

# The Quarterly Journal



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## Twelve Steps in the Wrong Direction

### A Biblical Critique of Codependency and Alcoholics Anonymous

Those who consume a steady diet of syndicated television talk shows or digest the writings of Christian psychologists such as Frank Minirth,<sup>1</sup> Paul Meier, and Henry Cloud will be surprised to learn that there is neither scientific nor biblical evidence to support the theories of codependency.

Codependency is a hot topic within current psychology. Before the late 20th century the word — and even the concept — was virtually unknown. Now, nearly everyone in one fashion or another seems to be codependent.

#### A DEFINITION OF CODEPENDENCY

In *The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms*, Marshall and Mary Asher call codependency, "An irrational, unhealthy relationship where one or both parties are emotionally dependent on each other."<sup>2</sup> They further note, "The term codependency is a term used in non-technical literature and especially self-help literature."<sup>3</sup>

by Gary E. Gilley  
and M. Kurt Goedelman



Martin and Deidre Bobgan, who for more than 30 years have educated Christians on the dangers of psychological counseling theories, tell us, "The word *codependent* was first used in the late 1970s to describe those people 'whose lives had become unmanageable as a result of living in a committed relationship with an alcoholic.'"<sup>4</sup>

Citing two professionals in the field, the Bobgans wrote, "Originally, it [codependency] was used to describe the person or persons whose lives were affected as a result of their being involved with someone who was chemically dependent."<sup>5</sup>

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# Editorials

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## THE CAPTIVITY OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

When Liberation Theology gained prominence and attention in Latin America in the 1960s, many saw it as a Christian answer to social and economic injustice.

The idea of freeing people from poverty and oppression through personal empowerment aided by Bible verses appealed to many who detested the dictatorial and corrupt governments in South America's Roman Catholic nations.

Dave Breese described Liberation Theology this way:

"It is the view that holds that Christ came into the world to be our economic liberator. It asserts that His first purpose was to free the poor and the oppressed from the shackles of economic constriction. In actuality, liberation theology redefines sin. In liberation theology sin is to possess wealth in the face of the world's poverty. Righteousness is therefore to redistribute that wealth, giving it to the poor. Evangelism is also redefined. It is seen as the announcement of the economic liberation of Christ and the invitation to the oppressed peoples of the world to join in the revolution He now ordains. Liberation theology advances another fascinating rationale. In that possessing money is the essence of sin, it follows that the most sinful system in the world is capitalism. The liberationists then ask,

From whence does capitalism come? The answer is, of course, the United States. ... And although it has lost ground in some places, liberation theology continues to be a serious spiritual subversion within Christianity and a serious threat to the stability of the world. It has been called 'the greatest threat that the Church has faced in all of its history.' The emergence of liberation theology makes clear that Marxism moves across the world in many a strange disguise" (*7 Men Who Rule the World from the Grave*, pp. 85-86).

These ideas were introduced in the United States through the writings of Gustavo Gutierrez. (See further, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, pp. 648-650.)

Liberation Theology owes more to Marxism than the Gospel by elevating class warfare to sacred doctrine. Its message bears little resemblance to the personal spiritual liberation Jesus Christ provided and the Apostle Paul described in the book of Romans.

Liberationism takes Marxism, adds biblical terminology, then redefines the words and events described. One example is the Exodus. The story is not presented as one about redemption focused on the covenant God, but as the poorer masses rising up against the Pharaohs of this world.

Rather than a Passover lamb and the offer of spiritual redemption through a covenant between God and His  
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## WORLD'S END MISSED AGAIN

Prophets who predict the world's end just don't get it — and they just don't get it right, either. Simply ask Hal Lindsey, Edgar Whisenant, Harold Camping, or the latest end-time prophet Chris McCann. McCann, who heads up the Philadelphia-based eBible Fellowship, maintained that on Oct. 7, 2015, earth would be destroyed with fire.

According to an online report from *The Guardian*, McCann told the British newspaper, "that by Thursday the world would be 'gone forever: annihilated'. McCann based his claim on an earlier prediction by Christian radio host Harold Camping, who said the world would end on 21 May 2011." Camping had made repeated failed "end of the world" predictions during the past three decades. Camping died Dec. 15, 2013, at age 92.

The news article further stated that, "The eBible Fellowship believed that Camping's 21 May 2011 was actually 'judgment day'. The fellowship thus claimed the world would end 1,600 days from that date: hence 7 October 2015."

On Oct. 8, McCann posted on the Fellowship's website a "response to being incorrect with the prediction that, 'in all likelihood, the world would end on October 7th.'" In the statement he maintained, "For some time now E Bible Fellowship (and myself) have been looking towards October 7th as the likely end of the world. We believed there was a strong likelihood that God would complete His judgment and bring about the world's destruction on that day. There was much biblical information pointing to this date and we freely shared it with all. Yet, consistently stressing throughout the entire time period that the world ending on that date was a 'strong likelihood.' Since it is now October 8th it is now obvious that we were incorrect regarding the world's ending on the 7th."

McCann and his group have also adopted the false notion devised by the late Camping that the church is dead and that God is finished with the church. Christian gatherings are now to be called "fellowships," not churches. In line with this thinking, McCann deflected criticism and further argued, "The Bible teaches that the church age is over. And the churches of the world are all operating without the presence of the Holy Spirit. The numerous doctrinal errors of all the world's churches prove the condition of their spiritual darkness. Therefore E Bible Fellowship is completely unconcerned with how any church or its members perceive us."

McCann, in his response, says, "There was no lie or deceitfulness involved" in his failed prediction. He did not offer a new date, but merely proposed that the earth "will one day soon come to an end."

—MKG

## GOTHARD MINISTRY HIT WITH LAWSUIT

Bill Gothard is feeling the heat over alleged actions and inaction committed by himself and others in his Institute in Basic Life Principles ministry. Gothard's latest challenge came last October when a civil lawsuit was filed in the Circuit Court for DuPage County (Illinois) against IBLP.

Gothard and members of the IBLP's board have been repeatedly accused of ignoring, minimizing, and/or concealing the numerous charges of sexual abuse and harassment by "participants, interns, or employees of IBLP."

According to Recovering Grace website, the lawsuit "alleges that IBLP was negligent over the past several decades by failing to properly address alleged sexual abuse and harassment by IBLP employees and that IBLP failed to properly report known or suspected abuse to the proper authorities. The lawsuit further alleges that IBLP's conduct was 'wilful and wanton' because IBLP demonstrated an 'utter indifference to and/or [a] conscious disregard for a substantial risk of harm' to the plaintiffs, and that IBLP and its directors engaged in a civil conspiracy to cover up the allegations." Recovering Grace is "an online organization devoted to helping people whose lives have been affected by the teachings of Bill Gothard" and his various ministries.

The report also states, "The lawsuit notes that IBLP is attempting to sell the Oak Brook [Ill.] Headquarters property and is planning to relocate to Texas, and it asks the court to impose a constructive trust on IBLP's assets, preventing IBLP from spending down their resources until the lawsuit is resolved." Another online report indicates that the lawsuit "also alleges the organization is 'liquidating assets' totaling more than \$100 million 'in an attempt to flee the jurisdiction (State of Illinois) where this wrongful conduct occurred.'"

A settlement of more than \$50,000 each is being sought by the five plaintiffs who filed the lawsuit.

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# Lording It Over the Flock

## The Tragedy of Authoritarian and Controlling Churches

by J. Greg Sheryl



In the 19th century Lord Acton wrote, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>1</sup>

And Abraham Lincoln observed, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character give him power."<sup>2</sup>

Some church leaders past and present have demonstrated — to the hurt of the members whom they are supposed to care for — the truth of those two quotations.

### BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

The Apostle Peter exhorted his fellow elders:

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3).

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians:

"Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy" (2 Corinthians 1:24, NASB).

Paul also warned free believers not to become subject to physical slavery — although an application could possibly also be made to spiritual slavery. He said:

"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Some people have a sinful desire to subjugate and dominate others and to impose their will and plans upon them. But this should not be the way of those whom God raises up to lead His people. In Mark 10, Jesus told his disciples:

"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (vv. 42-45).

No one gave a better example of God's way of leading than the Lord

Jesus. Luke wrote that on the night before His crucifixion:

"Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called "benefactors." But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves'" (Luke 22:24-27).

And on this same night, we read in John's Gospel, Jesus humbled Himself by washing His disciples' feet (John 13:3-11). Following what Jesus had done, John tells us:

"So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and

Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:12-17).

## MISHANDLING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Authoritarian and controlling religious authorities apparently existed among God's people prior to the time of Jesus' incarnation. For example, in Ezekiel God rebukes the shepherds of Israel. He says:

"The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:4).

In the New Testament Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees, stating, "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4).

And again He denounced them, saying:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation" (Matthew 23:14).

And despite these words and examples of our Lord and the words of His apostles, regarding leading God's people, some who claim to be God's servants do not obey these commands. The Apostle Paul warned the elders of Ephesus:

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking

perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul derided the Corinthians for putting up with some who were spiritually abusive:

"You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!" (2 Corinthians 11:19-21, NIV).

Paul sent his letter to the Galatians to warn them against the Judaizers, who were trying to bring the Galatians into bondage to the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote, "They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them" (Galatians 4:17).

Paul exhorted them to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1; cf. Acts 15:1-31).

And the Apostle John wrote to the early Church about one pseudo-leader of God's people, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against [unjustly accusing in the NASB] us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (3 John 1:9-10).

This problem did not cease at the close of the Apostolic era. Throughout Church history, unbiblical authoritarianism has manifested itself in Christ's Church.

Something that is always connected with such heavy-handed authoritarianism and control is *spiritual abuse*, a

term coined by Christian authors David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen.<sup>3</sup> They wrote:

"Spiritual abuse can occur when a leader uses his or her *spiritual position* to control or dominate another person. It often involves overriding the feelings and opinions of another, without regard to what will result in the other person's state of living, emotions or spiritual well-being. In this application [of spiritual abuse], power is used to bolster the position or needs of a leader, over and above one who comes to them in need."<sup>4</sup>

An example of this might be the person who conveys in words or by attitude, "You just need to do what I say [about a particular subject], because I'm pastor [or deacon, or Sunday school teacher, etc]."

The authors also give a second way spiritual abuse can occur:

"Spiritual abuse can also occur when *spirituality* is used to make others live up to a 'spiritual standard.' This promotes external 'spiritual performance,' also without regard to an individual's actual well-being, or is used as a means of 'proving' a person's spirituality."<sup>5</sup>

For instance, "How many chapters in the Bible do you read per day?" or "How long do you spend in prayer each day?" or "How many people did you witness to last week?"

The authors further state:

"Whatever the case, the results of spiritual abuse are usually the same: The individual is left bearing a weight of guilt, judgment or condemnation, and confusion about their worth and standing as a Christian. It's at this point, we say, that spirituality has become abusive."<sup>6</sup>

The authors point out that church leadership can also be abused by church members.<sup>7</sup> However, this article deals with abuse of the flock of God, rather than that of spiritual leaders.

In his book, *Churches That Abuse*, sociologist and cult researcher Ronald Enroth stated:

“Ruler is the right term to describe the kind of people in authoritarian leadership roles who are a focus of this book. They are spiritual tyrants who take unholy pleasure in requiring obedience and subordination of their followers. ... The spiritual autocrat, the religious dictator, attempts to *compel* subordination; the true Christian leader can legitimately only *elicit* follower-ship.”<sup>8</sup>

Another characteristic of authoritarian and controlling churches is mind control. Cult rescuer Steven Hassan prefers the term “undue influence” to “mind control,” explaining, “Both [terms] refer to the process of controlling people by mentally hijacking their normal thought processes. ... In many ways, undue influence is a better term than mind control, as exploitation is part of its definition.”<sup>9</sup>

### THE SHEPHERDING MOVEMENT AND OTHER AUTHORITARIAN GROUPS

Almost 40 years ago I became involved in an authoritarian and controlling church that was part of what is commonly called the Shepherding Movement.<sup>10</sup>

I was a member of this movement from early 1975 to late 1986.

Two other large and similarly authoritarian movements that were extant around the same time (and which have been written about in past issues of *The Quarterly Journal*) are: Maranatha Campus Ministries, founded by Bob Weiner<sup>11</sup> and the Boston Church of Christ (later known as the International Church of Christ) headed up by Kip McKean.<sup>12</sup> The movement that Kip McKean currently heads up is called The SoldOut Discippling Movement.<sup>13</sup> The Shepherding Movement’s examples of authoritarianism and control may have influenced both these movements and others.<sup>14</sup>

Leaders and followers of such movements would do well to consider the Scripture:

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11).

And:

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18).

The Shepherding Movement, which was structured like a spiritual pyramid, was ruled at the top by five prominent Charismatics: Charles Simpson, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Don Basham, and (later) Ern Baxter. John Poole also was briefly a member of this spiritual oligarchy. Simpson and Mumford are the only two who are still alive of the “Fort Lauderdale Five,” a title dubbed to them by outsiders. Simpson is the only one who still has a network of churches connected with him. I belonged to the branch presided over by Simpson, whom we all referred to (and addressed) as “Brother Charles.”

Simpson has said, “The book that best describes the journey of the *New Wine* [magazine] teachers [Simpson, Mumford, Prince, Basham, and Baxter] is Dr. S. David Moore’s book, *The Shepherding Movement*.”<sup>15</sup> Written by a former leader within the movement, Moore’s volume is a scholarly work that traces the history of the movement, primarily from the viewpoint of the five leaders<sup>16</sup> (especially Simpson and Mumford<sup>17</sup>). A critique of the movement, written by two former members who suffered harm from it, is Ron and Vicki Burks’ book, *Damaged Disciples*.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1970, Simpson, Mumford, Prince, and Basham met in Florida to discuss and pray about a situation of mutual concern regarding

a Christian associate who had fallen into sin. While they were meeting, they felt led to commit and to submit themselves and their ministries to one another. Out of this mutual submission, they began to seek to teach those within their spheres of influence to lay their lives down before a pastor and be shepherded by him.

### MY LIFE IN THE SHEPHERDING MOVEMENT

I joined a church in Atlanta, Ga., that was part of the Shepherding Movement. Church membership required members to make a covenant with a pastor. That pastor then became the member’s “shepherd.”

There was no formula for this covenant, but one was expected to promise loyalty and obedience. The covenant was oral but considered permanent and binding. Making a covenant with one’s shepherd was in effect making oneself “a living sacrifice” to the shepherd rather than the Lord. The shepherd’s view was God’s word to you. The way one obeyed and related to the shepherd was viewed as paralleling one’s relationship with and obedience to the Lord.

### THE WAY I ENTERED

There were several factors that predisposed me to become involved in such a group. At the time I joined I was directionless and vulnerable. I had gone to college for two years and had planned to return but was placed on academic suspension for a year because of poor grades. My mother told me to find a job and a place to stay because I wouldn’t be returning to school.

Three times that summer I faced the prospect of death. I had been held up at gunpoint on the street. I got locked inside a deep freezer at the restaurant where I worked without anyone being aware of it. Also, a stranger had pulled me over in an unfamiliar city and I thought he might kill me. God delivered me from all these situations, but I was nonetheless affected. I also struggled with depression. I did not have a church home, although I did pray and read the Bible.

