

RAPHA'S 12 STEPS IN THE WRONG DIRECTION
A Critique of "Rapha's 12-Step Program for Overcoming Chemical Dependency"
by Robert S. McGee with Pat Springle and Susan Joiner

Rapha's psychological counseling program is heavily grounded in the 12-step program originated by Alcoholics Anonymous. Rapha authors make several basic assumptions about the program that need to be highlighted and questioned at the beginning.

It is assumed that "the body of an addict cannot process alcohol or drugs normally" (xi). Although this review is theological rather than medical, this assumption needs to be questioned. AA has promoted the alcoholism-as-disease concept for several decades without previous scientific evidence to back the claim. This disease model has driven numerous so-called "recovery" programs such that biblical truth about all sorts of *sin* is now obscured. Rapha fails to add biblical clarity to that problem.

Another assumption is that "addiction" is something that "can happen to folks just like us, regardless of our reputation, social standing, or religious beliefs" (xi). But does "addiction" merely "happen" to us? Here is a case where the disease model blurs personal responsibility for behavior that the Bible defines as *sin*. Sin doesn't "happen" to us. Also, this statement tends to erase the antithesis between the Christian and unbeliever. Christ has broken the power of sin in the believer's life, even though sanctification is not entirely complete in this life. Religious beliefs *do make a difference*. Faith in Christ makes all the difference in the world when struggling with sin!

Rapha buys into the common myth that the original 12 steps are "biblically-based" (xii). A look at AA conference-approved literature reveals quickly that founders of the program were men who explicitly rejected Christianity. The steps were written through an automatic writing process similar to New Age techniques. This is a far cry from any sort of biblical exegesis or foundation. There are superficial similarities between the 12 steps and certain biblical truths, but bear in mind that *counterfeits always seek to closely imitate the original*. The 12 steps are a cleverly disguised counterfeit of real biblical truth. Christians err greatly in attempting to pull biblical principles out of a program designed by unbelievers.

Finally, these authors state that "progress is our goal in recovery, not perfection" (xii). Certainly, every Christian

continues to struggle with indwelling sin during this life. But the goal is far greater than mere "progress." As Paul stated in Philippians 3:14, believers are to press on toward their ultimate heavenly goal, *glorification* (Romans 8:28-30).

This brief review of Rapha's 12-step approach is accompanied by longer papers covering "codependency," self-worth, and the influence of parents. As each step is quickly reviewed and compared with Scripture, the reader will be referred to these other papers for topics covered more thoroughly there.

Step 1. "We admit that by ourselves we are powerless over chemical substances--that our lives have become unmanageable." Romans 7:18

Rapha authors state that "the distinguishing mark of addiction is **powerlessness**," yet at the same time, "we *think* we are in control when we are drinking or using" (1). Chemically dependent persons are said to build "elaborate structured defense mechanisms" to keep them in "denial" (1).

Psalm 115 speaks to the critical issue of idolatry. Dependence on chemical substances is a form of idolatry. The person who fashions his own "god" does so in an attempt to use that idol for his own sinful purposes, but those who trust in idols become like them (Psalm 115:8). The Christian, however, is one who has turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Meanwhile, other people are blamed. Blaming others for one's own sin is a real problem. However, psychological approaches (such as Rapha) fail to fully confront individuals with their own sin. Rapha's view of parental influences, for example, encourages at least an indirect blaming of other people. The concept of "defense mechanisms" is a thoroughly unbiblical idea invented by atheist Sigmund Freud. Personal responsibility is all but destroyed in such an approach.

The five-stage grief model developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is utilized by Rapha as appropriate to grieving the loss of a chemical substance. This is highly unbiblical. Kubler-Ross is an unbeliever, yet Christians are exhorted *not* to grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Furthermore, Scripture never commands or encourages believers to grieve the things of their former life in this manner. On the contrary, such things are to be counted as loss and rubbish in comparison to the joy of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

The whole idea of admitting "powerlessness" needs serious questioning. The unbeliever is both unable and unwilling to follow God's commands (Romans 8:7-8). The believer, while always dependent on the Lord (John 15:5), has the power of the indwelling Spirit and cannot rightly admit to "powerlessness" (Philippians 4:13; Romans 8:9ff).

