

The Twelve Steps...Tool for Evangelism or *Another Gospel?*

Critique of Steps to a New Beginning, by Sam Shoemaker, Dr. Frank Minirth, Dr. Richard Fowler, Dr. Brian Newman, and Dave Carder

Minirth and Meier have done it again. They have written yet another book that applauds the use of Twelve-Step "recovery," which they call "the spiritual movement of the 90s" (p. 23). This time they have taken their praise of the "program" one step further, considering it a wonderful yet urgent opportunity for evangelism.

Only "a generation ago, Christians weren't allowed to bring their real problems into the church" (p. 239). Today the picture has radically changed..."virtually everybody is in recovery these days" since "we all need recovery from experiences in the past" (p. 23). It has even become "chic and fashionable" to be in recovery (p. 23). But since most people are not there "to be in vogue, but to find hope and healing" (p. 23), the authors see an opportunity for Christians to evangelize as they pursue their own recovery. The "special vocabulary" of recovery--"adult child, codependency, denial, dysfunctional family, inner child, serenity, and shame" (p. 23)--builds a bridge wherein the Christian in recovery can speak the same "language" as the unbeliever who is working the Steps.

Historically, they note, there has been a gulf between the church and 12-step groups. This can be traced back to the early days of A.A. when "alcoholism was not widely understood" and "many churches looked down upon alcoholics as 'moral degenerates'" (p. 226). The fear of 12-step members is that

"Christians will judge, preach, and fix people, all of which would work against the recovery process and take away the alcoholics' freedom to tell their stories." (p. 227)

In contrast to such an attitude, the authors are convinced that we ought to learn from AA members about how to love, even though it comes in a "rough package" and "we are easily offended by the smoking and the cussing that is sometimes found in the AA environment" (p. 30):

"The fact is, nobody has done a better job of loving people and changing lives than AA. The basis of the life-changing power of AA is that people in AA know how to love." (p. 30)

This is a rather incredible statement in view of AA's general bias *against* Christianity, and the fact that only those who know Christ are able to love according to *biblical* standards. Perhaps changes need to be made in the church itself and in its members, but those changes must come from the teaching of *Scripture*, not the teachings and practices of unbelievers. (We will return to that subject!)

Suppose the Christian wishes to evangelize but is not in recovery himself? Quoting Bob Bartosch of the Christian 12-step organization Overcomers Outreach, "People in recovery are a different breed of cat. If you don't understand recovery from the inside, you don't understand recovery" (p. 173). But this obstacle is no problem to Minirth/Meier: "The good news is that a nonrecovery person can go into recovery" (p. 173). They see a universal need for recovery..."we are *all* driven, we are all addicted to something in some degree" (p. 172). Just as chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Romans demonstrate the need of all mankind for salvation, these authors make a similar claim for recovery:

"Clearly, the recovery issue is a huge net that draws us *all* in, despite our protests and denials. Can you honestly say you don't see yourself in that list? So...if you are not in recovery, why aren't you? It's a question only you can answer." (p. 172)

Well, why aren't you? Do you, perhaps, see a discrepancy between the teachings of "recovery" and the teachings of Scripture? Do you see a difference between the goals of "recovery" the sanctification of the believer? Before exploring the authors' very worthy goal of Christian evangelism, numerous questions must be asked to determine whether the Twelve Steps are truly an effective tool for such evangelism:

- * Were the founders of AA really Christians?
- * Are the Steps really rooted in biblical principles?
- * Are the teachings of unbelievers, found in both psychology and the 12 steps, compatible with Scripture?
- * Are "recovery" groups similar to the early church?
- * Do these groups supplement, or *replace*, today's church?
- * Is Jesus Christ the unnamed "higher power" of the 12 steps?
- * Can a Christian live with the spiritual fuzziness of the 12 steps?
- * Is it helpful to "Christianize" those steps?
- * What are the dynamics of "recovery" groups, and are

- they operated on principles compatible with the Bible?
- * What are the qualifications, goals, and motivations of group leaders?
 - * What is the role of the pastor in "recovery" groups meeting in his church?
 - * Is 12-step sponsorship a replacement for discipleship or a helpful addition?

Historical Background: Alcoholics Anonymous

The popular 12-step movement has its origins in Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in the early 1930's by two drunkards, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith. They were strongly influenced by Sam Shoemaker, who wanted to reach people for Christ, and Frank Buchman of the Oxford Group, a movement which stressed the "four absolutes" of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love (p. 16-17). Because of these influences, and a widespread myth that the early A.A. founders were Christians, the Twelve Steps are believed to be grounded in Scripture. Note the comments of Sam Shoemaker at the 20th anniversary celebration of A.A.:

"I believe that A.A. has derived its inspiration and impetus indirectly from the insights and beliefs of the church. Perhaps the time has come for the church to be reawakened and revitalized by the insights and practices found in A.A. I don't know any fields of human endeavor in which the Twelve Steps are not applicable and helpful." (p. 20)

Actually, A.A.'s sources of early inspiration are not necessarily compatible at all with biblical Christian faith. A complete history and analysis is far beyond the scope of this brief writing, but other writers have done excellent research (*Twelve Steps to Destruction*, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan; *The Useful Lie*, by Dr. William Playfair; *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked*, by Dr. Cathy Burns). The supposedly "Christian" origins of A.A. are **not** beyond question, as Minirth/Meier so boldly claim.

The Oxford Group sought "to reach all spiritually seeking people, even people who were antagonistic toward traditional churches" (p. 47). This is highly questionable, even though the church certainly must seek to proclaim the gospel clearly to *all* people. In their meetings, "members were encouraged to work through their own problems by helping others with similar problems" (p. 47). There is no biblical basis for this practice. The Christian does not help others in an attempt to help himself with the same problem; in fact, he must **first** confront his own

sin, and **then** he can see clearly to help the other (Matthew 7:1-5). Additionally, Oxford meetings included "testimonies, confession, prayer, Bible study, and informal talks" (p. 47). Prayer, Bible study, testimonies, and fellowship are legitimate purposes for small Christian groups. Open confession, however, may all too often be biblically inappropriate--confessing sins before groups of *uninvolved* parties to seek relief. The Oxford group was banned from the Princeton campus, and then given support by the University of Oxford in England, hence its name (p. 46). A.A. eventually broke off from, dropped any and all connections with Christianity, and decided that they needed "a program without religious dogma, and which welcome alcoholics of all persuasions--even atheists" (p. 47). A.A. is **not** a Christian group, and even these authors, who are such staunch defenders of the Twelve Steps, admit in numerous places the *outright hostility to the gospel* that is found in A.A. meetings. Yet incredibly, they state that:

"Since the earliest stirrings of the recovery movement, prayer and Bible study have been viewed as crucial, indispensable elements in the recovery process. AA founder Bill W. devoted himself to the spiritual side of the Twelve Steps. He prayed daily, immersed himself in Scripture and Christian literature, and often said that Oswald Chambers' classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* was his favorite book aside from the Bible." (p. 84)

In reality, there is no place in A.A. for Bible study! Even these authors, as shown later, look on Scripture in recovery meetings with contempt. Instead, it is the A.A. "Big Book" that is their "bible," mandatory daily reading for group participants, along with other A.A. publications. As for the life and spiritual condition of Bill W., these authors wrongly claim that he became a Christian:

(Discussing several ways in which people find God...) "The fifth way people find God, said Sam Shoemaker, is through the personal witness of others. This is how the cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous came to be rescued from his raging alcoholism." (p. 41)

"Once the Holy Spirit shows us that, apart from Christ, we are all down-and-out inside, true redemption can invade our lives. That is how AA founder Bill Wilson finally came to God." (p. 43)

After describing Bill W.'s exposure to the gospel and answering an altar call at an Oxford meeting, as well as his

famous "great white light" experience in a hospital: "Bill's conversion was the explosive kind, not unlike Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus." (p. 44-45)

Bill W. did have some *exposure* to the gospel, and he was visited by a former drinking buddy (Ebbby T.) who claimed to have "found conversion." However, there is no real evidence that he *trusted Christ for salvation*, only that he came to acknowledge the existence of a "higher power," the term so widely used in 12-step groups. An examination of his life shows no indication of a relationship with Christ, but rather the opposite. Again, I refer the reader to the other authors mentioned for more detailed information on A.A. history, as well as to A.A. literature itself. Bill W.'s spiritual condition is vitally important, especially when we consider the fundamental question of whether the "wisdom" of the ungodly can provide counsel for the Christian in overcoming sinful habits. Bill W. was not a Christian, but an *unbeliever*.

Are the Twelve Steps Really Rooted in Biblical Principles?

The authors make startling claims about the biblical roots of the Twelve Steps, which they consider "a pattern for spiritual commitment, growth, and discipleship that every Christian can practice every day of the year" (p. 15). In their claims they exalt psychology so as to put it on the level of Scripture, they show contempt for sound doctrine, they demonstrate a shallow understanding of sanctification, and they making confusing comparisons between Twelve Steps groups and the church.

