AMENDS

These two steps, at last, begin to focus away from self (somewhat) and onto reconciliation with others:

"Now the focus changes to rebuilding relationships we may have destroyed or damaged. We want to let go of our need to hold on to the past and blame others for our misfortune. Instead, we begin accepting full responsibility for our lives." (p. 175)

In the first of these two related steps, the authors focus on attitude and the *willingness* to make amends, rather than actually making contact with others (p.175). This begins with the compilation of a "completely uncensored" list which includes

"anyone to whom you owe a financial debt, a physical debt, or an emotional debt" (p. 176). You are asked to note specific incidents where others have been harmed by your "addictions." Persons on the list range from one's family of origin, to current family members as well as relationships at church, work, and other organizations. A second list identifies "relationship dysfunctions" wherein you are to "go beneath the surface and find the patterns that have caused relationship dysfunctions in the past" (p. 180). At this point, the authors begin to move away from the victim orientation of earlier pages:

"Even if it's seemingly the other person who is doing most of the harming, I am still playing some part. My response to that other person (or my lack of being willing to respond or confront) may ultimately harm him." (p. 180)

This willingness to examine one's own sin is certainly a significant improvement over the extreme focus on the sins of others. However, it comes much too late in the process. Such self-confrontation ought to be a priority, not secondary to seeing oneself as a longterm victim. The authors do mention the urgency of reconciliation as noted in the words of Christ (Matthew 5:23-24), but they do so only as part of a suggestion that reconciling with self and others is prerequisite to reconciliation with God (p. 195-196).

In examining the methods of harm, the authors focus their discussion on "boundaries," which they compare to a gate that may be opened or closed (p. 181). Four basic methods are described:

(1) Violating the boundaries of others through being overly possessive, overly controlling, critical, abusive, or engaging in constant conflict (p. 182).

(2) Allowing others to violate your boundaries by becoming "overly submissive or passive," playing the "martyr role" or "chronic victim role," and thus storing up resentment which erupts later on (p. 183).

(3) Having boundaries that are too thick due to one's strong fear of abandonment and belief that you are basically unlovable. This may be displayed in either sexual promiscuity or failure to establish a sexual union. Person may either be isolated from others, or "lonely in a crowd" (p. 185-186).

(4) Boundaries may be too thin or non-existent, resulting in enmeshment with someone else, or clinging tightly to an organization (p. 187).

All of the behaviors described above are certainly

unbiblical. *However*, speaking in terms of "boundaries" does not clarify the nature of the problem(s). This "boundary" concept is laden with self-focus. These behaviors would be more accurately examined in terms of biblical standards--what is or is not pleasing to God. One good way to see the problems is to look at the *idols of the heart*, in each case. What is this person *worshipping*? What is this person putting ahead of God in his life? In broad terms, it is self, but more specifically could be the approval of man or a specific person, for example.

As they move into the actual process of speaking with others, the authors offer a distinction between restitution and amends. They note that "restitution is something that can be paid," but "I can make restitution but not necessarily have a change of heart" (p. 190). Zacchaeus is cited as an example. They recommend that "even if it proves to be costly, we are willing to make amends because our hearts--not the law--lead us to do so" (p. 191). These comments are basically good. Note, however, that Zacchaeus did not require a 12-step program, or months/years of psychotherapy, for the change of heart that led him to restore what he had taken from others. Instead, his change of heart was an immediate fruit of his repentance when he encountered Christ. The authors do not stress the biblical concepts of sin and repentance, and their victim orientation weakens the few wise comments that they do make.

One section cover the guidelines for making amends (p. 196ff). Significantly, they fail to mention *biblical* standards, looking instead to human logic. They discuss four categories of persons: (1) those who may be contacted immediately for complete amends (p. 197), (2) those who should be contacted later, for example, "when harm was recently done, or if you or the other person is given to reacting in rage" (p. 198), (3) those who ought never to be contacted (p. 198-199), and (4) those who have died, are too ill, or cannot be located (p. 199-200).

The first category causes no problems, but the other three deviate from biblical standards. In the second category, recent harm, or the tendency toward ventilation of anger, is *no reason* to postpone the contact. If anything, there is all the more reason to reconcile quickly (Matthew 5:22-24). The third category opposes biblical standards, although there may be times when the contact ought to be planned very carefully, perhaps with a third party. The authors caution that "we cannot, for example, unload a detailed account of extramarital adventuring upon the shoulders of our unsuspecting wife or husband" (p. 199). A full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, but this statement is biblically *wrong* due to the "one-flesh" relationship of husband and wife. The adulterous spouse *must* confess and ask forgiveness of the other (it may be desirable or essential to take along a pastor or other biblically qualified individual for counsel/comfort).