Step 2. "We come to believe that God, through Jesus Christ, can restore us to sanity." Philippians 2:13

The authors focus here on two basic issues: sanity and faith in God.

"Sanity" is defined by them as "soundness of judgment" (11). The believer, of course, ought to exercise sound *biblical* judgment according to the standards of God's Word. The term "insanity," however, is one that confuses the issue and blurs responsibility. It is *salvation* and *sanctification* that God provides through Jesus Christ. These biblical terms ought to be used rather than the confusing concepts of a pagan program.

The authors demonstrate a rather lax view of faith in God when they state that:

"If talking about God makes you feel uncomfortable, that's perfectly understandable." (12)

Really? "Perfectly understandable" to be uncomfortable when speaking about the Lord? It is "understandable," in a sense, that the *unbeliever* would experience such discomfort, because he attempts to flee the presence of his Creator, holding down the truth in his unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). For the true believer, however, it is anything but "perfectly understandable" to be uncomfortable when talking about his Savior.

The authors raise guilt as a factor that complicates a person's relationship with God. This is a gross understatement! Guilt does much more than merely "complicate" man's relationship with God. It severs that relationship! But for the Christian, God has initiated and completed the restoration of fellowship.

Blame is another factor that Rapha authors bring in, but it is explained as the projection of self-hatred onto others (13). Biblically, blame is *anything but* evidence of self-hatred. It is

rather an expression of excessive love of self, such that one fails to assume proper biblical responsibility for sin.

Part of the workbook for Step 2 is a lengthy exercise concerning the "parent factor." The authors assume here a causal relationship between relationships with parents and one's adult relationship with God. (The reader is referred to the paper concentrating on this issue.) While parents have serious biblical responsibilities before God, this assumption is dubious in that it fails to account for God's sovereign power in regeneration. The "parent factor" analysis undercuts that divine power in the life of believers.

Another portion of this section is an evaluation of your relationship with God. The reader is instructed to respond from personal experience and *not* from a theological knowledge of God, to ask, for example, "to what degree do I really *feel* God loves me?" (23, emphasis added). The unreliable feelings of sinful man are thus placed above God's revelation of Himself in His Word. Although the attitudes of a person's heart should be examined, this approach tends to highlight feelings at the expense of revelation.

The closing paragraphs on this step explain the "four false beliefs" that Rapha identifies at various points in its literature. This teaching is grounded in the Rational-Emotive-Behavior therapy of atheist Albert Ellis, and the result is a deadly mixture of truth and error. (The reader is referred to the Rapha review concerning self-worth and also to Discernment Publications' critique of Ellis.)

Step 3. "We make a decision to turn our lives over to God through Jesus Christ. " **Romans 12:1**

Rapha authors consider this step an ongoing daily choice rather than a one-time event (41). They do make some accurate theological statements about original sin (41) and the forgiveness that Christ secured for believers (43). They are also to be commended for their presentation concerning the believer's assurance of salvation, grounded 100% in the work of Christ (54).

However, this third step is not the equivalent of salvation, nor does it represent the believer's ongoing sanctification. Salvation is not the daily decision that the authors equate with this step; rather, it is a one-time event. Salvation is also not "turning our lives over to God," but God's free gift which *He*

initiates and brings to completion (Ephesians 2:7-9). Sanctification is also God's gracious work in the Christian's life. Certainly it involves the believer's active obedience to God, but it is *because* of God's powerful work that such obedience is possible.

This step counterfeits genuine salvation, particularly since its original wording allows for the "god" (idol) of one's own choosing. The true living God refuses to be placed in a slot where any sort of "god" will suffice.

Step 4. "We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Lamentations 3:40

This fourth step appears to many Christians an application of biblical self-examination principles. Although there is similarity, however, there is not true equivalence.

Rapha introduces this step as a way to develop sound judgment by obtaining "the facts about our past" (57). It is considered "an opportunity to confess sins we may not yet be aware of" (57). At the same time, it supposedly provides "an understanding of *why* we behaved in certain ways at certain times," thus leading to "a new acceptance of ourselves" (57). A final objective is "to confront our age-old enemy: denial" (57).