Are psychology and the Bible compatible? This question is basic to all that follows. The Christian community in American today has warmly embraced the practice of psychotherapy. Either unaware of that alliance, or grossly underestimating it, the authors claim that "in American Christianity, there are many people who mistakenly believe that psychology and the Bible do not mix" (p. 221). The unfortunate multiplication of "Christian" psychology books attests to the contrary! Nevertheless, Minirth-Meier claim:

"In recent years, a spate of Christian books has condemned the Twelve Steps, the recovery movement, and the entire field of psychology, whether secular or Christian." (p. 221)

A quick stroll through almost any Christian bookstore proves otherwise! There ought to be *many more such books* to counter the appalling lack of discernment among Christians today. There are a

few books daring to question psychology, most of them almost impossible to locate. Only occasionally is such a controversial book able to obtain a public hearing. The authors mention a "recent best-seller" written by a pastor who (supposedly) "expresses little empathy for the very real problems many Christians face." Despite their quote of this author, and their negative evaluation, they fail to name their source! This is poor scholarship. If they are so sure of their position, why do they fail to name their sources so that people can read and decide for themselves? They also fail to note that there are some excellent books and other materials which help people to address their problems *biblically*, without the use of psychology. Jay Adams is the author of numerous excellent, detailed books with *answers* from God's Word to the "real problem Christians face," to use Minirth-Meier's term. The Biblical Counseling Foundation has prepared a wonderful Self-Confrontation Manual to guide Christians step by step in common everyday life problems. Other authors are beginning to join in, and organizations such as the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, and the National Association for Nouthetic Counselors, provide biblically-based training for pastors and other believers to counsel one another effectively.

Meanwhile, Minirth-Meier simply do not state the issues either accurately or completely. Following are quotes of their significant statements on the matter, and a response from the opposing position, which states that *God's Word is perfectly sufficient, without psychology, to help believers face all of the problems of life.*

"Much of the hostility many Christians feel toward psychology comes from a misunderstanding of both psychology and the Word of God. The truth is that there is a lot of psychology in the Bible. The Psalms, Proverbs, the teachings of Christ, and the New Testament epistles are filled with insight into the workings of the human mind, human emotions, and human relationships." (p. 221)

Here they have stated the focus of the opposing viewpoint! Indeed, the Bible contains the very insights they note about the mind, emotions, and relationships of man. It exposes the fundamental nature of man. And it gives clear, direct answers to these issues. But psychology addresses **the same issues!** Far from being an unrelated field untouched by the Bible, **it is in direct competition with God's Word!** And considering the confusing array of conflicting answers offered by the unregenerate minds of those who invented the various psychological theories, the believer must

surely acknowledge that this is not a "science," but pure speculation that rivals the revelation of God. Nevertheless:

"An understanding of the Bible is our primary basis for understanding what makes people tick. But the Bible does not give us all knowledge on all subjects" (p. 221). The authors proceed to note the physical and medical sciences, then the "sciences of psychology and psychiatry," which "have given us many profound insights into the workings of the human mind and emotions." (p. 221)

"We believe in the perfect sufficiency of God--but the Scriptures clearly teach that God is at work in the world and in human lives through us, His people--pastors, laypeople, and yes, even Christian psychologists and psychiatrists." (p. 223)

Again, this is **not a science!** Science yields more consistent results. The complexity of human behavior and emotion cannot be contained in a test tube. Psychology has arisen from the *pure speculations of unregenerate men*. It is not a coherent science! In fact, it does not meet the standards for being a true science. It is *theory*, not fact. And while the Bible does not give us all knowledge on all subjects, it **does** give all of the knowledge that is necessary for "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Knowledge about the nature of man, his relationships, his mind, heart, will, emotions, behavior--how he can change and what changes ought to be made--in this area the Bible is complete and fully sufficient. One dare not compare the knowledge of the inner man, created in the image of God, with knowledge in areas of physical science. God specifically **forbids** additions to or subtractions from His Word in areas where He claims to have spoken, and He **forbids** seeking the counsel of the ungodly:

"Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar." Proverbs 30:5, 6

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the **counsel** of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:1, 2

By incorporating the systems of Freud, Jung, Maslow, Rogers, and the like into their counseling systems, Minirth-Meier are walking in the **counsel of the wicked**. Their readers ought to know the background of these men--as subject which could fill an entire

book. These men displayed open hostility to the Christian faith and designed their systems in opposition and competition with it. God is indeed at the work in the world, as the authors state, and He sovereignly uses what man has intended for evil, but that never, never justifies direct disobedience to His commands. And it surely does not justify these counselors in their use of ungodly counseling systems.

"We emphatically do not place *anything* in authority over the Word of God. But it is clear from both experience *and from Scripture* that 'sharing Scripture and praying with someone' does not solve all emotional and spiritual problems." (p. 222)

Nevertheless, their *additions to Scripture* undermine and destroy its power and purity. Furthermore, their last sentence here is a total caricature of the opposing position. Biblical counselors do not *merely* "share Scripture and pray with someone." They spend time with others, carefully opening and applying Scripture to the real problems of life. The difference between the psychologist and the biblical counselor is not that the latter dismisses problems with superficial answers, but rather that the *foundation* for counseling is radically different. The biblical counselor gives *God's answers, not Freud's or Jung's or Maslow's*. The biblical counselor examines the problem in *God's terms, not the terms of ungodly men*. The biblical counselor and counselee rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, not the power of the flesh, to effect changes that are pleasing to God. There is a profound difference between the psychologist and the biblical counselor--one that Minirth-Meier fail to describe with any clarity.

The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead is cited with the statement that "the Lord is the source of all life and power, but He commands us to unbind those who are bound by toxic additions and toxic emotions." (p. 222)

"The ministry of encouraging, counseling, supporting, and confronting one another--which embraces both psychological counseling and the support group concept--is found in such passages as Proverbs 27:17, 1 Corinthians 12:20-26, Galatians 6:1-2, and Hebrews 10:23-25". (p. 223) In addition, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 is cited as "the foundation of the support-group concept" (p. 222).

Scripture indeed commands us to counsel, exhort, admonish, and encourage one another in brotherly love. The issue is **not** whether or not counseling ought to take place, but on what foundation.

None of these passages embrace *psychological* counseling, counseling based on the speculations of the ungodly. We must counsel one another using *Scripture as the foundation*:

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

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

In addition, the authors cite examples of two seminary students who came to their clinic, each with a psychosis that "was unquestionably a chemical imbalance in the brain" (p. 223-4). One they claim to have cured, the other remains hospitalized. The one difference between the two cases, they claims, is that the pastor of the second student was vehemently opposed to psychiatry. Aside from the fact that this is a type of "testimonial theology" rather than an analysis based solidly on Scripture, there are questions and problems. First, if there was indeed a *purely physiological cause, a genuine **medical** problem*, then no pastor or biblical counselor would rightly object to the use of proper *medical* treatment. The citation of these cases, however, clouds the real issue at hand: the theories and methodologies to be used in *counseling*, as opposed to *medical treatment* of the body. Also, one must wonder whether the cases were actually so identical as claimed by the authors. Might there be additional factors they either deliberately or unknowingly fail to provide here? They do, in fact, mention their *counseling* of their first young man in areas such as his anger. Here they leave the practice of *medicine* and enter an area sufficiently covered by Scripture. One must not be deceived by these case history analyses which muddy the waters.

Finally, the authors state that in their books "...we have repeatedly examined the Twelve Steps and the claims of the recovery movement according to God's Word" (p. 224). In response, their supposedly "biblical" examinations have in turned been examined and found to be lacking theologically (see previous critique, "*Path to Deception*," reviewing their book, *Path to Serenity*, and others). This brings us to the next crucial question....

Are the Twelve Steps really rooted in biblical principles?
The authors say yes:

"The Steps themselves are profoundly Christian in character, and each Step is rooted in Christian truth." (p. 49-50)

"The Twelve Steps are really nothing more than orthodox Christianity in a nutshell." (p. 79)

"The apostle Paul foreshadowed Step One when he wrote to the Corinthians." (p. 60, referencing 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Along with these claims regarding the character of the Steps, the authors see in the groups themselves a striking similarity to the early Christian church, crediting the "success" of the program with this likeness:

"People in recovery are like Christians of the first-century church: They have a mission field--fellow addicts and codependents like themselves--recovery and spiritual renewal to this mission field. Clearly, the goal of sharing Christ with others through the Twelve-Step process is embedded in the Twelfth Step itself." (p. 87)

According to one 12-step member: "One of the reasons the Twelve Steps work...is that the essence of the Steps is the essence of the early church."

Quoting Sam Shoemaker: "It is evident to any close reading of the New Testament that what we are seeing is not a string of individuals bound to Christ, but a company of men and women bound to Christ and to one another. Modern psychology is moving toward the same conception. A few years ago, psychology considered man in himself, in his emotions, in his reactions, in his conscious and subconscious mind. But today psychology considers man in his relations, and is beginning to say that he cannot be understood, nor can he adequately manage his life, apart from those relations. Dr. C. G. Jung says that 'the meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.'" (p. 140)

As for the content of the Twelve Steps, I again refer the reader to other materials previously mentioned. They are decidedly **not** Christian in character. The spiritual fuzziness of the Steps will be discussed in more depth in a later section. Earlier we looked at the life of AA founder Bill W. and whether or not he truly became a Christian. It is nearly certain that he did not, which means that to walk in his "steps" is to walk in the

counsel of the ungodly. Any similarity between those Steps and the Bible is merely surface-level, more likely a dangerous counterfeit than a biblical pattern.

The similarity between "recovery" groups and the church is not a valid reason to endorse the Twelve Step program, but a cause for alarm. The authors state that "we do not want Twelve-Step groups to become churches or to replace the church" (p. 227), yet that is precisely what happens all too often. Even if an individual attends both church and 12-step meetings, the support group usurps the role that God intended for the **church** in caring for God's sheep. For those who reject Christianity, the 12-step group is definitely a *substitute* for the church. Certainly relationships between individuals are a vital part of Christian life, but that fact does not validate the specific endorsement of the Twelve Step program. The authors say that "we (the church) ought to be doing these programs ourselves. The Twelve Steps are so profoundly Christian that they belong in the church" (p. 227). The Steps are **not** "profoundly Christian" and do **not** belong in the church. However, it is indeed the church that ought to be addressing the life-dominating sins that are currently addressed by "recovery" programs. Those programs have stolen the church's ministry. The answer is not to embrace the Steps within the church, but for the church to repent and begin doing the job it was called to do!!