Additionally, I had a good friend, whom I'll call Cedric, who had become involved in the Shepherding Movement. He presented these shepherding teachings to me as the answer to my problems. When I joined I made my covenant with him. We remain friends today, minus the covenant relationship.

### WHAT IT WAS LIKE INSIDE

Once I got in, I believed that it was my duty to spend as much time as I could with Cedric. We spent so much time together that people told me I seemed just like him. I took this as a compliment. Cedric in turn tried to imitate his shepherd, who was the senior pastor of the church and one of Simpson's disciples.

Shortly after I joined, I got a welding job through a man in the congregation named Daniel. After several months on that job, Cedric urged me to get a job at a warehouse where one of his other disciples worked. Although I got the job, I didn't like it. At times I wanted to leave but Cedric wouldn't let me. So I worked there about five and one-half years before I took a job at another warehouse, where another church member had a job. I held that job for about six months.

From there, I obtained a job as a parking lot supervisor through a church member who was an executive at the company. While there my supervisor — who was not a member of our church — invited me to a barbecue at his house. He wanted me to meet a single woman from his church. I told Cedric. He was condescending. Finally, he said, "You just don't understand, do you?" I realized that people in our church weren't supposed to date outside the movement. So I turned down the invitation.

### TWO PROMISES

Two things of which Cedric assured me never happened during my time in the movement. One was specific. He told me that I would be married. At one point, he even said, "It won't be long until you're married." I had

no girlfriend at the time he said this, nor was I dating anyone. Since he was my shepherd, I took this to be a word from God. I am 61 and still single.

Another assurance was that "something" would happen for me when I reached age 30. I took that to mean that I would become a leader within the movement. I was almost 21 when I became a member and these two assurances kept me anchored to it.

### LIFE AS A SINGLE MAN IN THE MOVEMENT

I was also set up to room with a couple of Cedric's other single disciples: Dustin and Richard (not their real names). After we had lived for a while at one apartment complex, the church placed a number of disciples — including the three of us — into another apartment complex. We continued to be roommates for as long as Dustin and Richard were single.

Marriages within the Shepherding Movement were arranged by the shepherds. Additionally, a number of marriages within our small church dissolved, sooner or later, after people left the movement; although not all of those divorces occurred because of the movement.

There was a girl named Brigitte (not her real name) to whom I had been attracted even before I joined the movement. Sometime after I had become a member, she and I went out on a date, increasing my attraction to her. However, one Sunday evening, my shepherd told me that the shepherds wanted her to date someone else. I was a good "sheep," and backed off.

She dated that man and they married, but the marriage ended in divorce. One of the things that damaged the man who became Brigitte's husband was alcohol. At one point, our pastor encouraged the men in the church to drink alcohol recreationally. This was portrayed as a way to remove barriers between believers and unbelievers. Even drunkenness was not taken seriously (cf. Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:19-21). Another way we were led to break our "religious

bondage" was encouragement to use some four-letter words (although not coarse sexual language or profanity, such as using the Lord's name in vain).

Dustin and Richard each eventually got married. Cedric offered Richard a choice between two nice women in our congregation and was told to choose one and he did so. They eventually were divorced. Dustin's marriage to a woman in the movement ended in divorce, as well. In addition, Cedric's marriage also ended in divorce.

Shepherds made decisions for members on all kinds of matters: major purchases, where to work, where to live and whom to live with, and whom they should or should not date and marry. We also were expected to attend special meetings, both locally and out-of-state if possible.

Cedric thought I needed to look into a career in order to get a job by which I could support a family. I thought about becoming a math teacher. Cedric rejected the idea. I ended up going to technical school to learn computer programming. After about 10 months, I graduated. It took me a year to find my first computer job.

### OBLIGATORY FASTING

Some in the Shepherding Movement promoted fasting. Derek Prince did so to the point where it almost became a religion in itself. Our congregation was told that at the beginning of 1982 everyone would fast for 40 days by eating once a day for 40 days. We endured this, although it was not easy for me.

A year or two later, we were told to fast again in the same manner. I presented a paper to my pastor in which I gave scriptural arguments against this requirement. I don't think he was pleased with it.

### MY "GIRLFRIEND"

After a while, a man I'll call "Joe" replaced Cedric as my shepherd. He encouraged me to date a woman, Michelle (not her real name). I didn't want to, but because he was my

shepherd, I complied. Later, Joe wanted me to double-date with Michelle and another couple whom they were apparently trying to match. I was reluctant but acquiesced, because he was my “shepherd.”

At one point, Michelle told me she thought the Lord had shown her that I was supposed to be her husband. This put enormous pressure on me, because I feared disobeying God. I agonized over this for many years afterward. At one point, on the advice of her shepherd, Michelle gave me an ultimatum: either marry her or stop dating her. At first I told her I would marry her. Shortly thereafter, I reneged. Soon afterward Michelle’s shepherd told me that he supported my decision.

### MY EXIT FROM THE MOVEMENT

Various themes were emphasized in the Shepherding Movement: the kingdom of God, authority, submission, shepherding, and covenant relationships. An additional theme emphasized in the Shepherding Movement was “integrity.” In fact, the name of one of the organizations associated with the movement was “Integrity Communications.”

There were a number of difficult things about being in the movement, including, as noted, being restricted as to whom I could date or marry. I believe that my involvement in the movement is the reason I have never been married.

Also the obligatory lengthy fasts were a tremendous difficulty that I chafed under. I was also shuffled to different shepherds over time, as were others throughout the Shepherding Movement. However, at some point, my friend (and original shepherd) Cedric and I began to communicate through cassette tape “letters” that we sent to each other. Even after I left the movement, Cedric and I continued these cassette letters to one another for a time. So, despite the shuffling to different shepherds, I did have some continuity. I seem to recall that many, if not most, of the sermons we heard were from the Old Testament. For

instance, stories about loyalty and covenant relationships from the life of David. Similarly, sermons seemed to center around a very narrow scope of subjects, such as submission, authority, and covenant relationships. Eventually, I became depressed when I would go to church, because the sermons made me feel guilty, and I also grew tired of hearing about these same subjects so often.

Some may wonder why people remain in a movement like this. For me, and I suspect others also, it was largely because I had made a “covenant.” There were several times while I was there that an open invitation to leave the movement was made; sometimes, during these times, I thought about leaving, but never did.

At one point, Charles Simpson visited our church for a series of meetings. He announced that our pastor was overweight and that he was going someplace to lose some weight. About two months later, it was announced that our pastor was returning, but that he would resign.

When the pastor returned, he *had* lost a lot of weight. He announced his resignation. One of the members asked for an explanation, but none was given. The church pianist, who was also the pastor’s sister-in-law and who worked at our church school, announced that she *would* be staying. This seemed odd because it probably hadn’t occurred to anyone that she *wouldn’t* be staying. However, she left shortly afterward.

There was a going-away party arranged for the pastor one evening, but he never showed up at the gathering. Finally, as the evening wore on, people began leaving.

Not long afterward, Simpson returned — without the pastor — to address our church. He announced that the pastor had been an alcoholic and that he was going to go spend time in Mobile, Ala., with his ministerial peers. A question-and-answer session followed. At one point, someone may have suggested that there was a problem with the system itself. Simp-

son firmly told the inquirer that “the system isn’t for sale.” A question I asked Simpson received an overly cautious response.

An interim shepherd was supposedly being sought to replace our pastor. However, the man who usually ministered to us was John Duke, Simpson’s right-hand man.