To their credit, the authors do warn against excessive preoccupation with self:

"Step 4 is *not* intended to serve as a route to morbid introspection and self-absorption. This can be better understood by realizing that you are not responsible for the actual *search* of your past. The Lord has assumed this responsibility for you." (58)

They also mention that the Lord is gracious, revealing only what we are able to handle at a particular time (58). The reader is counseled to "take your time," to "trust Him to reveal to you *what* you need to know *when* you need to know it" (58).

These remarks attempt to conform the original step to biblical principles. The fourth step of AA *is* an "actual search of your past" without any particular help from the Holy Spirit and without scriptural standards. However, *we do not need a program created by unbelievers in order to experience the convicting work of the Holy Spirit!* We need God's Word and God's Spirit, not a

12-step program. Self-absorption is exactly what does occur when "working" these steps. It is also dangerous to attempt a catalogue of one's past sins, because it can easily lead to works righteousness.

Another major weakness is the focus on *acceptance* of self. Conviction of sin never has this purpose! When Isaiah was called into the presence of God (Isaiah 6), any previous self-acceptance or self-worth was bulldozed by the holiness of God. God *cleansed* him with burning coals, but He never instructed Isaiah to simply "accept" himself or to "understand why" he had sinned in the past.

The workbook proceeds to give specific exercises in a variety of areas: resentment, forgiveness, dishonesty (which supposedly "damages our self esteem" [65]), honesty, selfishness, sharing, impatience, patience, false pride, humility, anger, fear, trust, intolerance, tolerance, jealousy, acceptance, criticism, love, self-pity, sexual behavior, and finally, "feeling good about ourselves" (119). Most of these (scratch the last one!) are areas that do require biblical examination and conviction as we grow in godliness. However, believers need mutual admonition, preaching, teaching, and faithful immersion in God's Word, not a counterfeit that was never intended to conform to God's standards.

Step 5. "We admit to God and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." James 5:16a

This Scripture in James is regularly misused to justify "confession" that is foreign to the passage. This is one instance of such misuse, doing violence to the text.

Rapha authors emphasize the necessity of confession to another person rather than to God alone:

"There is something about our nature which propels us into action only after we have confessed our struggles to another person." (125)

The motives they highlight are: losing our sense of isolation (125), losing our unwillingness to forgive (125), losing our inflated pride (126), and losing our sense of "denial" (126). Confession is considered "a means for us to *experience* forgiveness, not obtain it" (126).

The authors rightly bring in the necessity of repentance, a turning away from sin to God (126, 131), and restitution (131).

They also correctly state that the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers, is the One who convicts us of sin (128). They are right in noting that all sin is against God, and that "confession recognizes the full scope of sin" (130).

What these authors fail to do, however, is to fully outline biblical principles about *when* and *to whom* confession should be made. Modern "recovery" programs encourage much unbiblical communication about the sins of *others* (gossip and slander). "Confession" becomes a type of Freudian catharsis which fails to promptly and properly deal with sins against others. Biblical confession is to be made *to the person sinned against*, not to other uninvolved parties. Some sins of the heart may be confessed to God alone--and *should be*, to avoid further sin against another or gossip.

As for "experiencing" forgiveness rather than obtaining it, the authors are wrong. Confession is made to others with the specific intent of asking their forgiveness. Confession is also made to *God* to seek *His* forgiveness, as a close look at Psalm 51 will reveal.

The passage in James 5 covers the specific instance of physical illness. The individual is to call for the church elders, and *if* he has sinned (his own sin may or may not be a factor in his illness), he is to confess and seek forgiveness. This half verse has been ripped from its context and stretched to give license to all sorts of unbiblical "confession" in "recovery" groups.

The authors list some qualities they believe are important when choosing a person to share one's "inventory" with. They recommend: someone who has spent several successful years in "recovery," someone able to honor a confidence, an objective listener, and someone willing to share personal examples (132). Note the emphasis on someone in "recovery" rather than a mature believer who walks in the ways of the Lord and knows His Word. Nothing is said about this person being a believer or a member of one's own church. There is serious compromise here. The standards of "recovery" do not align with the standards of Scripture.