As for a closer look at similarities with the first century church, there is a drastic difference we dare not overlook. Those believers had a faith that was strengthened in the face of severe persecution. Many were martyred for their faith. Is there anything even remotely close to these circumstances in the self-centered "recovery" groups? Absolutely not!

The authors show an unfortunate disregard of sound doctrine, almost to the point of contempt. This is hardly consistent with a counseling center that professes to be "Christian."

"The fact is, most evangelical Christians tend to be institutionally and objectively oriented. We like to evaluate whether a person's faith is valid or not according to certain tests: Does this person belong to the 'right' denomination? Does this person affirm the 'right' creeds and doctrines? Does this person 'correctly' interpret certain passages of Scripture? In other words, we apply cognitive, information-laden tests to determine whether or not this person's faith is 'orthodox.'" (p. 57)

Claiming that the early church was "much more experience- and relationship-oriented," they say that by contrast..."many of our churches of our own day have tended to ignore these experiential elements of church life in favor of cognitive elements such as doctrinal orthodoxy." (p. 57)

"We in the evangelical church can learn a lot about the experiential side of our faith from people in recovery. This is not to say that recovery groups should in any way be viewed as alternatives to the church" but rather they "can be a bridge" to the church. (p. 57)

Questions related to doctrine, as posed above, are not irrelevant or unimportant! It is true that a person's *life* must also be examined; proper doctrine without godly living is hypocritical. Yet despite the statements of these authors, the early church was extremely concerned about the maintenance of sound doctrine:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with **sound doctrine**. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the **truth** and turn aside to myths." 2 Timothy 4:2-4

"I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." Jude 3

Disregard for sound doctrine spills over into the actual practices of "recovery" meetings, where God's Word is definitely **not welcome**:

"We do not use the Bible during our meetings, although individuals in the group may mention a passage that was helpful in their recovery that week. Be careful that a person doesn't guide the support group toward Scripture reading. This can offend some people who are struggling in their relationship with God (at least at the moment). Also, a person who uses a lot of Bible verses may not be honestly telling you their feelings about their life or problems. We do recommend regular attendance at Bible studies outside of

New Hope (specific group at Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, CA) and feel that they are appropriate and helpful." (p. 269, emphasis added)

So...here is a group attempting to help people solve their problems in living, yet deliberately **disregarding** God's Word, His instructions on how we must live to His glory! Not a secular group, but a **Christian** group meeting within an evangelical church! Note how both "experience" and "feelings" are exalted above God's Word. Bible study attendance is recommended, but note its separation from the actual working through of life's problem. Do they intend Bible study to be a dry academic exercise that has no relevance to real life? It appears so. Scripture must be used with sensitivity and love, not thrown at people or used superficially, but it must be used nonetheless. Considering the Scriptures just quoted regarding sound doctrine, the apostles and early church would have abhorred modern "recovery" groups.

Finally, here is one more reason given for the neglect of truth:

"Bad theology keeps many Christians in denial...a lot of the verses we were nourished on in Sunday school can be twisted around to a codependent's delight. Like 'turn the other cheek,' which to many Christians means 'become a doormat.'" (p. 215)

Bad theology is indeed a problem in today's church. If correct theology were taught and applied, the Twelve Steps would have never gotten a foot in the church's door. Scripture can indeed be misused, but that is no excuse whatsoever for ignoring it in preference for the ungodly wisdom of man, his experiences, his feelings, his wandering imaginations. This faulty logic does not excuse the neglect of God's Word.

The authors demonstrate a shallow understanding of Christian sanctification as taught in Scripture. They claims that wherever they go, "they find people hungry for a biblical understanding of addiction and recovery" (p. 212). We can agree that the **need** for such a biblical understanding is enormous, but these authors have not filled it. Such a scriptural perspective would encompass the doctrine of *sanctification*, the believer's increasing growth in righteousness after salvation, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Comparing "alcoholics" with Christians, the authors make these amazing claims:

"AA members never graduate from AA. No one in Alcoholics Anonymous says, 'I used to be an alcoholic,' not even the AA old timer who hasn't touched a drop in forty years." (p. 83)

"And the same thing is true of any Christian. We are all sinners, the Bible says." (p. 83)

Indeed we are all sinners (Romans 3:23). But this comparison is invalid. For one thing, the **Christian**, in contrast to the AA member, no longer bases his identity on a life-dominating sin that characterizes the "old man" prior to conversion:

"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

Note the **past tense**: "some of you **were.**" Yes, the believer still struggles with sin. He is not totally sinless during this life. But a radical change in orientation has taken place wherein the believer is no longer enslaved to and ruled by the power of sin as he once was:

"For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Romans 6:6

This section in Romans (actually chapters 6 through 8) should be studied thoroughly by every Christian who desires to have increasing victory over sinful practices and grow in godliness. But God's Word is not welcome in "recovery" meetings! The authors, despite their claims to upholding Scripture, simply do not demonstrate a real grasp of the dramatic change in allegiance that takes place in the Christian.

Furthermore, they note that in many Christian groups (despite quotes above about the lifetime status of "addiction"), only a limited time in "recovery" is recommended. But in case the Steps become an "addiction" in and of themselves (enslavement), they dismiss any concern: "A lifetime spent living the principles of the Twelve Steps is about the healthiest addiction anyone has

every discovered!" (p. 218-9). But in nearly the same breath a significant admission is made:

"For some people, a recovery group is just another crutch in a collection of crutches. **We have seen marriages destroyed by Twelve-Step groups.**" (p. 220, emphasis added)

This hardly requires much comment. *Could they honestly say that marriages are destroyed by serious study of Scripture and application of its principles?* Of course not.

In addition, they fail to call sin...sin! They attempt to wiggle their way out of the term "disease," which has caused so many Christians to question--quite rightly!--the "recovery" movement with its claims:

"At the Minirth-Meier Clinic, we do not call addiction a disease. We call it a *disorder*." (p. 213)

"But the existence of a disorder does not diminish the importance of choice and responsibility." (p. 213)

"Recovery does not take place until the addict takes *responsibility* for his or her choices." (p. 213)

The minor change of terms is not helpful. Whether sin is renamed "disease" or "disorder" makes little difference. The label is still incorrect. Calling it **sin** not only clears up issues of responsibility, but also issues of how the believer can change through the power of the Holy Spirit. That power is far greater than mere "choices," although certainly all persons are responsible before God for their actions and the motives of their hearts.

The authors' misunderstanding of sanctification is also revealed in the following double-talk:

"Those who prescribe 'just read your Bible and pray' for people with compulsive-obsessive behavior do not fully understand the nature of sin from either a biblical or psychological point of view. The Bible clearly teaches that sin is a complex issue, rooted in the disorder nature of the human condition. That is why the apostle Paul writes, 'For what I am doing, I do not understand.... For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.'" (p. 213)

"...praying, reading the Bible, and relying on the Holy Spirit" ... "That's what the Twelve Steps are all about! Some Christians are under the mistaken impression that Twelve-Step groups are being promoted as a substitute for Christian disciplines such as prayer and Bible study. Nothing could be further from the truth." (p. 216)

There is a serious inconsistency here, and it appears that the authors may be attempting to straddle both sides of the fence. In any event, the Twelve Steps are **not** about reading the Bible (as demonstrated earlier), and are **not** about relying on the Holy Spirit, but any "higher power" (idol) one cares to submit to. And regardless of good intentions, the Steps all too often **do** replace basic Christian disciplines. Sin is indeed a complex issue, which is exactly why we must go to our Creator for clear answers about the nature of man and how he can change. It is crucial to note here, too, that quoting bits of Romans 7 *without delving into Romans 6 and Romans 8* can lead to incorrect conclusions about sin and sanctification. Romans 6 explains the believer's new allegiance to righteousness, now that he is no longer enslaved to sin, and Romans 8 describes more fully the process of living in the power of the Holy Spirit. The authors are not presenting a full biblical view here.

Contradicting much of the content of their numerous books, Minirth-Meier say:

"As Christians in recovery, our focus should not be on taking scabs off old memories and reopening old wounds. Our focus should always be on healed relationships with God and others. Our goal is to live a fully functional life in the here and now." (p. 220)

Compared with most of what they write, this is definitely *double-talk*, and perhaps, another attempt to accommodate both sides of this issue. Yet better than "functional life" would be *godly life*. Finally, the issue of self-esteem arises in this book, as it does so often in psychological literature:

"Many Christians confuse 'self-esteem' with the sin of pride." (p. 215)

"We do not believe Jesus died for worms. We believe He died for men and women of worth." (p. 215)

"Healthy self-esteem is not pride or arrogance."

"Having healthy self-esteem means that we do not beat ourselves down, nor do we puff ourselves up." (p. 216)

One of the fundamental problems with man's fallen nature is his propensity to seek *his own glory* instead of reflecting *God's glory*. Salvation requires a recognition of one's sinful condition as compared with God's holiness. That has little in common with "healthy self-esteem." The believer, justified by God's sheer grace apart for either works or worthiness, must die to sin and self and begin to live for God. Sanctification begins here, not with the development of self-esteem, self-worth, self-love, or any other selfism.