The fourth category reveals extremely unbiblical methods recommended by the authors, wherein you are asked to speak to an empty chair, hold a dialogue beside someone's grave, or write a letter that will never be mailed (p. 199-200). All of these reveal a flawed understanding of the nature of forgiveness, which is *never to be self-focused* as it is in these exercises. Here are additional comments by the authors:

"It's essential to understand that amends are one-directional. They do not require mutual reciprocation."

"You are responsible to do the right thing as God has directed and pray that He will lead others to do the right thing also, but only in His good time." (p. 201)

There is an element of truth here, in that there are some limitations in going to others--and you can respond righteously regardless of the other person's response. However, biblical forgiveness focuses on *others*; it is not an exercise solely for the benefit of self. Rather it is based on God's forgiveness of *your sins* through Christ. Church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1, 2), undertaken in love, is available to make strong efforts to restore the other person if he refuses to reconcile. The authors come short of a fully biblical approach.

In addition to making amends for past sins, the authors outline the need for "living amends." This involves changes in future relationship patterns. Minirth and Meier suggest that you identify specific "roles" that you play, along with persons and situations that trigger these roles (p. 203). Then, they counsel that you give yourself "permission to set new boundaries with trigger persons and situations" (p. 204), using new "I" messages to "declare (your) new boundaries and new roles to significant persons" (p. 204), regardless of how others react (p. 205). In doing this, the authors recommend a "detachment" which they claim "does not mean abandonment, rejection, or even aloofness" but rather "not putting the same heavy emotional investment in the other person's sick behavior that you have in the past" (p. 206). In addition, they suggest drawing on God's power every moment in order to set these "new boundaries" and "play new roles" (p. 206). Frequent contact with a "support network," they claim, is needed for "unconditional love" as well as "feedback, loving confrontation" (p. 206). In addition, self-affirmation of one's new roles and "appropriate detachment" is counseled (p. 208). Finally, the authors ask that you "take healthy risks" as you experiment in your new roles (p. 208).

In all of this, there is much continued focus on self, on one's own "recovery," rather than on dying to self and truly considering the welfare of others. Biblical standards are not

even mentioned, nor do they note that the Christian is to *live to please and glorify God*--not self.

Generally, Steps Eight and Nine are too little, too late. There is too little concern for God and others, and even though the focus finally moves away from the stronghold of self, it comes much too late in the process of change.

STEP TEN COUNTERFEIT SANCTIFICATION

Minirth/Meier introduces the final three steps as the "important maintenance steps" wherein "we begin putting our A.A. way of living to practical use, day by day, in fair weather or foul" (p. 213). This "way of life" is one which replaces the Christian view of sanctification, wherein the believer is to continue to change from sin to righteousness. Much of the discussion of Step Ten bears surface similarities to the Christian life, but it is a substitution **unnecessary to the believer**, not a useful addition.

The authors ask you to examine four areas of your life on a daily basis: physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. First, warnings from your body may reveal tension, anger, or a craving for some substance (p. 214). Second, "the emotional survey is the core of your daily inventory" (p. 214), thus given priority by the authors. They claim that you "must always try to be in touch with (your) authentic feelings," watching out for either "numbness," the inability to feel your feelings, or being flooded with feelings (p. 214). Digging a bit deeper, they caution you to look for "unmet needs that are causing anger or fear," and to "remember needs that may arise out of your basic personality," and even more importantly, "basic universal needs that are deep within all of us" (love, affirmation, affection, belonging, feeling capable) (p. 215). Unfortunately, all of this tends toward living to please self rather than living to please God--as commanded by Scripture. The believer must seek to grow in *godliness*, not focus continually on the task of getting his "needs" met!

Third, the authors warn that "people who have been addictive or codependent" tend to "fall back into, and even seek out, relationships where their basic needs don't get met" (p. 215). Thus, Minirth/Meier ask that you continue to review "boundaries" related both to people you see every day, as well as those "living rent free in your mind" (p. 215). The discussion continues to revolve around "boundaries" rather than what is pleasing to God and putting others ahead of self (Philippians 2:3). The believer must focus on the response that is righteous--honoring God and

acting in the best interests of the other person. Sometimes that means laying down one's "rights" and "needs." Other times, the action may coincide with *what* the psychologists would suggest--but with radically different motives.

Fourth is the spiritual area, where the authors focus on the A.A. "Serenity Prayer" and "turning it over" to God (p. 216). More than merely "turning it over," the believer must humbly acknowledge God's sovereign control in every circumstance, trusting that God is working out His purposes for good.