Finally, the authors emphasize that a successful fifth step depends on "disclosing the significant events in your life which need to be shared with another human being," rather than on your feelings about the encounter (133). They also focus on the

purpose of the step as being "for you" rather than for others (133). Although the focus away from feelings may seem to be a breath of fresh air, the emphasis on self-serving purposes is far removed from biblical principles of confessing sin in order to reconcile with others. This step is not grounded in genuine biblical principles of confession!

Step 6. "We commit ourselves to obedience to God, desiring that He remove patterns of sin from our lives." James 4:10

Rapha's sixth step rewords the original AA version, "were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." Their revision gives a biblical appearance, since biblical terms like *obedience* and *sin* are employed. The discussion centers around issues related to sanctification, particularly obedience to God's commands.

Concerns are raised at the outset about believers who are happy to know Christ as *Savior* but not so quick to accept Him as *Lord* (143). The authors state that even as Christians, "we may still be uncertain that God is capable of transforming our lives" or "we may feel that we are unworthy of the love He gives" (143). Obedience may be grounded in the wrong motives, or it may be wrongly based on human willpower (143). God may be misunderstood as mean (145) or overly demanding (146). The believer may fear losing control of his life or being perceived of by others as "weird" (146).

Some correct theological statements are tucked into the chapter on this sixth step. Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit residing within the Christian (148). "Christianity is not a self-improvement program" (149). An ongoing spiritual battle is waged within us (149), and we can do nothing apart from Christ (149). God gives us His commands for good purposes (156). Loving discipline is distinguished from punishment, which Jesus bore on the cross on our behalf (155-156).

The area of motivation is indeed an important one to consider. Paul certainly considered it when he answered charges that God's grace would lead to increased sin (Romans 5-6). Rapha authors assume that our motivations are grounded in our perception of God's character:

"Faulty perceptions of God often prompt us to rebel against Him. Our image of God is the foundation for all of our motivations." (153)

Is this true? This sort of analysis is more rooted in the Rational-Emotive Therapy of atheist Albert Ellis than in Scripture. It is true that our thoughts should be honoring to God, and that sound doctrine is of vital importance. However, Rapha authors are reductionistic when they root all sin in the thought processes. James instructs us that sin can be traced to lustful desires (James 1:14). There is more to it than *merely* incorrect thinking.

Here are what Rapha authors consider proper motivations for obedience (159):

- Love for Christ
- Destructiveness of sin
- God's fatherly discipline
- Goodness of God's commands
- Rewards (in heaven) for obedience
- Worthiness of Christ

These don't raise any theological problems.

By contrast, the following are what Rapha authors consider improper motivations:

- Fear of being discovered by others
- Fear of God's anger
- Fear of failing to meet self-imposed standards
- Bargaining with God to receive blessings

Basically we can agree that these are the wrong motives. However, the *fear of the Lord*, in Scripture, is nearly synonymous with the love of God. The discussion here would be enhanced if the authors would distinguish between the reverential fear of God that Scripture commends, and the fear of His anger that characterizes His enemies.

The fundamental problem with this chapter is the assumption that belief systems are the root of motivations. A second problem concerns their assumption that a true believer can receive Christ as Savior but *not* simultaneously accept His Lordship. Entire books have been written on this matter, so we cannot cover it fully here. However, Scripture does affirm that the *true* believer, as opposed to one who makes a false outward profession, will persevere in the faith so that good fruit results (1 Peter 1:3-5; James 2:14-26).

Step 7. "We humbly ask God to renew our minds so that our sinful patterns can be transformed into patterns of righteousness." Romans 12:2

The authors have once again supplied a radical rewording in their attempt to force the 12-step program into a biblical mold. The original step reads as follows: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings." The 12-step program seems to have become a sort of "stronghold" in the Christian community, such that both the steps and the Bible are stretched to conform to one another. We can rejoice that these authors express a desire to help people using biblical principles, but is it really necessary to wed the Bible to these 12 steps? And is the result really *biblical*?

The authors begin by saying that "we are now ready to ask God to reshape us and transform our lives for His glory" (165). But does God ever need to wait on man being "ready" for His work? Never. At the time of regeneration, that divine work was *already* begun! God promises to also complete what *He* began at that time (Philippians 1:6).