Not long after Simpson’s visit, I received a call from Michelle. She was stunned by something she had learned: our pastor had been having an adulterous relationship with his sister-in-law, the pianist. It had gone on for years, even during a period of time — perhaps two years — when he had stepped down from being our church’s senior pastor. It was also during the time he had lived in Mobile, where Simpson was based, until he was “released” by Simpson to return to our church as senior pastor. Michelle felt so guilty about sharing this with me, that she told her shepherd. He responded by saying, “If Greg loses his soul as a result of this, it will be your fault.”

The next Sunday night when our church met, I saw Duke enter. I had never before seen such anger on his face. Duke said that after the service they were going to talk to Michelle and that I could be there if I wished. Following the service, Duke and two or three other men took Michelle into a side room, where I also went; and for 45 minutes or more, they castigated her. I tried to speak up at one point, but was warned to be quiet. At one point Duke said that if we wanted to leave the movement, we could. The session had been so traumatic for Michelle that when she got to her car afterwards, she retched. At this point, I felt Duke had opened the door for me to leave the movement, and I did.

Part of the reason I did so was because I felt that the word “integrity” had no meaning in the movement. Also, one of our emphases had been “the kingdom of God.” Yet the Scripture plainly teaches that “the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”

(Romans 14:17). And the Scripture is also clear that, “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9); and that, within the list of “the unrighteous,” the Scripture includes “fornicators” and “adulterers.” We imagined that we were on “the cutting edge of what God was doing,” which led to an attitude of spiritual elitism and pride and then, by contrast, witnessed first-hand the covering up of immorality.<sup>19</sup>

Thus God used these things to show me that the movement was “not as advertised.” I didn’t feel *compelled* to leave by seeing these things. However, I *did* believe I had a choice and I chose to leave.

My involvement in the movement let to pride and an elitist attitude that resulted in my looking down on some of those both inside and outside the movement — and especially on those who left the movement. Those who left the movement were typically spoken of as having “left the kingdom” of God. So, although there were certainly valid biblical and doctrinal reasons not to be a part of this movement, these neither played a part in leading me into the movement nor in getting me out of the movement.

However, praise God for His great mercy in getting me out!

### THE AFTERMATH

There was a heavy emphasis in the Shepherding Movement on covenant relationships. These were viewed to be eternal or at least lifelong and were entered into by making a verbal commitment to a pastor. As it turned out, as former members Ron and Vicki Burks point out in *Damaged Disciples*, the five leaders themselves were unable to live by their own teaching in the area of covenant relationships. This was demonstrated by the fact that, in 1986, the men dissolved their ministry relationship with one another. (Prince had left in 1984.) As the Burkses wrote regarding the dissolution of the leaders’ covenant relationships:

“They were choosing not to follow their own teaching. They

demonstrated to the world that they were unwilling to require of themselves the same level of commitment [they] expected of their followers.”<sup>20</sup>

S. David Moore wrote:

“Despite the statement in [the November 1986 issue of] *New Wine* that there was no ‘split up’, they indeed had separated. The Shepherding movement as an expression of the five teachers’ association had ended.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1987, Basham publicly “apologized to any who had been hurt by the movement and urged them to write to him personally.”<sup>22</sup>

Later, Mumford expressed distress for people who had been hurt in the movement while appearing to stop short of acknowledging personal fault for any damage done. Prince sought to distance himself from any abuses caused by the movement. So far as I know, Simpson has never publicly apologized for any damage he caused through his teaching and example, and I am not aware of any apology by the late Ern Baxter.

I believe I left the movement near the end of 1986. Today, I am a member of a small Southern Baptist church. My pastor, Patrick M. Brown, has a true shepherd’s heart.

### WAS THE SHEPHERDING MOVEMENT A CULT?

Whether or not the Shepherding Movement and other authoritarian and controlling churches and movements are cults depends on how one defines the word “cult.” In discussing a definition of the term, Ron Rhodes states, “Talk to 10 different cult ‘experts’ and you may well be given 10 different definitions.”<sup>23</sup> Rhodes notes that cults can be defined either theologically or sociologically.<sup>24</sup>

While the Shepherding Movement probably was not a cult from a theological standpoint — at least not from the standpoint of what we professed to believe — things are less clear if we use a sociological definition of a cult. From a sociological

standpoint, the movement of which I was a part of exhibited cultic characteristics and tendencies, such as authoritarianism and control.

The late Christian psychologist Paul R. Martin has written, “[M]y personal experience (which has been verified by the considerable research of others) has been that some Christian groups *are* cultic in practice.”<sup>25</sup>

Further on, he stated, “groups which are at least marginally Christian are producing psychological harm quite similar to that produced by non-Bible-based cults.”<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, specifically referring to the Shepherding Movement and similar authoritarian, Bible-oriented groups, Martin wrote:

“What is disturbing is that many of these cultic groups could, with a clear conscience, subscribe to a most orthodox, fundamental, and evangelical statement of faith. But phenomenologically and practically they are living a subtle but deadly religion of ‘performance,’ of trying to live up to essentially nonbiblical standards imposed by the leader.”<sup>27</sup>

And sociologist and cult researcher Ronald Enroth wrote in his book, *Churches That Abuse*:

“A central theme of this book is that spiritual abuse can take place in the context of doctrinally sound, Bible preaching, fundamental, conservative Christianity. All that is needed for abuse is a pastor accountable to no one and therefore beyond confrontation.”<sup>28</sup>

### THE APPEAL OF AUTHORITARIAN AND CONTROLLING CHURCHES

People seldom join authoritarian groups for the theology or doctrine. Other factors are more decisive. Paul Martin has written:

“Harold Bussell notes that he *never* saw an evangelical who entered a cultic group for doctrinal reasons. Among the things he describes as factors which make

a group attractive is the cult's emphasis on 'group sharing ... community and caring.'"<sup>29</sup>

Martin also noted, "In recovering from cultic life, the issue that takes longest to resolve is typically the gnawing search for the love, fellowship, and caring experienced while in the group."<sup>30</sup>

He listed the following four features that might predispose a person to join a cult or cult-like group (such as an authoritarian or controlling church):

"1) a stressful event within the past year; 2) a transition phase in life (between family and independence, between school and career, or between dating relationships); 3) a longing for community and caring friends; and 4) a desire to serve a great cause and be part of a movement that will change society."<sup>31</sup>

The late cult expert Margaret Thaler Singer wrote in the Introduction of her book, *Cults in Our Midst*, that:

"[This book] is not about weird people who join crazy groups. It's about how all of us, at various times, can fall into vulnerable states during which another person can wield more influence over us than at other times. We are all more vulnerable to flattery, deception, lures, and enticements when we are lonely, sad, and feeling needy. In such periods of transient vulnerability, most of us are more manipulable, more suggestible, and more likely to be deceived by the flattery and inducement of designing persons."<sup>32</sup>

She also noted:

"Despite the myth that normal people don't get sucked into cults, it has become clear over the years that everyone is susceptible to the lure of these master manipulators. In fact, the majority of adolescents and adults in cults come from middle-class backgrounds, are fairly well educated, and are not seriously disturbed prior to joining."<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere, Singer wrote:

"Cults are truly *personality cults*. Because cult structure is basically authoritarian, the personality of the leader is all important. Cults come to reflect the ideas, style, and whims of the leader and become extensions of the leader."<sup>34</sup>

Later, she noted, "Almost all cults make the claim that their members are 'chosen,' 'select,' or 'special,' while nonmembers are considered lesser beings."<sup>35</sup>

In concluding one chapter, she observed, "Cults know that if you knew from the get go what you were in for and why, you would never join. It's as simple as that."<sup>36</sup>

### RECOVERING FROM CULTIC ABUSE: LOOK TO THE LORD

People involved in an authoritarian and controlling environment for a significant length of time are bound to be affected. One writer noted:

"Perhaps the single largest difficulty for those who walk away from their cults is isolation and loneliness. Without a network of family, friends, and other survivors, recovery is much more difficult. Some ex-members return to their cults or inadvertently join other destructive groups (known as cult hopping) in order to fill the void created by leaving the intense group experience provided by the cult."<sup>37</sup>

Personal Freedom Outreach, publisher of *The Quarterly Journal*, offers numerous useful resources to those exiting cults and/or spiritual abusive groups. This includes a very helpful message by PFO director G. Richard Fisher.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to intense loneliness, some of the experiences and emotions a person may go through after exiting an abusive religious system include fear and anxiety, confusion, depression, guilt, anger, and grief, as well as experiencing an inability to trust God and/or people.