Three parts are noted for this ongoing "inventory:" (1) a brief morning quiet time (p. 216), (2) "spot checks" later in the day, focusing on whether you are taking care of yourself (p. 217), and (3) an honest evaluation at the end of the day to see if old "defects" or "dysfunctions" are surfaced (p. 217). While such self-examinations, at these times of the day (beginning, throughout, and at the end), are basically a good idea, the focus ought to be on serving/pleasing God and obeying His Word--not on excessive self-care. An excellent resource for this activity is 4 Weeks With God and Your Neighbor, by Jay Adams.

The authors note a number of "warning signals," such as anger, old hurts resurfacing, preoccupation with your "addictive agent," rationalization of your old dependency, isolation from others, depression, desires to retaliate (p. 218-224). We can agree that these signals ought to be heeded, *but in accordance with God's Word*, and again, seeking to live to please Him--not self.

Minirth/Meier's remedy for a "relapse" includes the following:

1. Acknowledge to God, self, and another the reality of the relapse (p. 225).
2. Forgive and endorse yourself (p. 225).
3. Give yourself "permission" to reestablish boundaries. They say to "give permission" rather than to make a vow, "to get out of the shame syndrome" (p. 225-6).
4. Look at what the relapse is telling you; something is deficient or incomplete in your "recovery" (p. 226).
5. Recommit yourself to a revitalized "recovery" (p. 226).

This list is entirely too self-oriented (again!). Yes, it is important to acknowledge sinful failures to God--to ask His forgiveness, cleansing, and power to change. It is also important to ask forgiveness of others you have sinned against. However,

forgiveness of self is an unbiblical concept that mutilates the biblical view of forgiveness. "Boundaries," as discussed previously, is not a proper guide to relationships. The "shame syndrome" is not a biblical concept; one must repent of sin (not "give permission") and place oneself at God's mercy. He is the One who provides grace for *both* salvation *and* sanctification.

The final suggestion for this step is the making of a "gratitude list." Excellent idea, in view of such passages as Philippians 4:6-9. However, their four areas of gratitude are excessively self-centered: (1) things you have done right today (p. 227), (2) the basic blessings of life (p.228), (3) "what you value or like in yourself" (p. 229), and (4) "anything large or small that you have seen in your day that shows you how the grace of God is working in your life" (p. 229). Although it *is* good to thank God for basic blessings, and certainly His work in your life, one's list ought not to be so very limited! There is nothing here about thanking God for His work in *others*, Christ's work on the cross, the cause of spreading the Gospel, and so forth. It's all *self, self, self*.

The believer has God's Word, God's power, and God's grace for the ongoing process of sanctification. Thus he *does not* need this worldly counterfeit!

STEP ELEVEN COUNTERFEIT RELIGION

The authors begin their discussion of Step Eleven with the example of a client who, having entered the program as an agnostic, approached this eleventh step with only a fuzzy concept of who or what his "higher power" really was. Following is a fuller description of their view of this step:

"Step Eleven is an invitation to move into the presence of the all-powerful God who is available in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Step Two, we 'came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.' through the rest of the Twelve Steps to this point, we have been moving closer and closer to God, letting Him restore our sanity through His power. The entire journey will only be completed when we reach heaven, but now we each find ourselves at a different stage along the way. This fact alone helps us understand that Christ is a personal God because we, His creatures, are individual persons and He deals with us as such." (p. 234)

Actually, one of the main problems with 12-step theology is that it does *not* include the necessity of a relationship with Christ. It does *not* require salvation. Note that even these

Christian counselors do not see salvation as the first, most critical "step" for a counselee. Theirs is a "take-your-own-time" attitude. This is dangerous, not only because of potential eternal consequences, but also because it leaves the unbeliever with the impression that there is a way to cope with his life's problems *apart from Christ*. While he may achieve some apparent victory over a particular sin, or simply switch from one sin to another, he has failed to solve his most basic problem: separation from God due to sin. The Twelve Steps never address this most fundamental need of man. In addition, Scripture states clearly that the unbeliever *cannot* please God; he does not have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:8). Thus it is impossible for an unbeliever to be sanctified. He must first trust in Christ as Savior, and only then can he proceed along the road to sanctification. The authors have placed a phony "sanctification" ahead of salvation in time, and that is disastrous. Fortunately, God is gracious enough to bring some to salvation *in spite of* these grievous errors.

Most of Minirth/Meier's discussion of Step Eleven centers on various "roadblocks," or fears, that they claim hinder people from spiritual intimacy with God: "The same basic fears that trigger their old addiction now resurface as roadblocks to spiritual intimacy with God" (p. 235). There is the "fear of deprivation," that "there will never be enough of 'whatever'" (p. 235).