It is rightly stated that man's mind was darkened at the Fall (citing Ephesians 4:17-19). The authors state that "Satan's goal is to keep our minds unrenewed," and that he attempts to do so by "establishing fortresses of deception" (165). Such "fortresses" are quickly equated with the four "false beliefs" that Rapha literature regularly cites as the culprits in all of our lives (168):

1. "I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself."
2. "I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself."
3. "Those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished."
4. "I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless."

These are covered more fully in the combined critique of *Search for Significance* and *Search for Freedom*. For now, note that Rapha authors assume that "our minds contain deeply held beliefs and attitudes which have been learned" and "are often the source of our emotions" (166). To them, Satan's *major deception* is the following: "our self worth = performance + others' opinions." The balance of the chapter on step seven is devoted to working through this scheme. There is heavy emphasis on *self-worth* apart from performance or failures. Some wonderfully correct statements

are made about the imputation of Christ's righteousness (175, 178), God's work of reconciliation (186), and forgiveness of others based on God's forgiveness of us (196). However, these biblical truths are turned around to serve Rapha's self-worth agenda:

"The Lord never meant for us to find the fulfillment of our self-worth and significance in the opinions of others. This undeniable, unavoidable need for a sense of significance was created in man by God.... The truth that you have been new in Christ will enable you to develop a strong, positive self-esteem in spite of 'flaws' in your appearance or past failures." (202)

However, consider such passages as Ephesians 1. God's abundant love and mercy are *to the praise of His glory* (1:6,12), not to the praise of man's glory or self-worth! Also, where does the Bible say that God *created* man's "need" for significance? Scripture affirms very few actual *needs*, but speaks extensively to the *sinful desires* of fallen man. When man seeks his own glory, or significance, rather than glorifying God, he is not pursuing a God-given "need."

In addition to the error of focusing on self-worth, and the emphasis on thoughts rather than the whole heart, listen to what these authors say about regeneration:

"The part of us that the Holy Spirit regenerated is our spirit.... The Holy Spirit has been joined to our human spirit, forming a new spiritual entity. A new birth has produced a new being." (206)

Elsewhere, Rapha holds to a three-part view of man (body, soul, spirit). This is problematic in itself, as Scripture confirms a two-part view of man. (This is an involved theological issue beyond the scope of this brief paper. Use of the words *soul* and *spirit* in the Bible lend no support to the trichotomous view.) But when we take the two statements together, it is implied that only *part* of the inner man is regenerated. Scripture teaches that *the new believer* is regenerated, not merely some "part" of him, although we do await the transformation of our physical bodies in the future. Also, the idea of "joining" the Holy Spirit and human spirit is somewhat strange. The Spirit indwells the believer, who is made alive together with Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:5). The unregenerate man is spiritually dead in sin, but the regenerate man is spiritually alive. Regeneration is a spiritual

resurrection. The authors do refer to a "transforming resuscitation," but their discussion needs some clarification. *Resuscitation* and *resurrection* are not exact equivalents.

Step 8. "We make a list of all persons we have harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all." Luke 6:31

The authors introduce this step by saying that:

"If we are to make further progress in our journey to recovery, we must prepare to eliminate the burden of unnecessary baggage we are still carrying: the guilt, fear, and shame that either prompts us to avoid certain people or causes us to feel uncomfortable around them." (209)

This involves identification of "those we harmed as a result of our addiction" in order to "improve our understanding of the responsibility we have in our relationship with them" (209). One of those responsibilities is forgiveness. The chapter on step eight centers around forgiveness.

A primary concern is that forgiveness is *postponed* for such a lengthy time in the 12-step program. This step doesn't even involve actual forgiveness or attempts at reconciliation. It is merely the making of a list!

The Bible, on the contrary, treats broken relationships with far more seriousness. The believer is instructed to interrupt an act of *worship* (Matthew 5:23-24) in order to be reconciled with a brother who has something against him, regardless of who is right or wrong. Christians are not to let the sun go down on their anger, but must handle it quickly (Ephesians 4:26-27). This hardly accords with giving eighth place to the mere making of a *list*, let alone actually approaching others.