It is important to realize that God knows all about your involvement in the group and the suffering that has resulted from your involvement. He loves you and wants to help you. "Why did He allow this to happen to me?" you may wonder. Individual situations are different, and so may be the reason(s) He allowed this to happen to you. Remember that God is sovereign and in control of your life.

If you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, He has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Someone has noted that in the Greek in which the New Testament was written, there are five negatives in this verse!<sup>39</sup>

One study Bible contains a note about Hebrews 13:5, which says, in part:

"This quotation is one of the most emphatic statements in the NT. In Greek it contains two double negatives, similar to saying in English, 'I will never, ever, ever forsake you.'"<sup>40</sup>

The Bible says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray" (James 5:13). And, if your heart is broken, the Scripture says:

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18, NASB).

"For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise His who are prisoners" (Psalm 69:33, NASB).

"For He has not despised nor abhorred the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard" (Psalm 22:24, NASB).

And Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Second, feed on the Bible, which is the Word of God. God says:

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

“[A]s newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Peter 2:2-3).

The Psalms are a good place to find comfort and help from the Lord for our emotional and psychological wounds and turmoil.

Third, find a good church to belong to. If you feel taken advantage of, abused, or ripped off by your involvement in an authoritarian or controlling church, it may be tempting to give up on church altogether. Don't. The solution for being a part of a *bad* church is not to avoid church, but to find and be a part of a *good* church.

When I attended college for two years, I became weary of trying to find a church and I quit attending church on Sunday mornings. One day I was reading in Luke and came across this verse:

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16).

I focused on the words, “as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” I knew that Jesus, Who is God in the flesh, didn't need to attend synagogue on the Sabbath. Furthermore, He could have created a much more perfect form of worship than the local synagogue service. Instead, He voluntarily made it His “custom,” His habit, to gather with God's people in the synagogue on the Sabbath, despite what were surely, to Him, the imperfections and deficiencies of their syna-

gogue worship. If Jesus made it His custom on the Sabbath to attend synagogue with its sinful people, I, as His disciple, had to follow His example.

And the Scripture exhorts us to be “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

### A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PAST INVOLVEMENT IN AN ABUSIVE CHURCH

Sanctification — being transformed into Christ's likeness — is an essential part of the Christian life and can especially be borne out in life's most difficult circumstances, including when we have been harmed in a controlling and authoritarian church. We do this by “putting off” any sinful anger, bitterness, hatred, and a desire for vengeance that we may have for those who have hurt us. Those feelings must be replaced with something else. We must “put on” kindness, love, and blessing (see Ephesians 4:22-24). We can never lose sight of the fact that, just as when we were in sin and an unrepentant state, it was God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering that led us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

While it might be either impossible or futile to approach those in the church or group whom we believe have wronged us to try to renew a relationship with them, we can and must, however, release our desire to get even with them or hold a claim against them. There is no such thing as a Christian vigilante.

For some, a daily reading, personally praying, and applying the admonishments of Romans 12 might prove helpful in overcoming the pangs of bitterness, malice, and anger. While we cannot — in the biblical sense — extend forgiveness, we must adopt the healthy and biblical course of blessing, not cursing, toward those who have sinned against us. And we must be ready and willing to forgive. Donald Whitney provides for us some very important distinctions of biblical forgiveness:

“What Christians should always do, as Jesus exemplified in His prayer, is be *ready* to forgive. And then, when forgiveness is sought, forgiveness can be extended. Yes, we ought to release our sinful bitterness and hatred whether the offender ever seeks forgiveness. Some equate this decision with forgiveness itself. In reality though, this is only getting ready, being willing to forgive. Then if the offender repents, we are prepared to complete the process by saying, ‘I forgive you.’”<sup>41</sup>

To this, biblical counselor Craig Rowe adds these helpful words:

“The Bible never says, ‘Forgive and forget.’ ... But what you can do, you can live enough life this side of the offense so when you look at it, in the horizon of your life, it's only a speck. It's not a dominating feature. ... Hatred will tie you to a person just like love will tie you to a person. Only hatred is like being connected to a sewer system and all the sewage is flooding into your mind. Love sets up a filter and it says, ‘I will not allow that garbage in my mind.’ ... A change of my heart and a change of perspective heals.”<sup>42</sup>

This doesn't mean that overcoming the evil that was done to you will be easy. It will take both time and the grace of God. Several other things that may help you move on with your life after leaving a controlling and authoritarian church include the following:

First, realize that although you were abused and hurt by the movement, those who hurt you may not have intended to do so. That doesn't excuse it or say that it didn't happen — only that the intent may not have been malicious. Ronald Enroth states:

“Do the [spiritual] abusers intend to inflict hurt? In most cases, probably not. They usually are unaware of what they are doing to people in the name of God. They may, in fact, be convinced

that their behavior is what the Lord has mandated. What others interpret as control they may view as caring for the flock. Ken Blue notes that ‘spiritual abusers are curiously naive about the effects of their exploitation. They rarely intend to hurt their victims. They are usually so narcissistic or so focused on some great thing they are doing for God that they don’t notice the wounds they are inflicting on their followers.’<sup>43</sup>

Again, this doesn’t mean you weren’t hurt or abused even if that was not the intent of those who abused you.

Second, realize that not everything you experienced in the group was bad. For example, one writer, in discussing skills learned in controlling groups, noted:

“Many ex-members resist looking at the positive side; nevertheless, some good must have occurred, even if it is only to acknowledge to yourself that you could survive incredible hardship. Cult members learn sales and recruitment skills, office skills, farming, communication skills, publishing skills, and administrative and leadership abilities, to name just a few.”<sup>44</sup>

A member may have learned skills that can serve them outside the group. As an example, one job skill I learned while in the Shepherding Movement was editing recordings of messages given. Cedric recognized that God had given me a gift of teaching and he encouraged and affirmed this gift. And I have relationships that survived my departure.

Third, remember Romans 8:28:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

This verse doesn’t say that everything that happens to the child of God is good. However, it does say that God will take everything that hap-

pens to the child of God, and cause it all to work together for his or her good. God may use the bad that happened to us in the group we were in and allow it to make us more discerning and more compassionate toward others, among other things. The ultimate good that God is working in us is described in Romans 8:29, that of conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus.

We see examples in the Bible of those who endured evil at the hands of man and/or Satan, and God turned it for their good. Such examples include Joseph, Job, and the Lord Jesus Himself.

Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Years later, Joseph didn’t gloss over the wrong that they had done to him:

“Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive’ (Genesis 50:19-20).

Recall the example of Job. Satan attacked Job, killed all his children and many of his servants, killed and plundered many of his animals, and smote him with painful boils all over his body (Job 1:12-2:8). Yet, in the end, God restored to Job twice as much as he had originally had (Job 42:10). And we read, “After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:16-17).