Spiritual Fuzziness

The Twelve Steps are completely vague about the identity and attributes of God, welcoming any "higher power" that a member wishes to identify as "god." Minirth/Meier note that although the Steps are "spiritual in nature" they are "not specifically Christian," and thus "any god that works for you is okay" (p. 25). Some Christians, they note, "accuse the Steps of being spiritually wishy-washy" (p. 65). Referencing the observation of AA historian Ernest Kurtz, "the fundamental message of Christianity is 'Jesus saves,' but the fundamental message of the Twelve Steps is 'Something saves'" (p. 65). This is an accurate description of what Scripture calls *idolatry*, although the authors raise loud protests to the contrary. While acknowledging that the Steps represent "a pluralistic and deliberately vague spirituality," they claim that "someone must help them identify *the Power of the Twelve Steps*" (p. 24, emphasis added). Repeatedly, it is asserted that Jesus Christ is the undefined "power" behind the Steps. But is their conclusion true? After all, there are other spiritual powers at work (note the warning in Ephesians 6) who would be all too happy to disguise themselves as "angels of light" in exchange for a person's eternal soul.

However, to support their conclusions, the authors equate the "unknown god" of Acts 17:23 with the "higher power" of the Twelve Step program. Paul, upon finding the altar to the "unknown god," used that as a springboard to proclaim the gospel: "Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). This is perhaps the most convincing argument put forth to date in favor of Christians embracing the 12-step "higher power" concept. **However**, it doesn't stand up to close scrutiny. Paul was greatly **distressed** to see that the city of Athens was full of idols (Acts 17:16). He did not **join** the idolaters in their

idolatry, but merely used the "unknown god" as an initial point of contact to boldly proclaim the true God of the Bible and the one way of salvation, Jesus Christ. He called on them to repent in view of God's approaching judgment and His provision for salvation. This is absolutely *contrary* to the stance one is expected to take in joining the Twelve Step program, where the gospel is met with outright hostility, needed though it is:

"The need for religious pluralism in AA was recognized in those early days before the Twelve Steps were written and The Big Book was published. Alcoholics were streaming into that early fellowship from many religious backgrounds. A substantial number of them were atheists and agnostics. A few others were followers of non-Christian religions. Some had been raised in the church, but had since rejected Christianity after being judged as 'moral degenerates' by religious--but uncaring--people. If a Christian shared in those early pre-AA meetings how his relationship with Christ kept him sober, others in the group often felt they were being preached to. The result was that some meetings degenerated into religious debates. Vague "Higher Power" terminology helped head off arguments and kept the focus of each meeting on sobriety and recovery." (p. 50)

There is indeed here an enormous group of people who **need** the gospel, and on that one point, we can respect the professed motives of the authors in their encouragement to Christians to join 12-step groups. However, their overall encouragement to only proclaim Christ *privately*, never *publicly* in a meeting...sharply opposes the open proclamation of the gospel in Acts 17 and throughout the New Testament. The methodology of the early apostles certainly differs radically from the compromise of Sam Shoemaker, a clergyman who helped in the formation of AA:

"Though Sam Shoemaker uncompromisingly preached the Christ of the Bible, he also encouraged spiritual inquirers who did not believe in Christ to pray to God however they conceive of Him." (p. 50)

One cannot "uncompromisingly preach Christ" and *at the same time* encourage people to pray to any conception of God that may arise out of their own imaginations!

Yet these authors are convinced that "without question, the subject of Steps 2 and 3 is conversion. For the biblical Christian, however, the question arises: 'Conversion to **what?**'" (p. 64, emphasis added). That is a valid question. Noting the

general hostility to the gospel in AA, one must respond by acknowledging that it is **not** conversion to Christ. People in AA **need** Christ, and the Christian must witness. But it is sometimes more difficult to witness to someone who has already been "converted" to *something other than Christ*.

Still, in discussing Step One (powerlessness), the authors are certain that it leads to the God of the Bible in the Steps that follow:

"If Step One did not lead immediately to the God of Step Two, then Step One would be a statement of despair, a confession of powerlessness without any hope of change or recovery. Fortunately, the Steps point the way to a Higher Power, and the name of that Power is Jesus Christ." (p. 60)

One cannot attend an AA meeting and agree that Jesus Christ is the *unnamed, unacknowledged* "power" behind this program. Step One is an expression of powerlessness without repentance. None of the other steps contain a call to true repentance or a proclamation of the *only Name* by which one may be saved. People do not worship Christ without knowing His name! To say otherwise is the height of spiritual deception. Furthermore, the unbeliever is indeed *powerless* over his sinful condition, apart from divine intervention to turn his heart to the truth. But the believer cannot make this sin, because he has been set free from that enslavement to sin. This program is a spiritual *counterfeit*, a disguise and deception. Even though the authors note the controversy amongst Christians about the spiritual fuzziness of the Twelve Steps, they basically dismiss the entire debate as somewhat irrelevant:

"Whatever side of this issue you take, there is one fact that simply cannot be argued: The Twelve Steps have stirred the spiritual responsiveness of millions who were once **spiritually dead**. People in recovery may not always speak in evangelical jargon. Their doctrine (if they have any) may not be orthodox by our standards. Their language, as they describe their relationship with God, may even be sprinkled with coarse words. But their eyes are turned toward God. They are spiritually hungry. They are eager to go farther on and deeper into a personal knowledge.

"We accept the fact that the spiritual fuzziness of the Steps is an issue with many Christians--**and understandably so**. The Scriptures warn against those who have a form of godliness but deny its power. That is why we feel so strongly that

Christians need to be involved in the Twelve Steps, pointing people in recovery to the true Power of the Steps. How can we allow needy people to come so close to the Truth, yet remain so far away?" (p. 65, emphasis added)

"To use the Twelve Steps as a vehicle to reach others for Christ **we do not have to take sides on whether the spiritual fogginess of the Steps is right or wrong.**" (p. 61, emphasis added)

Oh yes we do! The Christian who adamantly opposes such "spiritual fogginess" as idolatry **cannot** use the idolatrous Twelve Steps as such a "vehicle." He must still evangelize, must still proclaim the gospel in love for the lost, but through other avenues. People in "recovery" are desperately in need of the gospel, along with the rest of the world. And indeed, we must tell them the **Truth**. That is exactly why we dare not tolerantly embrace spiritual fuzziness. People are **not** becoming "spiritually awake" through the Twelve Steps. They are *spiritually dead in sins and trespasses* (Ephesians 2:1), despite a form of "spirituality." It is nothing new to see people pursuing forms of worship that oppose the living God. The Twelve Steps didn't bring about a spiritual "responsiveness" that never existed before. They have simply made it somewhat respectable and fashionable for each person to create his own private idol. Furthermore, those who have not received Christ **do not** have "their eyes turned toward God." No, all of them, without exception, have *turned away from God*, like sheep. "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:11). The need for the gospel among "recovery" people is certainly real. But only a clear, uncompromising presentation of the whole counsel of God will make a dent in that need.

"Christianizing" the Steps

Some answer the concerns about spiritual fuzziness by "Christianizing" the Steps, identifying Jesus Christ as the "power." The authors note that:

"There are many Christian organizations that minister to people in recovery. Some of these organizations have rewritten the Twelve Steps in an effort to 'Christianize' them and make the Steps more compatible with their doctrinal viewpoint." (p. 106-107).

However, Overcomers Outreach, one such Christian organization, explains that "We've found it best not to tamper with the Steps

because the Steps are very dear to people in recovery" (p. 107). Furthermore, "one thing that happens when you 'Christianize' the Steps is that they cease to project a feeling of openness and acceptance toward people who are spiritually seeking" (p. 107). To the unbeliever who isn't ready to commit to Christ:

"These 'Christianized' Steps are like a door that is shut and bolted. They seem to say, 'Come back when you have your doctrine straight. Come back when you believe the way we do'" (p. 107).

Therefore: "Changing the Steps in this way blunts their effectiveness as a vehicle for evangelism. As originally written, the Steps are a bridge. Altered for the sake of orthodoxy, they become a closed door." (p. 108)

Apparently, one dare not "offend" with the gospel. But the gospel does offend those whose hearts are hardened! It is even referred to biblically as a "rock of offense" or a "stone of stumbling" (Romans 9:33). Yet it is that very Rock Who is the cornerstone, and "the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame" (Romans 9:34). Real concern for the eternal destiny of lost souls demands a full and clear presentation of the gospel, although one's spirit must be gentle and loving rather than quarrelsome (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

The authors, however, concur with Overcomers Outreach in their belief that the Steps are a "bridge" to the Christian faith:

"People who would never set foot in a worship service will go to a Twelve-Step group for healing. Many Twelve-Step groups meet in churches, and that gives the church a profound opportunity: Without compromising or watering down the gospel, we can present Jesus as the Power. We don't have to tamper with or 'Christianize' the Twelve Steps. In fact, experience has shown that attempts at Christian Fourteen-Step groups or similar modified versions invariably fail. We can't 'fix' what already works--and there's no need to. We can take the Twelve Steps exactly as written, identify the Higher Power as Christ, and suddenly the entire vehicle, both chassis and engine, roars to life, transforming not only behavior but souls." (p. 24)

"...the Steps have endured and changed millions of lives in exactly the form in which they first appeared in 1939. It is risky to tamper with what works." (p. 54)

Yet here is why the authors claim that the Steps "work:"

"There is no magical power in the Twelve Steps themselves or in the recovery groups that use the Twelve Steps. The power of the Steps comes from the fact that they are rooted in scriptural truth and they point people back to God. Our goal at the Minirth-Meier Clinic is not to 'Christianize' the Twelve Steps but to return the Twelve-Step process to its original roots: Biblical Christian faith." (p. 56)

There is much to say in response to all of this. First, there is significant double-talk here. The authors do not wish to "Christianize" the Steps, yet they want to return them to their supposedly "biblical roots." If those roots are indeed biblical, and if these authors are identifying Jesus Christ as the "power" behind them, are they are "Christianizing" in a more subtle manner? And if indeed the roots are so "biblical" (which they are not), then what real offense is there in naming the Name above all names? There appears to be at work here an intense desire to *please man*, to compromise in a way that will offend no one. The authors claim there is no "compromise" or "watering down" of the gospel. This is absurd. Of course there is compromise when Christ is not named openly and the gospel is not fully declared, because one wishes not to offend anyone.