The authors do make some good general statements about the nature of forgiveness. For example:

"The modern idea of forgiveness is to approach an offense with a large eraser and wipe it off the books. God has never forgiven like this. For each offense, He demanded full payment. This is the reason for the cross. Beside every offense on our ledger is the blood of Christ, which has paid for our sins in full." (216)

Indeed, God's perfect *justice* is one essential key to understanding biblical forgiveness. The authors also correctly point out that "there is nothing that anyone can do to me...that can compare with what Christ has forgiven me for" (216). Our forgiveness of others, according to Ephesians 4:32, is modeled after what we have already received from God (216).

The chapter focuses both on extending forgiveness *to* others and seeking it *from* others. The believer must, of course, engage in both. A grave concern emerges, however, when the authors discuss motivations for "making amends." These motives are *primarily* focused on self, on progressing along the road to "recovery," rather than on obeying and glorifying God. For example, they state that "it will release us from the control these people currently have on us" (222). It is also disappointing to note their emphasis on forgiving self:

"Finally, as we take action to forgive others and experience their forgiveness, we will be able to more completely forgive ourselves. We will better understand that while our behavior may have been shameful, we as persons are not worthless. Learning how to love ourselves is a prerequisite for genuinely loving others." (222)

No Scripture can be located to support this love-of-self first attitude, which arises from the speculations of atheists like Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow. No Scripture commands the forgiveness of self. The authors cite no scriptural support for their statements, but ironically, the next paragraph cites Hebrews 12:1-2, a text that exhorts believers to fix their eyes on *Jesus...not self!*

Step 9. "We make direct amends to such people where possible, except when doing so will injure them or others." Matthew 5:23-24

It is indeed strange that these authors cite a passage that commands *immediate* reconciliation with a brother! The urgency of this text clashes with placing such actions in ninth place on a scale of one to twelve.

The authors indicate that we are at last ready "to unload our baggage of secrets," having "unloaded our sins to God" and "admitted them to ourselves and to at least one other person" (225). In their scheme, admission of sin to *someone other than the one actually sinned against* must precede actual reconciliation. This defies scriptural principles, such as

Matthew 5 above, and the classic passage in Matthew 18:15-20, where such matters are handled as privately and quickly as possible.

Along with the errors, some good points are made. It is important to go directly to the person sinned against (225) unless that is impossible due to the individual's death or other factors. Full responsibility should be assumed for our own sins (225). Restitution involves more than mere apologies (226).

There is some concern when we read what the authors say about making *indirect* amends to individuals who cannot be located:

"We can learn from our mistakes and apply that knowledge to present and future situations. If someone we wronged has moved or died, we can pay what debts we may owe to one of their survivors or make a charitable donation in their name; we can treat their survivors with a special act of kindness. We can do for other people's children or parents what we wish we'd done for our own, not as an act of guilt, but in love. We can pray for those whom we know are still living, but cannot locate." (228)

These are not necessarily wrong actions. In fact, they are all very good things to do. *However*, doing them as part of a 12-step program to "make amends" smells far too much like a type of penance, or attempting to atone for one's own sins. The believer who loves the Lord and is grateful for the work of Christ will quite naturally engage in such actions out of love for God and others...not as "working the ninth step"!

The final sections relate to situations where either partial or delayed restitution is supposedly necessary. In view of the biblical directives to reconcile quickly, these sections require extreme caution, discernment, and application of *biblical* (not psychological) principles.

Step 10. "We continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, promptly admit it." 1 Corinthians 10:12

This step is called a "maintenance" step (233). Its purpose, according to these authors, is to prevent "little" sins from growing into bigger ones. They suggest a *daily* "inventory."

The chapter starts off with a comparison between conviction and guilt. Here is what the authors say about the latter:

"Perhaps no emotion is more destructive than guilt. It causes a loss of self-respect. It causes the human spirit to wither, and eats away at our personal significance." (233)

Biblically, guilt is not an emotion but a violation of God's commandments. The result is not "loss of self-respect" but broken fellowship with God, a far more devastating consequence.