There is the fear that one will lose control (p. 235). One may say: "If I pray for God's will, He may do something that will be totally counter to what I want to do and be in life" (p. 239). Rather than acknowledge the universal tendency of man to turn away from God (Isaiah 53:6, Romans 3:12), and the need for repentance, they assure you that "God's will is not necessarily contrary to your will," but "as soon as you truly desire God's will--you will find that most of your desires are God-given in the first place" (p. 240). In addition, "As we give God possession of all our will, His leading comes to us, not as commands from without but through our own desires springing up from within" (p. 240). There is some truth in this. The believer, as he grows in godliness, does change his basic inclination from the desires of the flesh to the desires of the Spirit (Romans 8:6ff). However, one must still be extremely careful about equating his own desires with God's will. You must examine your heart, and you must test your perception of God's will, and the validity of your desires, according to God's Word. The authors fail to provide a complete perspective here, particularly in failing to mention Scripture, even though they do briefly acknowledge that God may not grant your request if it arises out of your own willfulness (p. 239).

Furthermore, there is the fear that "God won't listen to me," which the authors believe to be "a false shame message, a lie that your shame base is feeding you" (p. 237-238). They counter this

fear with the promises of Scripture, and on this point (looking to Scripture!), we cannot fault them. However, "shame base" is not a proper explanation; there is more likely a sinful failure to trust God as He has commanded.

Other fears include "I'm not spiritual (or mystical) enough" (p. 238), fear of looking or sounding like a "spiritual fanatic" (p. 243), and the fear that God might be too busy to deal with specific requests about every day concerns (p. 241). These tend to be focused on self and the desire for man's approval (fear of man). In a short discussion of prayer, the authors state that there is no "right way," but suggest beginning in a child-like manner and offering "short, fragment-like cries to God in the heat of the battle of everyday life" (p. 246). This is generally good, although it would benefit the believer to add much more about coming to God with both boldness and a reverential fear.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that Minirth/Meier's discussion meditation eliminates any connection with Eastern mysticism, chanting mantras, or other "exotic techniques" (p. 247). Instead, they state that Christian meditation "involves the special skill of slowing down to better hear God and commune with Him"--taking quiet time alone with God to hear Him (p. 247-248). This is generally good but could be improved by noting Scripture's specific admonition to *meditate on God's Word* (Psalm 1:1-2).

The overall problem with Step Eleven is that it substitutes for what the believer is to do (worship, prayer, meditation) in the community of God's people, using His Word. This step constitutes *religious* practice--developing "conscious contact" with God but without biblical standards or the necessity of knowing Christ as Savior. Thus it is a counterfeit religion.

STEP TWELVE COUNTERFEIT EVANGELISM

According to the authors, Step Ten "focused inward on ourselves," Step Eleven "focused upward on God" (p. 254), but Step Twelve is one of "transcendence and *evangelism*" (p. 255, emphasis added). They define the "spiritual awakening" of a person as a time when "he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone" (p. 251). More specifically, they identify three basic varieties of "spiritual awakening:" (1) slow progression from agnostic to believer, (2) "someone who once believed in God--often back in childhood--but whose faith became withered and dormant," and (3) the person who moves "away from legalism and ritualism to a deeper, more authentic personal relationship to God" (p. 253). In their counseling practice, they believe that "as people go through the Twelve Steps, their understanding of God grows

proportionately" (p. 253).

People do grow and change spiritually, sometimes slowly, other times more rapidly. Sometimes conversion to Christ appears to be a lengthy process which culminates in salvation; other experiences are more sudden. However, "spiritual awakening" is a misleading, inaccurate term. Apart from saving knowledge of Christ, man is spiritually *dead* and must be *made alive*. He is not spiritually *asleep* needing to be *awakened*. This may seem to be splitting hairs, but it is crucial, particularly when these authors make so very little of the importance of eternal salvation, and in a time when New Age theology calls man to look within himself to find God, and/or to "awaken" to the knowledge that God is within!

Minirth/Meier compare Step Twelve with the Christian call to evangelism: "Jesus left no alternate plan to spread the Gospel, and the same principle is true of A.A. and other Twelve-Step groups" (p. 256). At least they do recognize (though somewhat indirectly) a distinction between spreading the Gospel and spreading the "message" of recovery. But the similarity is a cause for concern. Christians are called to focus on proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *not the "gospel" of "recovery."* This is "another gospel," an alternative "salvation" message that ought to be avoided, not embraced.