And in the New Testament, we read:

“You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11).

A third example of God turning evil things to good is found in the death of the Lord Jesus. He was betrayed by one of His own disciples into the hands of His enemies, the Jewish religious leaders. He died at the hand

of the pagan Roman authorities. Yet through suffering the supreme injustice of the Cross, the innocent and blameless Son of God brought eternal salvation to those who trust in His complete and holy sacrifice on their behalf. God took the evil that Satan did through wicked men to make possible the salvation of all mankind — even to those who put their faith in His perfect sacrifice on their behalf.

And so, in seeing how God works all things together for the good of His children, may we be enabled to overcome the evil by those who have wronged us in spiritually abusive groups and move forward, confident that God will bring good for us out of it. As the Scripture tells us, “The misled and the misleader belong to Him” (Job 12:16, NASB).

## OTHER RESOURCES THAT MAY BE OF HELP

*Damaged Disciples*, by Ron and Vicki Burks who were members of the Shepherding Movement for many years, may be helpful. One book that specifically deals with the Boston Church of Christ movement, but which includes some material on the Shepherding Movement, is *The Discipling Dilemma*.

While by no means intending to endorse everything in the books listed below,<sup>45</sup> other works that might be helpful include *Churches That Abuse and Recovering From Churches That Abuse* (both by Ronald Enroth), *Combating Cult Mind Control and Freedom of Mind*<sup>46</sup> (both by Steven Hassan, a former member of the Unification Church), *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, and *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*. Publication information on all these books can be found in the endnotes of this article, in the first reference to the book in the article.

Hassan is Jewish, so the two books mentioned by him are not written from a Christian perspective. Nevertheless, some of the material in them may prove helpful to Christians leaving authoritarian churches, especially in understanding how controlling movements exercise undue influence on their members. Christian books or

articles (if any exist) by or about the specific group one was involved in may also prove helpful.

### Endnotes:

1. Margaret Miner and Hugh Rawson, *The New International Dictionary of Quotations*. New York: Signet, 2000, pg. 376.
2. Bob Kelly, *Worth Repeating: More Than 5,000 Classic and Contemporary Quotes*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2003, pg. 41.
3. David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1991, pg. 20.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, italics in original. The example which follows is mine.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 21, italic in original. The example which follows is mine.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
7. *Ibid.* The authors give an example of pastoral spiritual abuse on pg. 21.
8. Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, pg. 196, italics in original.
9. Steven Hassan, *Combating Cult Mind Control* (25th Anniversary edition). Newton, Mass.: Freedom of Mind Press, 2015, pp. 23-24.
10. See Steve Coleman, "Christian — Who Is Your Covering?: A Christian Look at the Shepherding Movement," *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*, April-June 1983, pp. 1, 6-7.
11. See Steve Cannon, "Maranatha Campus Ministries: God's Green Berets?" *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*, January-March 1985, pp. 4, 7; Stephen F. Cannon, "Maranatha Christian Churches Dissolve Union," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1990, pp. 2, 8.
12. See Stephen F. Cannon, "The Boston Church of Christ: Has Mind Control Come to Bean Town?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1989, pp. 5-8; Stephen F. Cannon, "Has Mind Control Gone Hollywood?," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 1995, pp. 5-11; M. Kurt Goedelman, "International Church of Christ Scores Partial Victory," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1998, pg. 22; Stephen F. Cannon, "Controversial Church Leader Resigns," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2003, pg. 3.
13. See Ron Harding, "A History of the Spread of Christianity in Modern Times," Kip McKean website. Document accessed at: [www.kipmckean.com](http://www.kipmckean.com).
14. See Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., Editor, *The Discipling Dilemma*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1988, pp. 130-140, where Don Vinzant, the author of that portion of the book, seems to draw a connection between the Shepherding Movement, Maranatha Campus Ministries, and the discipling movement within the Churches of Christ.
15. Charles Simpson, "Embracing the Truth With Our Lives," *One-To-One*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Summer 2015, pg. 6, italics in original. *New Wine* was the magazine of the Shepherding Movement; although it also carried articles by others who were not associated with the movement. The book Simpson references is S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2003.
16. *The Shepherding Movement*, op. cit., pg. 4. Moore's book is an admirable piece of research that evidences painstaking thoroughness.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.
18. Ron and Vicki Burks, *Damaged Disciples*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
19. Phil Woodward, M.Div., J.D., a former leader in the church, recently told me in a phone conversation (Oct. 2, 2015) that there was additional sexual immorality within the church, which was also covered over.
20. *Damaged Disciples*, op. cit., pg. 148.
21. *The Shepherding Movement*, op. cit., pg. 169.
22. *Ibid.* Moore cites Don Basham, *Interview on 700 Club*. Virginia Beach, Va.: Christian Broadcast Network, 1987, videocassette, 14:30 min.
23. Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001, pg. 20.
24. *Ibid.* Rhodes' chapter on "Defining Cults" is both thorough and readable and I refer readers interested in a definition of "cults" to that excellent chapter, *ibid.*, pp. 19-35.
25. Paul R. Martin, "Dispelling the Myths: The Psychological Consequences of Cultic Involvement," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Winter/Spring 1989, pg. 10, italic in original. Martin was at one time, himself, a member of a cult.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Paul R. Martin, "Post-Cult Recovery: Assessment and Rehabilitation," in Michael D. Langone, editor, *Recovery From Cults: Help for Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993, pg. 214.
28. *Churches That Abuse*, op. cit., pg. 189.
29. "Dispelling the Myths: The Psychological Consequences of Cultic Involvement," op. cit., pg. 13, italic and ellipsis in original, referencing Harold Bussell, "Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Cults," *Moody Monthly*, March 1985, pp. 111-113.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
32. Margaret Thaler Singer with Janja Lalich, *Cults in Our Midst*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996, pg. XXI.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. XX, italics in original.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 124.
37. Madeleine Landau Tobias, "Guidelines for Ex-members" in *Recovery From Cults*, op. cit., pg. 316.
38. G. Richard Fisher, "Getting Out — Getting On." The audio version of this message is available at: [www.pfo.org/exitingacult.html](http://www.pfo.org/exitingacult.html). It may also be accessed in a readable, printable version at: [www.pfo.org/VL21-NO1.PDF](http://www.pfo.org/VL21-NO1.PDF).
39. Dr. Steven W. Waterhouse, *Blessed Assurance: A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Security*. Amarillo, Texas: Westcliff Press, 2004, pg. 16.
40. Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, editors, *NKJV Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007, pg. 1966, from the study note on Hebrews 13:5, 6.
41. Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001, pg. 116, italic in original.
42. Craig Rowe, "Understanding Biblical Forgiveness," NANC National Conference 1999, Tape #N9948, side 2.
43. Ronald Enroth, *Recovering From Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, pg. 17, citing Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993, pp. 12-13.
44. "Guidelines for Ex-members" in *Recovery From Cults*, op. cit., pg. 315.
45. As with all "Christian" resources, the use of these publications should be used with discernment. Regarding Christians and psychology, PFO's viewpoint is that on the issue of psychology, the concern is not with *descriptive* psychology, but rather with *prescriptive* psychology. The former outlines the behavioral characteristics of an individual; the latter uses the wisdom of man to alter/change those characteristics. They are the teachings which emanate from the likes of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, B.F. Skinner, etc., and has sadly infiltrated the Church by way of "Christian" psychologists. These men (and women) are labeled as "integrationists" because they integrate the philosophy of man with the Word of God. It can be a toxic mix. Prescriptive psychologists have no firm foundation, propose an abundance of variant views (and solutions), and are constantly changing their teachings (and opinions). PFO holds to the school of biblical counseling founded by Dr. Jay Adams, called "nouthetic" counseling. See further: [www.nouthetic.org/about-ins/what-is-nouthetic-counseling](http://www.nouthetic.org/about-ins/what-is-nouthetic-counseling).
46. Steven Hassan, *Freedom of Mind*. Newton, Mass.: Freedom of Mind Press, 2013.