As for "magical power" in the Steps, that is exactly how all too many members view them. They have sense of sacredness, along with the "Big Book" and other AA literature which cannot be altered (as the authors acknowledge above). Such reverence ought to be reserved for *Scripture*, which indicates strongly that the Twelve Steps are in fact *a religion*, one that serves as an alternative to biblical Christian faith.

One must seriously inquire as to **why** attempts at "Christian" modified versions of AA do not work. If Jesus Christ is truly the unidentified "power" behind these Steps, then such modifications, clearly identifying Him (as the authors in fact recommend!), ought to bring real power, not failure. But such attempts do fail, just as one would fail in attempting to "Christianize" Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, or any other false faith. The Twelve Steps and Christianity simply **are not compatible!**

Group Dynamics

This book includes much specific discussion about the dynamics involved in various types of groups. The authors note

three basic types of groups: (1) the "sobriety" group where members seek to stop an "addictive" behavior; (2) the "recovery" group where participants work on "underlying issues" or "childhood issues," seeking a "place to be nurtured and reparented;" (3) the "support" group which deals with "transitory hurts rather than the wounds of childhood," also described as "intense but relatively impermanent crises" (p. 108-109). The important of group fellowship is stressed by the authors, who believe that Protestantism has degenerated into a "sterile individualism" wherein people are quite self-centered (p. 140-141). However, as we will explore, it is highly questionable whether any of the three types of groups just mentioned are effective in countering this self-focus.

First, here is what Minirth/Meier believe a support group ought to provide (p. 163)

1. mutual support
2. listening to stories of others
3. confronting those in "denial"
4. learning about "addiction" and its causes
5. insight into one's own issues
6. chance to work through one's own resistances
7. opportunity to ventilate emotion
8. involvement in helping others

The first and last of these are legitimate purposes for Christian fellowship. Confrontation of *sin* (#3) is something to be done in *private*, bringing in others only as biblically necessary (Matthew 18:15-20). "Addiction" is not a valid concept; Christians must learn about overcoming *sin*, and the church is responsible to its members for teaching from Scripture on this issue. It is questionable whether the "stories" of others ought to be brought up before a group, because of the danger of gossip and/or slander. There is, however, a legitimate place for testimonies giving glory to the Lord for His deliverance. It is important for the believer to confront his own *sin* (not "issues" -- #5 and #6), but a group setting is probably **not** appropriate for this purpose. The "opportunity to ventilate emotion," particularly anger and the like, **violates** Scripture. Much of what takes place in "support" or "recovery" groups ought to take place privately, if at all.

Following are "15 common characteristics" listed for support group participants:

1. low self-esteem (p. 257)
2. isolation (p. 258)

3. approval seeking (p. 258)
4. intimidated by angry people (p. 259)
5. attracted to "emotionally unavailable" people (p. 259)
6. living life as victims (p. 260)
7. either super-responsible or super-irresponsible (p. 260)
8. giving to others instead of caring for self (p. 261)
9. repress feelings (p. 261)
10. terrified of rejection/abandonment (p. 262)
11. denial, isolation, control, misplaced guilt (p. 262)
12. difficulty with boundaries and intimate relationships (p. 263)
13. difficulty in following through (p. 263)
14. desire to be in control (p. 264)
15. impulsive (p. 264)

One of the problems here is the lack of biblical language and understanding. "Low self-esteem" (#1) and giving to others instead of caring for self (#8) are definitely **not** biblically defined as problems (or sins). The authors cite Scripture with each of these categories. Much time could be spent in going through those passages to show the **misuse** of the Bible. Unfortunately, that would take us too far from the major purpose of this critique. (But interested readers may write Discernment Publications to inquire about any one or more of the above and related Scriptures.)

Specific dynamics of group interaction include "no cross-talk" and "circular response" (p. 144), along with a strong emphasis on unconditional acceptance:

"The key to an effective recovery ministry is an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance. People are never judged or criticized for what they share in the group or for what they believe. Atheists and agnostics are received just as warmly as the most orthodox Christian. There should be no condemnation, no finger of accusation, no Bible pounding in a Christian recovery group." (p. 177)

"A recovery group is a place where people seek answers. If we want people to continue coming to find healing, we cannot buttonhole them and tell them what they have to believe. We allow them to come as they are, believing as much as they are able to believe, committing as much of themselves as they are able to commit. We accept them. We unconditionally love them. We befriend them." (p. 177)

There are serious problems here, and a misunderstanding of mutual exhortation among believers. People are indeed seeking answers, but real answers do not come about in the atmosphere just described, but rather where there is solid biblical teaching which *provides* those answers--God's answers. Of course, the church welcomes unbelievers to come and to hear the message of the gospel, and accusing fingers of condemnation violate some basic scriptural principles of humility and service. Sound Bible teaching and exhortation **are not** equivalent to "Bible pounding" or the self-righteous, condemning attitudes that the authors rightly wish to avoid in the process of ministering to others.

Strangely enough, this group of "unconditional acceptance" is also supposed to provide accountability and confrontation:

"In every effective recovery group, there is accountability and sometimes even confrontation (especially when a group member is clearly in denial). But the accountability is surrounded by what we call 'the warm fuzzies,' an atmosphere of total support and caring." (p. 177)

The biblical view is much more logically consistent. Comfort and encouragement are accompanied by exhortation, teaching, admonition, accountability, and discipline. "Unconditional acceptance" is neither biblical nor consistent with the accountability that the "recovery" group claims to provide. Furthermore, the accountability provided is highly inconsistent with biblical principles due to the exclusion of the pastor (covered later) and other God-ordained church authority.

Another emphasis in these groups is the expression of feelings, which takes precedence over sound doctrine and/or the renewing of the believer's mind. The authors claim that the purpose is to "own our feelings and responses" rather than to place blame on others (p. 274). However, the Christian is to confront and assume responsibility for his own *sin*. Nowhere is he exhorted to "own" his feelings or to place them in such a high priority. Also, despite the protests of the authors, blame **is** placed on others to a high degree, and little concern is shown for restoration of others who have sinned against the counselee.

Christian "recovery" groups. There has been a rapid growth of specifically Christian groups over the past few years. The authors discuss such groups, and the ones that meet at the Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, CA ("New Hope") are cited as an example.

The authors state that "we should never hide or apologize for the fact that this is a *Christian* Twelve-Step group. It should be boldly stated up front" (p. 178). Meanwhile, unbelievers who come are not confronted with the gospel, but are told: "If Jesus Christ is not your Higher Power, we strongly encourage you to keep an open mind and an open heart" (p. 178). Certainly the gospel must be presented in a spirit of loving humility, but it must be boldly proclaimed as **the** truth, not one option among many.

Christian groups are specifically **not** Bible studies (p. 178). Several group goals are enumerated (p. 267), and the authors state that "these are areas of growth that *support groups*--not Bible studies or therapy session--*can* achieve" (p. 267):

1. increased self-awareness
2. reduced feelings of isolation
3. validation of feelings
4. reinforcement of reality
5. support and encouragement
6. identification of dysfunctional patterns
7. goals
8. establish positive decision-making habits
9. increased self-confidence
10. healing of relationships with God, others, and ourselves

Some of these goals, such as "validation of feelings," are not biblically supported. Perhaps even more importantly, growth in Christian living *cannot be achieved* apart from the standards of God's Word. It is unfortunate that groups professing to be "Christian" are so adamant in omitting Scripture from their agenda.

The authors also teach that Christian groups "should not operate in isolation" but "should view themselves as part of a larger network of caring, acting in concert with both the church and with programs such as AA" (p. 179). Two reasons are given--to learn from others, and to exercise evangelistic influence (p. 179). Evangelistic influence will be covered later. However, note here that believers are called *out of the world*, to live in the world but not be of the world. This biblical separation is seriously compromised by the stance of "Christian" recovery groups. Such an alliance between light and darkness is unbiblical.

Secular Groups. The Christian groups just mentioned, according to the author, are "not intended to take the place of

either the church or secular programs such as AA" (p. 178). Actually, due to the *religious* nature of the Twelve-Step program, they do indeed replace the church. Even if attendees also belong to and participate in their local churches, the "recovery" group usurps the role of the church in overseeing the conduct and lives of its members. Minirth/Meier acknowledge that "AA groups frown on any reference to a specific religions" and that "if you talk about Christ or Christianity, you get shot right down" (p. 180). Such contempt for the Lord ought to make it obvious why Christians should **not** become members of these secular (yet religious!!) "recovery" groups. This is no place for a person who loves the Lord and is committed to Him. The authors do express an evangelistic purpose for attendance, noting that "this is a personal choice for each individual to make" (p. 226). While recognizing the very unpleasant atmosphere of secular groups (crude language and heavy smoke), they call it a "very needy mission field" and advise the Christian to go there if he feels called to do so (p. 226). But despite the important of evangelism, we cannot agree with their approach. There are countless opportunities to witness to unbelievers, including those who belong to Twelve Step groups, without *joining* those groups.

Minirth/Meier are correct in noting that "every major doctrine of the Christian faith has relationship at its core" (p. 164). Redemption involves man's reconciliation with God. Believers are called to be the body of Christ, serving and ministering to one another in many ways. **However:**

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

How can Minirth/Meier reconcile these God-breathed words to their alignment with a pagan program?