The authors go on to state that guilt is restricted to man's condition before salvation. They cite Romans 8:1, which says there is no *condemnation* for those in Christ Jesus. Explaining further, they claim that guilt is concerned with our status before God, while conviction relates to behavior (234). There ought to be greater clarity in distinguishing *guilt* from *condemnation*. The contrast should be between *condemnation* and conviction rather than between *guilt* and conviction. We are all guilty before God, but He has declared us "*not guilty*," and we are no longer under eternal condemnation. This condition is solely due to the completed work of Christ. Meanwhile, we do sometimes sin. When we do, there is genuine *guilt*, but it does not result in *eternal condemnation*. It may result in God's fatherly, loving discipline. At salvation, God the Judge becomes *Father*. The relationship changes, but God's standards do not change. Psychologists do a great disservice to the church by redefining guilt as a destructive emotion rather than a fact based on God's holy standards. Distinguishing between conviction and condemnation, rather than between conviction and guilt, would be far more biblical and helpful.

The authors list a number of contrasts between guilt and conviction. Except for a couple of problem areas, most of these contrasts would be biblically valid if *condemnation* were substituted for the term guilt. The authors again focus wrongly on "loss of self-esteem and wounded self-pride" as a primary consequence of guilt (234). Another problem is that they consider Satan to be the "agent of guilt" (235), citing 2 Corinthians 4:4. This verse, however, concerns Satan's blinding of *unbelievers* to the truth of the gospel. It is *God* who determines guilt and *God* who justifies the believer. *God* sets the standards. Satan is called the *accuser* of the brethren, but his accusations are false in the light of Christ's substitutionary death.

To their credit, the authors do state that Christians are "judicially righteous before God," that "our sins do not bring condemnation" (238). Here they use the correct biblical terms and

make accurate statements. There is a *mixture* of truth and error throughout Rapha writings, which makes discernment critical.

One key aspect of the authors' counsel is to "affirm our righteousness in Christ as well as confess our sins" (238). They have written a prayer which begins with, "Father, I affirm that I am deeply loved by you" (238). Certainly believers can affirm that they are deeply loved by God (Romans 8:35-39). However, the prayer would be better worded with the word *thank* rather than *affirm*. The "affirmation" reflects Rapha's extensive use of Rational-Emotive Therapy, to which we now turn.

The "daily inventory" recommended is one that focuses on tracing emotions (considered morally neutral by the authors) to false beliefs (239). The authors claim that our communications come from the heart, which they equate with our belief system (239). They teach that belief systems are often false due to powerful past influences, such as lack of love and affirmation in childhood (239). It is necessary, they claim, to search out the *specific* lie that is believed in order to benefit from God's Word:

"If we are not aware of the specific lie we are believing, we usually attempt to meet our need with any and every biblical truth--knowing that it is true and hoping that it will help. However, if Scripture doesn't speak powerfully to our specific need, we can become frustrated and disillusioned instead of freed and encouraged." (245)

This analysis badly needs to be critiqued. Biblically, the term *heart* refers to the entire inner man, the thoughts, emotions, purposes, intentions, desires, will, and so forth. It cannot be reduced to our "belief system" *alone*. Sinful thoughts, emotions, and actions do indeed arise from the heart, but the term is far broader than these authors admit. They are immersed in the system of atheist Albert Ellis. (For more detailed critique, see Discernment's paper reviewing Ellis, and "Think on These Things," a critique of two Christian books rooted in Ellis.) Sin arises from more than thoughts *alone*. There are also, for example, sinful desires (lusts) residing in the heart.

The quotation about using Scripture is one that fails to take into account the teaching of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. *All* Scripture is profitable for doctrine, conviction, correction, and disciplined training in righteousness. Sometimes, of course, specific Scriptures speak to specific issues in a particularly helpful manner. It can be very good to seek out those passages.

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit is not so limited that He cannot use any portion of God's Word to speak to a believer who seeks to overcome his problems biblically. Scripture, studied in the right spirit by a Christian, does *not* lead to frustration and disillusionment! This is a most serious charge that needs to be reconsidered by these authors.

Step 11. "We seek to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer, meditation, and obedience, praying for wisdom and power to carry out His will." James 1:5-6

This chapter, happily, is the least loaded with psychological error. In fact, much of it provides good biblical direction in the areas of prayer, meditation on God's Word, and obedience. There is a section about the attributes of God (285-287) which is excellent and well worth studying.