In terms of approach, those who call on a potential newcomers "don't try to 'rescue, fix or preach.' They simply tell of their own recovery journey" (p. 257). But the Christian evangelist must preach, must declare the means by which the sinner is rescued from God's wrath, must give the type of godly counsel that will help "fix" a broken life, although he may also include his personal testimony. The methods of evangelistic outreach are thus quite different. The authors also mention the power of a transformed life which speaks to others and warn against "becoming militant in carrying the message" (p. 240). The Christian must also live a transformed life which speaks of the power of Christ. However, it is critical that he add *words*; no one is converted **merely** by a changed life with no mention of what empowered that change. A.A. insists on "attraction rather than promotion," but Christian evangelism *does* involve some "promotion" of the Gospel.

The authors mention motives for "carrying the message" as well as for staying in "recovery." They quote a popular slogan: "You can't keep it unless you give it away" (p. 255). This is absolutely *not true* about salvation, although the believer will want others to know the Savior. Minirth/Meier rightly warn about ulterior motives for approaching others ("Thirteenth Step" work), such as money or romance (p. 259).

As for continuing in "recovery," they note that "although the patients come to recovery because of their pain, they stay in, we've found, because of the spiritual growth initiated in Step Two" (p. 267). The counselee may say, "Recovery from my addiction has become secondary. Developing a deeper relationship with God is my primary goal" (p. 267). In truly biblical counseling, the counselee must *begin* with a desire to please and serve God, not merely a desire to be relieved from pain. Such godly motivation is not an afterthought or simply a consequence of change. God considers the motives of the heart to be more crucial than mere outward change, or change in one's emotions (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

The authors note the necessity of continuing in recovery *for the rest of your life*: "...the stark truth is that you will spend the rest of your life practicing your recovery" (p. 261). Also:

What "anyone who finishes the Twelve Steps must ever be aware of is that they have never reached the summit of spiritual development or total mastery over their addiction or compulsive behavior." (p. 254)

The believer's *sanctification* is not final until he goes to be with the Lord. However, the deception in this quotation is that one continues to be an "alcoholic" (or whatever) for rest of his life. This defies statements such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, wherein the believer is *no longer* a drunkard, homosexual, or the like; this is what "some of you were" in the passage just noted. There is continued spiritual growth in the believer, but a much more radical change, and a much greater hope, than that held out by the 12-step program.

Finally, and significantly, Minirth/Meier note that "some Christians have unfounded apprehensions about using the Twelve Steps as recovery tools" because "Bill Wilson did stray into some non-Christian practices" (p. 256). They answer these apprehension in three ways, and we must in turn respond to their assertions:

1. **King Solomon strayed after writing the book of Proverbs.** Nevertheless, Proverbs remains in the Bible. However, the authors make a misleading analogy here. God is the ultimate Author of Scripture, and He had total control over its writing and over the human authors, even though it was not done as mechanical dictation. The Bible is unique and cannot be compared to other literature, as is attempted here. In all other cases, one *must* carefully examine the beliefs and theology of the author! Bill Wilson was not a Christian, and thus his teachings and methods *must* be subjected to careful scrutiny. In this case, his "wisdom" is in direct competition with subjects covered thoroughly by God's Word.

2. **Christian doctors use penicillin and such "without needing to know the theology of those who discovered these valuable tools of healing."** However, we are not dealing here with a disease of the body, but with *sin*. It is absolutely crucial to know the theology of those who propose to deal with sin! The Twelve Steps are not a neutral "tool of healing," but an attempt to do theology apart from the true God of the Bible and His Word. As noted above, such an effort competes with God!

3. **"God clearly uses the world's knowledge for His glory, whether it be knowledge of how to build or commonsense counseling. Of course, secular knowledge should always be put through the grid of Scripture and be consistent with the Bible."** The answer to this argument is basically the same as in the others. There is not a valid comparison being made here. The Bible does not claim to be a textbook for building office complexes (or numerous other tasks), but it clearly does claim to give the final and only answers for sin--not only salvation, but also growing in godliness. It is definitely a textbook on counseling, despite the claims of even "Christian" psychologists. This topic could very well fill an entire book!

These final comments are a good place to conclude our analysis. the Twelve Step program is *not* either a necessary or a helpful addition to the life of the believer, who is called to walk according to **God's** commandments, not according to the Twelve Steps!

8 **1993, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.**
www.christiandiscernment.com

THE PATH TO DECEPTION

Critique of *The Path to Serenity*, by Hemfelt, Fowler, Minirth, and Meier

Introduction.....	1
Definitions.....	2
Step One The Deception of Powerlessness.....	3
Step Two The Deception of "Insanity".....	5
Step Three The Deception of Idolatry.....	8
Step Four The Deception of "Inventory".....	10
Step Five	