Leadership and Sponsorship...vs. Discipleship

Role of the pastor. The **exclusion** of the pastor from leadership of "recovery" groups in the church is a grave concern:

"...pastors sometimes panic. They feel apprehensive because they're not sure where it's going and how it works and who's in control. The group does not report to the pastor. The pastor isn't welcome to stroll in and observe, as he can in other church programs...once the group is started, the pastor's control is gone." (p. 225)

"...it is inappropriate for an 'inspector'--a pastor or program director--to enter a group to check on its practices. it is also inappropriate for facilitators to discuss with the pastor what goes on inside the support group meeting."
(p. 201)

"His support is necessary, even though his personal presence in the meetings is not recommended." (p. 225)

This is a most serious and unacceptable violation of the God-given duties of a pastor, who is to be a *shepherd* of God's flock. Any pastor who takes such duties seriously and adheres to sound doctrine **must** be alarmed the at the growth of Twelve Step recovery groups in the church, and **must** oppose their formation in his own church home. Otherwise, he will be prevented from fulfilling his obligations before God. Since he must give an account to God for each soul under his care (Hebrews 13:17), we can hardly overemphasize the importance of this warning.

Group Leaders. Minirth and Meier claim biblical support for their view of sponsorship, which they say is a "principle of **both** AA and biblical Christian faith" where "we are to walk the walk *alongside* them" (p. 122, bold emphasis added). They further say that "having a sponsor or mentor is a principle of spiritual growth practiced since New Testament times" (p. 122). The concept is crucial to the theme of their book, because "sponsoring relationships provide the ideal atmosphere for sharing Christ through the Twelve-Step process" (p. 123). While not questioning the goal of evangelism, we must examine Twelve-Step sponsorship and determine whether or not it is truly consistent with biblical *discipleship*, or perhaps a deceptive substitute. Certainly we are called to walk alongside one another, exhorting, encouraging, admonishing, loving, and such. But as we shall see, biblical "one another" teachings do not line up with Twelve-Step sponsoring.

Qualifications and Motives. The sponsor must have lots of time in the "program," be seriously working the Twelve Steps, maintain a daily relationship with God, and demonstrate an attitude of humility, love, and acceptance of others (p. 125). His ideal motivations are described by the authors:

"Tell yourself, 'I am facilitating this group for the sake of my own recovery. I am not here to save the group. I am not responsible for the success of this group. I am not responsible for anyone's recovery but my own.'" (p. 210)

"...maintaining my own recovery is the only foundation that gives me the proper perspective to be a healthy facilitator." (p. 267)

The fundamentally self-oriented nature of Twelve-Step recovery is evident in these quotes, even though the authors entitle one chapter, "The Servant of the Group," and despite their claim that such self-absorption is merely a "stage" (p. 204). The contradiction can be better understood, though not excused, by noting the authors' description of a facilitator as "a servant leader who helps others grow by helping them learn how to develop **their own skills and resources**" (p. 270, emphasis added). However, it is just such "skills and resources" that are lacking; **God's** resources are needed! The attitude of dying to self, serving Christ and others, is antithetical to what is taught here about leadership motivation. Qualifications are sadly lacking, though bearing *faint* similarities to biblical qualities required for leaders. Those who desire to teach must love others, demonstrate humility, have some maturity in the faith and a daily relationship with the Lord. However, they need not be "working the steps" of AA. Note also that the authors do not require any knowledge or understanding of God's Word, or a specific saving relationship with *Jesus Christ*. Much more could be said about biblical leadership qualifications. The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus spell out the requirements for *Christian* leaders.

Training. The authors recommend a minimal amount of training so that the group leader is comfortable and confident in his role. This contrasts with traditional Twelve-Step practice:

"The idea of training facilitators is taboo among many traditional AA people--and even among some in the Christian recovery movement." (p. 169)

The minimal "training" that does exist consists more in the psychological "wisdom" of man, such as a Minirth-Meier workbook for leaders, than in anything to do with God's Word:

Says one leader: "The *Workbook* makes me more confident as a facilitator. It gives us a focus of authority that I can't bring to the group as a layperson. If there is any professional at all in the group, it is through the book. It is as if Dr. Minirth, Dr. Meier, and the rest of the Clinic team were sitting in with us, interacting with us, sharing their expertise." (p. 185)

The authority of God's Word is tragically absent here, as "experts" take over, replacing it with the speculations and theories of man.

Another evidence of the lack of biblically based training:

"Christians often try to impose a churchlike hierarchical authority onto an AA-style meeting by placing a strong, directive leader 'in charge.' But in successful groups, no one is truly 'in charge.'" (p. 187)

God's authority supersedes all, of course. However, He has ordained earthly shepherds (pastors and elders) to care for His flock. While their authority must be within the bounds of Scripture and never abused, they are nevertheless required to be strong, directive leaders. The absence of such leadership, in a group designed to help people work through the problems of life, is unbiblical and inexcusable in a group that professes to be "Christian."

How to Facilitate a Group or Sponsor a Newcomer. The authors give numerous descriptions of what a group leader or sponsor ought to be doing. Generally, he is described as one who "plays a very different role from that of a Bible study leader" (p. 189). This is hardly surprising, since the authors are so adamant about keeping Scripture **out** of Twelve-Step groups. The role of a sponsor "is encompassed not by written rules but by traditions, most of which originated in the Oxford Group and AA" (p. 124). Each sponsoring relationship is "unique" (p. 124). Note how these man-made "traditions" are elevated above the standards established by **God** for leadership and discipleship among His people; God's standards are not even mentioned.

Sponsorship of an individual involves several things:

1. The sponsor acts as a "coach and encourager" who checks up on the person's progress, and helps "in times of crisis and temptation." (p. 124)
2. The sponsor also may confront the newcomer "whenever patterns of sin, addiction, or denial become apparent" and he is to "deal honestly with emotions." (p. 125)
3. The sponsor shouldn't allow the other person to become too dependent, and shouldn't "rescue" (p. 129). The authors also warn the potential sponsor that "you may want to consider whether you feel safe with a person before you give him or her twenty-four access to your time and emotional energy" (p. 125).
4. The sponsor should always *avoid giving advice* (p. 129), because "people usually have the truth inside them and just need a trusted friend to draw it out of them" (p. 130). **This one is a major problem.**
5. The sponsor must "never violate confidentiality" (p. 130) except in extreme cases such as child abuse, suicide, or murder.
6. The sponsor must "authentically hear what the other person is actually saying" and accept his feelings without trying to change him or "fix" those feelings (p. 194). He is to practice reflexive listening (p. 195) and "focus on feelings, not on facts" (p. 196). He is cautioned not to rehearse his reply, identify too closely with the other's experiences, ignore some statements while hearing others, or attempt to read feelings and motives with insufficient data. He is also warned not to judge or daydream, but is encouraged to listen to his own feelings as well as the feelings of the other.

There are extremely serious problems with much of the above.

Checking up on progress and offering encouragement present no problems. Help in times of temptation, and confrontation of sin, are also concepts that overlap biblical discipleship. But as we move on, the differences are all too apparent.

Looking at the third recommendation, we can agree that a person being disciplined or counseled should not become too dependent, but rather should be directed to the Lord and His Word.

Proper discipleship is focused on Him from the very beginning, in sharp contrast to much psychological counseling! As for feeling

"safe" with the person before giving him access to your time and energy, this is far too self-focused and again defies Christ's commands to die to self. Proper *biblical* counseling, focused on the Lord with biblically based homework, should practically guarantee that dependence never becomes an issue. (This shouldn't be taken as a simplistic solution. Additional training in *biblical counseling* is recommended.)

The fourth suggestion is absolutely the worst. People do not "have the truth inside them!!!" The heart of man is sinful, deceitful, and desperately wicked, as numerous Scriptures show beyond any doubt (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:10-18). **The truth is found in God's Word.** Nowhere else! The sinful heart of man must be exposed by God's Word, which is sharp and piercing (Hebrews 4:12). The Christian who leads others absolutely **must** give advice! He must exhort, instruct, admonish, rebuke, encourage, and restore. He cannot stand by passively. But here are two potential responses to advice that the authors note as reasons for their position:

1. In some cases, "denial mechanisms turn on" and "rebellious tendencies kick in," because "we want to make our own choices" (p. 192).
2. On the other hand, "some of us...like to receive advice so we don't have to take responsibility for ourselves" and "can blame the people who advised us for our failure or disappointment" (p. 192)

In addition, "what works for one person may not work for another...no one can tell another person how to work the Steps" (p. 193).

This line of reasoning is undergirded by the authors' rejection of *Scripture* as a basis for giving counsel. The counselee may indeed rebel and demand his "own choices," but that is no reason for failure to give him *God's commands*. In fact, it is all the more reason to confront him with God's Word! His response reveals the sin in his own heart, and that sin **needs** to be exposed. The second instance is equally fallacious, because the individual described is actually blaming **God**, not the counselor, if the counselor is giving "advice" founded in Scripture. No way does he escape responsibility! In fact, such responsibility is all the more firmly established when *biblical* counsel is given and then rejected or "doesn't work." Finally, we cannot agree that what "works" for one person may not "work" for

another. When God's standards are employed rather than such relativism, this faulty statement is blown completely away.

The requirement of absolute confidentiality, excepting the dangerous situations listed, is unbiblical. Principles of church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20) often *require* bringing in others, perhaps even the entire church, even where there is not a life-threatening situation. But the authors have excluded the pastor from the church's "support" groups and excluded Scripture from their standards of group practices. Their standards of confidentiality defy Scripture and may frustrate God's solutions to continued practice of sin.

There is much error in the authors' description of good listening. Listening to others is vitally important and it should take place in discipleship. We can agree with the authors that listening shouldn't be selective, ignoring some statement while hearing others. However, it isn't the reflexive listening of Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology. It also must **not** be oriented toward feelings (either or listener or talker), but must involve careful notation of the **facts**. The person who counsels biblically must indeed consider how he will answer so he can offer biblical solutions. He must be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19). But he must not be idle, acting merely as a mirror or sponge.