The chapter on step eleven begins by quoting the words of our Lord in John 10:1-4, 14. Here He speaks about His care for His own sheep, who hear and know His voice. The authors respond that:

"We can't hope to follow Jesus unless we know His voice, and we can't distinguish His voice from any other until we have cultivated an intimate relationship with Him. Such a relationship takes time, but God clearly wants it. He has taken the initiative in having a relationship with us."
(277)

Yes, God *has* taken the initiative, and the believer's relationship with Him deepens over time. It must be noted, however, that the *true believer*, called by God, *does* hear His voice when initially called to saving faith. This passage is primarily concerned with that initial response to His call. The authors imply that a Christian might actually fail to hear His voice over a long period of time.

Much of this chapter could be used fruitfully by believers. However, discernment is necessary since it is embedded in a book loaded with psychological baggage.

Step 12. "Having had a spiritual awakening, we try to carry the message of Christ's grace and restoration power to others who are chemically dependent, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs." Galatians 6:1

"**Spiritual awakening.**" The biggest initial red flag here is the term "spiritual awakening." Unbelievers are spiritually *dead*,

not *asleep*. They need resurrection, not "awakening." These authors, however, state that:

"Spiritual rebirth isn't the same as spiritual awakening, though the two go hand in hand." (299)

Thus it is the *Christian* who supposedly experiences one or more "spiritual awakenings." The authors use the term much as originally intended by AA:

"Our spiritual awakening, regardless of how significant or small it may have seemed at the time, began with the realization that we were powerless over our addiction." (299)

Steps two and three are considered as possible *additional* "spiritual awakenings." These authors also believe that valid "spiritual awakenings" may include the actual hearing of God's voice or seeing Jesus (299). (A full critique is beyond the scope of this paper. However, when Jesus returns visibly to earth, there will be no doubt!)

"Spiritual awakening" seems to be defined as some special individual revelation, particularly one that concerns an "addiction." However, the term is highly confusing and inappropriate for believers. It is all too easily mistaken or substituted for regeneration, particularly where *unbelievers* are concerned. As defined, "spiritual awakening" could apply to an unbeliever as well as to a Christian. Furthermore, we live in an age where New Age theology teaches that man needs to be "awakened" to the divinity within. The term "spiritual awakening" lends itself all too well to such lies.

"Carrying the message." Here the authors are primarily concerned with reaching others who share the same chemical dependency (302). They do rightly note that God is sovereign and uses our sufferings so that we can comfort others in affliction (302). But much like the unregenerate founders of AA, they highlight this "evangelistic" step as an aid to one's own "recovery" and a reminder of one's former life (302). Real *evangelism*, carrying the *gospel* rather than a psychological "recovery" message, does not share these self-oriented motives.

The authors do bring genuine evangelism into the discussion, saying that in time "we will begin to be compelled to share His transforming love and power with even those who are outside the

program" (306). (As if such "program - non/program" distinctions are ever really valid! *All* have sinned and come short of the glory of God [Romans 3:23]!) The concluding sentence on step twelve says that "it is genuinely thrilling to follow Him and allow Him to make us fishers of men." (310) The conclusion to the whole book expands on that thought:

"Growing with God, we will continue to discover that our 'spiritual awakening' is an ongoing process--as is our sharing of Him with others--because there are those who are suffering from chemical dependency and those who need to hear the news of Christ's redeeming love everywhere." (311)

"Those who are suffering from chemical dependency" and "those who need to hear the news of Christ's redeeming love" should not be so sharply separated. We are *all* sinners in need of redemption. The person whose sin involves a chemical idol is not fundamentally different. The mushrooming of 12-step groups to cover all sorts of sin is a witness to that fact. It is the *gospel* that needs to be witnessed to unbelievers. As for others in the body of Christ, we are called to exhort, encourage, rebuke, and minister in a variety of ways to one another. That may include giving godly counsel to someone who struggles with a similar sin. It may mean giving godly counsel to someone who struggles with a much different sin. In Christ we are *one body*, not splintered into groups based on specific sins. The 12-step program divides mankind into "addict" and "normal" rather than believer and unbeliever. This is no minor difference! The self-oriented focus of the program is unbiblical, and its steps lead into a type of works-righteousness that distorts the gospel. The centering on self-worth detracts from the work of evangelism, as believers become focused on building up of self rather than serving Christ. It is time to sound an alarm and turn from this worldly substitute...back to the sufficient Word of God.

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