Today, definitions vary so much that it is often difficult to be certain what is being talked about.

Consider the ways that the term is described and explained by several popular “Christian” psychologizers:

“A codependent person is one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior.”<sup>6</sup>

“In its broadest sense, *codependency* can be defined as ‘an addiction to people, behaviors, or things.’ Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside. To the codependent, control or the lack of it is central to every aspect of life. The codependent may be addicted to another person. In this interpersonal codependency, the codependent has become so elaborately enmeshed in the other person that the sense of self — personal identity — is severely restricted, crowded out by that other person’s identity and problems.”<sup>7</sup>

“It’s [codependency] the condition when the love tanks are running on empty.”<sup>8</sup>

The Bobgans add:

“The idea of compulsive behavior also enters into the definition of *codependency*. The working definition at the first national conference on codependency (1989) used this definition: ‘Codependency is a pattern of painful dependence on **compulsive** behaviors and on approval from others in an attempt to find safety, self-worth, and identity.’”<sup>9</sup>

Confused? Even Melody Beattie, the acknowledged spokeswoman for codependency, admitted:

“There are almost as many definitions of codependency as there are experiences that represent it. In desperation (or perhaps en-

lightenment), some therapists have proclaimed: ‘Codependency is *anything*, and *everyone* is codependent.’”<sup>10</sup>

Not only are the experts uncertain about what this “disorder” is, they are also not sure who has it. Drs. Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meier tell us that roughly 100 million Americans suffer from codependency.<sup>11</sup>

It has been estimated by yet another source that 85 percent of the codependent population is female. The primary reason is that traditional feminine traits and behaviors such as nurturing, mothering, and developing intimate relationships are often considered symptoms of codependency. Women who have chosen to be caretakers and nurturers rather than put their own feelings and desires above others are labeled codependent.

While we would acknowledge that these traits can be carried too far by some, we are greatly concerned when we are told that virtually the whole adult population — especially women — is suffering from this “disease.” Psychologists may be confusing codependence with unselfish acts of love and their goal may be to turn us into people who serve and love self more than others. If so, they are in contradiction with Philippians 2:3-4.

### THE CAUSE OF CODEPENDENCY

Psychologists Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier say that “unmet emotional needs, lost childhood, and the compulsion to fix the dysfunctional family” lead to codependency.<sup>12</sup> While these causes are interrelated, we will take them one at a time.

**Unmet Emotional Needs:** The theory is that we each have a reservoir of love — a “love tank.” If our reservoir has not been filled by the “significant others” in our lives, our emotional needs will not be met and we will become codependent.<sup>13</sup> This theory especially targets children.

**Lost Childhood:** Children lose their childhood through abuse usually by parents or parental figures. Active abuse such as incest and physical or

emotional abuse are the most recognized forms and we must not deny or minimize them. However, we are told of more subtle forms of abuse that apparently leave similar scars on a child’s life. Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier assert there are other forms of abuse that are often not recognized. These include one parent who is preoccupied and unavailable to a child emotionally, a child who is not constantly praised, a lack of touching and hugging in the family, parents who are not at peace with one another sexually, parents who demand “too much,” parents depending too much on their children, a parent who is too rigid, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to mention two points in response to the subtle forms of abuse suggested above. This view places extreme pressure on parents who don’t know where the line is between emotional availability and overindulgence, between firmness and rigidity, or expecting too much and not enough. What a horrible position to be in, knowing that the answers to these questions are relative, yet knowing that failure on our part will “scar” our children for life.

The biblical view would be that parents do have responsibility to their children, but that they are not responsible for the choices their children make. Likewise, instead of blaming our parents for the mistakes they made while raising us, we must take responsibility for our own actions. By the codependent definition of abuse, virtually all children in the past should have developed into codependents. Parents of 10 or more children could not have been emotionally available to all of them all the time. It would have been difficult if not impossible to fill their children’s love tanks while they worked 60 or more hours per week and their children often worked as well. Yet from all observations children in the past were as mentally healthy as those today, perhaps more so.

Second, and even more critical: If codependency has been our problem all of these years, God has failed us by not giving us instructions on how to deal with it and worse yet, has

revealed this problem and its solution mostly to those who reject Christ and His revelation.

*The Compulsion to Fix the Dysfunctional Family:* Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier also wrote:

“We all possess a primal need to re-create the familiar, the original family situation, *even if the familiar, the situation, is destructive and painful.*”<sup>15</sup>

People want to re-create a painful situation, we are told, because we are compelled by our unconscious minds, which control 80 percent of our decisions (apparently without our conscious knowledge).<sup>16</sup> Why we would unconsciously choose to put ourselves through such pain is difficult to understand, but those in the codependency movement give three reasons:

- We believe that if the original situation can be drummed back into existence, this time around we can fix it. We can cure the pain. We know we can! The codependent possesses a powerful need to go back and fix what was wrong, he must cure the original pain.
- We believe that we were responsible for the rotten original family; therefore, we must be punished — we deserve pain. Codependents may actually be hooked on misery.
- We believe that there is that yearning for the familiar and the secure. Even if the past was painful, at least it was home.

John Bradshaw, author and television codependency guru, blames biblical teaching that everyone is born in a condition of sin. He asserts that such teaching produces a “shame-based” personality destined to become an addict. He wrote:

“Many religious denominations teach a concept of man as wretched and stained with original sin. Original sin as taught by some religious bodies means you are bad from the moment you are born. ... With original sin you’re beat before you start.”<sup>17</sup>

Actually, the various “experts” come up with numerous and often

contradictory reasons why they believe people become codependent. Why so many options? Perhaps this quote from the University of California’s *Wellness Letter* explains the problem:

“**The literature of codependency is based on assertions, generalizations, and anecdotes.** ... To start **without the slightest shred of scientific evidence** and casually label large groups as diseased may be helpful to a few, but it is **potentially harmful and exploitative** as well. If as the best sellers claim, ‘all society is an addict’ and 96% of us are codependents, that leaves precious few of us outside the rehab centers — but at that point the claims become ludicrous at best.”<sup>18</sup>

The codependency movement is quickly turning biblical living into a vice. Those who choose to put Christ and others before their own needs are being told they are sick and in need of therapy. It is no wonder that their world is confused.

### THE EFFECTS OF CODEPENDENCY

Codependency advocates say that it is very difficult to discern whether the behavior of a codependent is caused by his “illness” or the “illness” is caused by his behavior. Melody Beattie groups the problems of codependent people around the following categories: caretaking, low self-worth, repression, obsession, controlling, denial, dependency, poor communication, weak boundaries, lack of trust, anger, sex problems, miscellaneous and progressive.<sup>19</sup> Few, if any, can totally escape this codependent label.

Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier blame addictions and compulsions on codependency. Even more importantly, they claim that a codependent is unable to obey God:

“The Christian’s foremost privilege and responsibility is to hear and respond to God. The codependent can neither hear clearly nor respond adequately. It’s that simple.”<sup>20</sup>

How cruel God must be to demand obedience from people who cannot obey because of their emotional illnesses (caused usually by harsh parents), then punish them because of their disobedience. Either the apostles of codependency are right or God (in His Word) is — we cannot have it both ways!

### THE “CURE”

In order to recover from codependency, codependents must enter a “Twelve Step” program specifically designed for them. The program, Codependence Anonymous, is almost identical to Alcoholics Anonymous, with only minor changes.