Moving from one-to-one sponsorship into group leadership, the authors describe both problems in groups and "problem people" within those groups. Following are some group problems they state may occur (p. 198-201):

1. The group may include people who are angry with God.
2. The whole group may be "in denial."
3. People may leave..."facilitators should not be possessive of the people in their groups."
4. The group may experience a "dry spell."
5. Some people may not belong in a particular group, because it is either too confrontational or too "warm and fuzzy."
6. The leader may fear a loss of control.

The first item in particular needs discussion. The authors believe that "anger with God" may result because "their earthly fathers were distant, abusive, or otherwise dysfunctional" (p. 199). Perhaps a person is "bitter toward the church and religion" or "disappointed with God" (p. 199). The authors warn that "people who are angry with God cannot be talked out of their anger" (p. 199). Anger with God is **sin**. It needs to be

confronted as such, in gentleness and humility (Galatians 6:1, 2), and the solution involves *repentance*. It cannot be blamed on parents or families or churches, but results from the sin of the human heart.

There are additional group problems that the authors do not even discuss. Most significant are the problems of gossip and slander, plus sinful ventilation of emotions. The whole concept of these "support groups" is biblically questionable. A Bible believing church ought to be organizing groups for other purposes, such as Bible study, worship, and fellowship. Counsel for specific issues of sin ought to be done *privately*, involving only those who biblically *need* to know--and no one else.

Besides problems with groups, the authors describe problems that may be encountered with the people in those groups--angry outbursts (perhaps "feelings that have been repressed or denied for years"--p. 203), joking/clowning (p. 204), seductiveness (p. 205), drunk or disorderly behavior (p. 206). They also express concern over people trying to "fix" others and claim that "Christians are often the worst offenders because the Christian culture teaches that there is a Bible verse for every problem we face" (p. 205--see previous discussion about giving advice).

Some people may be "stuck," but:

"Everyone is responsible for his or her own recovery. No one is going to do it for you. It's your life. If you don't take responsibility for yourself, no one else will." (p. 204-5)

People do have individual responsibilities before God for their *sin*. However, biblical principles call for extensive attempts at restoration, and church discipline if needed. The person who is "stuck" in sin is not to be ignored as these authors insist.

A more serious concern is suicidal individuals. Some of the authors' recommendations are correct, such as taking the threat seriously. Absolutely. But they also say:

"Listen carefully and nonjudgmentally. Don't say things like, 'Suicide is a sin,' 'Suicide is bad,' or 'People who kill themselves go to hell.'" (p. 208)

These statements need to be questioned. Careful listening is surely important. However, suicide **is** a sin, and the most hopeful thing a counselor can do is to point that out--**with** the solution

offered in Christ. Also, the eternal consequences of such an action **dare not** be ignored. This subject cannot be explored fully in this brief writing, but it is an important one that **must** be addressed biblically. And this is certainly an area where looking for truth within the person, or leaving him to be solely responsible for his own "recovery," are exposed as bankrupt bits of psychological "wisdom." Only God's wisdom can approach such a deadly problem and offer genuine hope.

A final concern about group leadership is Minirth/Meier's counsel to:

"Listen to what your own gut is telling you regarding what is happening in the group. If you are feeling anxious, bored, angry, passive, you may be feeling the mood of the group."
(p. 273)

This is a very shakey basis for evaluating any group! Scripture warns repeatedly against trusting in *self*. Once again, **God's** standards are ignored.

Conclusions. The authors note prayer as "the most important distinctive" of Christian groups, as opposed to secular ones (p. 189). But even this factor isn't conclusive, as many secular groups end with the Lord's Prayer, and many members pray to whatever "god" (idol) is to their liking. If these groups were truly **Christian**, the distinctions would be far more impressive! God's Word would be held in high esteem and used as a basis for counsel. The pastor would be intimately involved. Only biblically involved persons would be present. Absolute confidentiality would not be observed, but gossip/slander would have no place. Jesus Christ would be honored as Lord and Savior. I could go on, but the essential point is that these "Christian" groups are not truly Christian at all, and their standards for leadership are violently opposed to what Scripture requires for teachers, pastors, and elders.

Twelve Step Evangelism

This book begins with an emphatic statement that:

"We believe the Steps can be a profound part of the journey that leads people in recovery to a vital relationship with Jesus Christ." (p. 23)

Note also that they define the Twelve Step program as an evangelistic process:

"...a process to help--and **evangelize**--anyone who has a problem or need." (p. 15, emphasis added)

"...a process to **evangelize** and help people overcome any obsessive-compulsive behavior: overeating, workaholism, and codependency, for instance, as well as alcoholism and drugs." (p. 15, emphasis added)

Contrary to the authors' evangelistic zeal, with which we can sympathize, the traditions of AA specifically exclude affiliation with any particular religion, and its stated purpose is to achieve sobriety, not evangelism. Even the authors admit:

"The secular programs are not *designed* to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ, but because of God's grace and the biblical origins of the Twelve Steps, many people happily do. Unfortunately some secular programs interpret 'God as we understand Him' from an increasingly meaningless (and even New Age) perspective." (p. 235)

It is definitely due to *God's grace* that some people become Christians while attending recovery groups. However, it is not the supposed "biblical origins," as demonstrated in other writings. The Steps are **not** biblical in origin. The vague "God as we understand Him" or "higher power" is indeed meaningless, and can be a hindrance to Christian evangelism.

The authors also say that:

"For millions of people, the Twelve Steps have been a path to recovery and emotional wholeness. And for **some**, the Steps have also been a path to Jesus Christ." (p. 106, emphasis added)

Note, first, that "recovery" and "emotional wholeness" are presumed to be possible apart from Jesus Christ. These words are not descriptive of man's fundamental need, which is deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. However, what the authors are actually saying is that it is possible to live a rather full and satisfying life *without Christ*. This is utterly deceptive. Also, notice that only *some* people find Christ in the Steps. People come to salvation in many different contexts. The fact that some people are saved in a particular environment does not automatically validate the methods or teachings found in that

setting, which must be separately evaluated according to God's standards.

Despite Minirth/Meier's theme of using the Twelve Step program to evangelize, they say:

"We dare not view Twelve-step recovery groups as a means to be cynically exploited in order to rack up scores of converts. Recovery is a valuable and crucial end in itself. As Christians, we should rejoice whenever someone is liberated from addiction to alcohol, drugs, or some other addictive agent. But the rejoicing is even greater when another person finds liberation from what Keith Miller calls 'the ultimate deadly addiction,' sin itself and the separation from God which sin causes." (p. 29)

"We are not advocating exploitation of Twelve-Step groups as a way of building church membership rolls. Nor do we advocate that anyone should try to 'sneak' the gospel into an AA meeting by subterfuge." (p. 113)

True evangelism is **never** a means of "cynical exploitation," but a compassionate concern for the eternal destiny of others. Recovery is **not** a "valuable and crucial end in itself." What does a man profit if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul? Also, sin is not an "addiction" or "disease." It is rebellion against God, violation of His commandments. We dare not euphemize.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the warning about "stacking up converts," that seems to be exactly what the authors have in mind, though not in a spirit of cynical exploitation:

"Our goal in the Twelve Step process is to liberate people not only from the power of addiction but also from the power of sin and death; to unite recovering people not just with a vague, unknown Higher Power, but also with the Highest Power of All, Jesus Christ; and to enable people to live the abundant life not only now but throughout eternity. Our motivation is the same motivation that has powered every great evangelistic movement in history: Christlike unconditional love." (p. 29)

This evangelistic concern is surely to be commended, and certainly people in "recovery" are in desperate need of knowing the "Highest Power," Jesus Christ. (He is not merely another "power" who is "higher," however.) What we must seriously question is whether it is appropriate and/or ultimately fruitful to **join** a **spiritual**

movement that is hostile to the gospel, in order to achieve our evangelistic objectives. No discerning Christian would join the Mormon church, Jehovah's Witnesses, or any other false religion in order to witness to its members. Just because the Twelve Step program is vague in its doctrines does not mean that it isn't just as much a **religious group** that no Christian should ever consider joining.

What message? The final Step is one which the authors believe "sets forth the missionary imperative of the Steps" (p. 93). It is one which involves "carrying the message." But what specific message is the Christian member to carry? The authors believe it is a "message for every human being on the planet," comparing the twelfth step "pass it on" imperative with Jesus' statement that "I will make you fishers of men" (p. 94). But in another example of double-talk, they also say:

"Of course, the **good news** of AA (liberation from alcohol) and the **good news** of Jesus Christ (liberation from sin and death) **are not the same thing.**" (p. 113, emphasis added)

The authors at one point give a reasonably orthodox presentation of the **gospel message** to be carried by the Christian (p. 228). One can only wonder whether the Christian 12-step member is expected to carry **two different messages** at the same time. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the "message" of recovery is **ANOTHER GOSPEL**, as Paul warned against in Galatians 1.

Motivation. The authors, consistent with traditional Twelve-Step beliefs, are clear about the primarily selfish motives for "carrying the message:"

"If a recovering person does not at some point develop an outward, others-centered focus, he or she will probably become stuck, unable to move all the way through recovery." (p. 164)

"The message of recovery, it is often said, is something that we keep only if we are giving it away. The same is true of the Christian gospel: if we are not giving away the message of Jesus Christ to others, can it truly be said that we even have that message in our own lives?" (p. 96)

The authors do at least acknowledge the fact that "recovery" is so often directed inward and focused on self. Yet even in becoming "others-centered," the focus here is on moving *self* to a full

"recovery." The believer must confront his own *sin* and handle it biblically before he is qualified to restore another person caught in sin, but this is far removed from the continuing self-focus encountered in "recovery." Also, salvation is by faith alone; it is an act of God's grace. Important as it is to witness to others, one does not lose his salvation by not witnessing, as the authors seem to imply here. Perhaps the failure to witness, or the continued practice of sin without repentance, is evidence that a person has not been genuinely born again. However, one must be extremely cautious about making such judgments, and witnessing must **not** be based on the expectation that doing so will enable the believer to retain his salvation. This easily becomes a form of works-righteousness, which Scriptures denounces (Romans 3:21-31). Evangelism is to be based on love for God first and then others. It is a grateful *response* to the gracious free gift that God has already provided.

How to approach people. The authors are careful to insist that evangelism be *private* rather than *public*: "In Twelve-Step groups, evangelism takes place not in pulpits but in relationships" (p. 180). "Sharing Christ in the Twelve-Step process is not an act" but "a process" which "takes place over time, in the context of relationships" (p. 110). The authors advocate one-to-one settings, sponsoring relationships, and "acts of supporting, serving, and helping...even without even saying a word" (p. 115). Also recommended is to openly name Jesus Christ *in Christian groups only*, since "this is rarely permitted in secular groups" (p. 115). The hostility to any public profession of Christ is further explained:

"Is there ever a place for a point-blank evangelistic message in a Twelve-Step meeting? Our experience, and the experience of others in the field, says no. 'I've seen groups destroyed by evangelistic presentations,' says evangelism professor Richard Peace." (p. 112)

"Many old-timers in traditional secular Twelve-Step groups are suspicious of the word evangelism. If there is one thing that dyed-in-the-wool AAs abhor, it's proselytizing." (p. 113)

The word evangelism..."conjures up the idea of persuasion and coercion--and even of arguing and haranguing." (p. 114)

This does not discourage the authors from their insistence on evangelism in the Twelve-Step program:

"Even in a traditional AA or Al-Anon group, where you may be restricted to talking about God in terms of a vague Higher Power, there are still plenty of opportunities to witness to what God is doing in your life." (p. 110)

They explain further that the Twelve Steps have already laid the "groundwork" for evangelism because "recovery people already accept their own neediness and powerlessness," and you can establish an "instant rapport" if you know the language of recovery (p. 25). Because such individuals "have already been persuaded of their need for God by their own powerlessness and pain...all they need is to find a face and a name for this vague, cloudy conception of the Power in their lives" (p. 115).

Before moving further, serious concerns are already evident. Christ specifically insists that His followers profess Him *publicly*:

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

Not that the believer must be cramming an evangelistic message down the throat of every person he contacts. He must speak with gentleness and exercise some discernment about the appropriate timing. However, it is sinful to align himself with a group where he is specifically expected to refrain from any public naming of his Lord and Savior. In a significant way, he is disowning Christ and seeking the praise of men rather than of God. The gospel, properly and clearly presented, leads some to repentance and others to rebellion. Even Minirth/Meier have to acknowledge that the gospel always brings some opposition (p. 128-9).

The second problem so far is in the authors' belief that recovery lays the groundwork for evangelism. It actually may *hinder* evangelism, because the unbeliever has been led to a false security of having solved his problems *apart from Christ*. Admitting to "powerlessness" is not equal to repentance, to acknowledging sin before a holy, righteous God. The person in recovery may be quite satisfied with his "higher power," his idol. Evangelism might be more fruitful if the person had *failed* in his own efforts, and Christ was presented as the *only* solution. Even the authors admit that some people "may not want your God...you can't persuade such people...only their own pain can ultimately persuade them" (p. 116). Actually, it is the Holy Spirit who

persuades, not by "pain" but through conviction of sin. The authors ignore Scripture when they say that:

"People in pain do not respond to preaching. They do not respond to theological reasoning or logical arguments. They certainly do not respond to condemnation and blame." (p. 116)

"Our goal is not to straighten out the recovery person's theology, but to introduce that person to the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ." (p. 114-5)

This gives a false view of preaching. It is not mere "theological reasoning" or "logical arguments," but a powerful, persuasive message from God, through His Word, to the listeners. It is not "condemnation and blame," but does involve *conviction* of specific sin and *correction* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The emphasis here on "pain" once again places emotions above all else. Salvation is not a mere escape from emotional pain, though that may result in time, but a redemption from sin. It can be painful--in a somewhat different sense than Minirth/Meier's use of the word "pain"--to come face to face with the sin in your own heart (see Isaiah 6!). But that is exactly what is needed to be brought from death into life.

As for "straightening out the recovery person's theology," that is exactly what is needed. Salvation cannot occur without correct theology! The vague "higher power" must be discarded and replaced by the true God of the Bible. This, my friends, is *theology*. The person's relationship with Christ is important, of course, but sound, biblical doctrine is essential to the growth of that relationship. Doctrine (or theology) and relationship are not in competition, but rather complement one another.

Sam Shoemaker, instrumental in the founding of AA, advised: "Don't begin talking about religion till you have won the other person's confidence...a person's point of need gives us the opportunity to suggest *the* answer to that need" (p. 96, 99). Certainly there are times when establishing a relationship precedes evangelistic appeal, and Christians must be prepared to continue spending time with friend who are unbelievers. Demonstrating Christ's love to the world is crucial, and a specific need may indeed provide the opportunity to present the gospel. However, this does not rule out all other methods of evangelism. There are times when the appeal ought to be made publicly, and times when a relationship cannot or need not be established first. This should not be made a hard and fast rule.

Earlier the authors mentioned sharing Christ "without even saying a word" (p. 115). This is a half-truth. One's life ought to bear witness to the Lord, but if actions are not accompanied by specific words presenting the gospel, no one is likely to be converted.

The overall evangelistic methods of these authors must be seriously questioned. Their position is defended by their statement that "in recent years, there has been a gradual but profound shift in the way the church views the issue of evangelism" (p. 111). Explaining further:

"We have paid a lot of attention to making converts but very little attention to making disciples, which is the spiritual process of the Twelve Steps and what Jesus really called us to do in the Great Commission." (p. 111)

Perhaps discipleship has been neglected in churches. It shouldn't be. Perhaps that neglect has paved the way for the intrusion of both psychology and the Twelve Steps. However, neither of these is a valid substitute for proper discipleship. The answer is not to embrace these worldly views and methods, but for the church to repent and begin doing the job it was called to do...making disciples. The Twelve Steps **do not** make disciples--not disciples of Christ anyway.

A key argument of Minirth/Meier for Twelve Step evangelism is that the rapid growth of this movement provides a great opportunity and challenge that we cannot ignore. They warn that the "danger is that if we do not act now, we will lose the opportunity" (p. 25). Also, they express concern that "many Christians have turned their backs on people in recovery" and, therefore, "they are ripe for deception by any religious system that will accept them and connect with their newfound spiritual awareness" (p. 26). Because of this "spiritual awareness," they are "ripe to either be deceived by false religions or to receive Jesus Christ" (p. 28). The authors note "significant differences between the Twelve Steps and New Age philosophy" (218), which is one such false religion today, yet the program's spiritual fuzziness widens the potential for deception.

However...this "opportunity" is not a new one. The opportunity and challenge of evangelism, amidst pagan religions, has always existed. Paul encountered it in ancient Corinth, and the Israelites were surrounded by idolatrous neighbors. The New Age movement, which the authors mention as a threat, is not new. The ancient Gnostic heresy presented much the same challenge

centuries ago. People may indeed be "ripe" for deception or conversion. However, that does not justify Christians in **joining** a specifically **spiritual** movement that is hostile to their faith. Witnessing may be done in numerous other contexts, without "turning their backs on people in recovery."

Finally, note these crucial admissions that are tucked away in the corners of this book:

"Only biblical Christianity can deal with the sin dimension of addiction. No other religion, psychological approach, or medical therapy can deal with sin." (p. 29)

"At the Minirth/Meier Clinic, we stand on John 14:6, which says that Jesus is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. There is no other way. Alcoholics Anonymous is not the way. The Twelve Steps are not the way. Jesus Christ is the *only Way*." (p. 229)

Indeed He is! Unfortunately, here is another sad example of double-talk. This entire book is basically devoted to proclaiming the "recovery message" as universally applicable, with the Steps as a way of life for everyone, Christian and unbeliever alike. Now, finally, the authors admit that Jesus Christ is the *only Way*. They also admit the inadequacy of psychological approaches and therapies and other religions. They acknowledge the ultimate reality of sin. But the rest of their book denies all these truths in ways that are sometimes subtle, other times blatant.

Conclusions

Minirth/Meier's strong endorsement of the Twelve Steps is well summarized by the following:

"Though the Steps do not mention Jesus Christ by name, it should be clear that a program that calls for repentance, humility, honesty, confession, restitution, prayer, service, and witnessing could hardly be called worldly." (p. 221)

Yes it could. The failure to mention Jesus Christ by name is **fatal**. This program is a worldly substitute for "repentance, humility, honesty, confession, restitution, prayer, service, and witnessing," which are all impossible apart from Christ. The Steps may be "spiritual," but remember that we battle not against flesh and blood, but against *spiritual* powers of wickedness in the

heavenlies (Ephesians 6). As discerning believers, we are called to *test* the spirits:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.**"

The Twelve Steps do not acknowledge Jesus. Need we say more?

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THE TWELVE STEPS... TOOL FOR EVANGELISM OR *ANOTHER GOSPEL*?

**A Critique of *Twelve Steps to a New Beginning*,
by Sam Shoemaker, Dr. Frank Minirth,
Dr. Richard Fowler, Dr. Brian Newman, and Dave Carder**

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