Another option is to enter a clinic such as The Minirth Mental Health Solution Clinic or Meier Clinics (in early 1996, the Minirth-Meier team split up) and go through their program. As a summation, the adherents of codependency would say:

“... codependents carry distorted messages about their own sense of worth and that such messages originate in ‘dysfunctional’ families. ... And of course those messages must be erased through regressive therapy and replaced with positive, self-enhancing messages.”<sup>21</sup>

The Scriptures teach a very different method of change and growth. This method is outlined in places such as Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are told to put off the old self, put on the new self, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Specific application of this principle will depend upon the problem that we face.

The psychological world — including Christian psychology — errs because it has a faulty view of man based upon human wisdom rather than upon the Word of God. Psychologists, in the codependent camp, believe that people behave poorly and develop emotional and psychological problems because their love tanks are empty. If they can get their “significant others” or even God to fill up their “love tanks,” their problems will be resolved. The result is self-focused living. The Bible says, however, that

we behave poorly because we are totally depraved, having been born with a sin nature. As a result, we react sinfully to our problems.

The solution offered by God is to live biblically through the strength of the Holy Spirit. Progressive sanctification is our goal as we live our lives to please God. Unfortunately, many miss the mandate in Scripture that the Word of God is sufficient not only for doctrine but for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness so that the believer will be “complete” and “thoroughly equipped” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Many are ignorant of this truth and therefore choose a solution based on worldly wisdom.

### TWELVE-STEP RECOVERY GROUPS AND THE CHRISTIAN

Without a doubt, the most widely recommended “therapy” for people struggling with life (including various forms of addictions, conditions such as codependency, and many “mental illnesses”) is a recovery group that employs a Twelve-Step program. The original Twelve-Step recovery group is, of course, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) which was founded in 1935.

Today there are thousands of recovery groups that are modeled after AA. Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier specifically place their stamp of approval on a long list of recovery groups including: AA, Al-Anon, Alateen, Debtors Anonymous, Emotions A, Gamblers A, Narcotics A, Codependents A, National Association for Children of Alcoholics, Overcomers Outreach, Overeaters A, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Incest Survivors A, Adult Children A, Al-Atot, Alcoholics Victorious, Bulimics/Anorexics A, Child Abusers A, Codependents of Sex Addicts, Fundamentalists A, Parents A, Pills A, Sex Addicts A, Sexaholics A, Sex and Love A, Shoplifters A, Smokers A, Spenders A, Victims of Incest Can Emerge, and Workaholics A.<sup>22</sup>

All of these groups have adapted AA’s methods and philosophies. One online recovery resource directory discloses:

“The suggested 12 steps were originally developed by the fel-

lowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. ... Other twelve-step groups have adapted the steps of AA as guiding principles for problems other than alcoholism. In some cases, the steps have been altered to emphasize particular principles important to those fellowships. One example being the first step in Al-anon replaces the word *alcohol* with the word *people*.”<sup>23</sup>

### THE BACKGROUND OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Many believers mistakenly think that the founders of AA were Christians who established their organization on biblical principles. Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier wrote, “the first AA workers themselves knew God intimately.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, however, the founders of AA, while religious, never claimed to be Christians. Rather, as we will see, they were enmeshed in a wide range of spiritual activities including heavy involvement with the occult and spiritualism.

Bill Wilson, the co-founder of AA, was an alcoholic whose life had become unmanageable. Wilson became hopeful that he could overcome his problem when his doctor convinced him that his heavy drinking was not his fault, but rather due to an “allergy” (a new idea at the time). It would be a concept found at the genesis of AA:

“A decisive turn toward seeing alcohol as a disease was the publication of The Big Book and the founding of A.A.”<sup>25</sup>

However, in defense of Wilson, biblical counselor Edward Welch noted:

“It helps to recognize that AA has gradually changed over the years. When Bill W. started AA, he used *disease* more in a figurative sense than a literal one. Although he was not always consistent in this, he would often use the word *disease* in a way similar to the way Scripture uses it — as a metaphor for our spiritual condition. Now, however, the disease metaphor is

more often used in a literal way at AA meetings, and illness language is mandatory. The result is that forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ are no longer absolutely central to the process of change.”<sup>26</sup>

Welch continues:

“Even more troublesome is the fact that the metaphor of addictions is gradually losing its metaphorical quality. Instead of saying that addictions are *like* a disease, in that they have many things in common with more traditional diseases, more people are simply saying that addictions *are* diseases.”<sup>27</sup>

As a result of Wilson’s alcoholism, he entered the hospital to receive drying-out treatments, which he assumed would solve his problems. Upon leaving the hospital he soon returned to his old ways. He then concluded that he was doomed.

It was at this point that Wilson ran into an old drinking buddy by the name of Ebby Thatcher. Thatcher had whipped his drinking problem and appeared to be a new man. He attributed his new life to having “got religion.” Wilson envied his old friend’s peace of mind, but resisted the idea of submitting himself to God. Shortly thereafter he entered another detoxification program at the hospital, where he was to receive his own religious experience. Alone in his room, and perhaps at the lowest point of his life, Wilson finally cried out in desperation. Biographer Francis Hartigan describes the episode:

“In the depths of his torment, Wilson issued the unknowable a challenge: ‘If there be a God, let Him show Himself now!’ he shouted. As if in response to his demand, the room suddenly filled with light. It was bright and white, a benign, enveloping presence that seemed more than a match for the terror he had been feeling just moments before. Then he saw himself on a mountaintop, with a wind blowing toward him. The wind moved closer and closer, then through

him. Then the man who had been bound up in a seemingly irresolvable internal struggle felt profoundly free."<sup>28</sup>

In AA's own biography of its co-founder, Wilson's experience is further described:

"Suddenly my room blazed with an indescribably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale by comparison. The light, the ecstasy — I was conscious of nothing else for a time."<sup>29</sup>

The experience had a profound effect on Wilson. From that point on he believed in the existence of God and he stopped drinking alcohol. However, at no time in his life (to our knowledge) did Bill Wilson ever place his faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. In addition, rather than turning to the Bible to explain more about God, he turned to William James' book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

James (1842-1910) was a philosopher-psychologist who was intrigued with mystical, existential experiences. He believed that people from all religions had had virtually identical experiences in which the person becomes one with the Absolute (God, as we understand Him). The official AA biography of Wilson says:

"James gave Bill the material he needed to understand what had just happened to him — and gave it to him in a way that was acceptable to Bill. Bill Wilson, the alcoholic, now had his spiritual experience ratified by a Harvard professor, called by some *the father of American psychology!*"<sup>30</sup>

In other ways, Wilson's life was absent of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Hartigan wrote:

"Many of Bill's failings centered on his arrogance. There were also, more devastatingly, his losing battles with depression, his compulsive womanizing, and a deep, and ultimately insatiable, need for approval. Even at the

height of his success, Bill could be both certain that people were against him and determined to win them over. Once he succeeded in doing so, though, he seemed to lose interest. Soon, the quest for something or someone else he could not have would begin again. Bill was hardly a poster boy for the joys of living a sober life the AA way, yet AA's poster boy was exactly what he was supposed to be."<sup>31</sup>

Hartigan added:

"When his depressions became severe and he sought relief from them through psychotherapy, many AA members were outraged. Bill was castigated for not working his own program. He was accused of never having taken the AA Steps, and the primary evidence offered for this was that he had stopped drinking as a result of a spiritual conversion experience."<sup>32</sup>

It is important for the discerning Christian to note that Wilson's faith system was not based on Jesus Christ and Him crucified nor is there any mention of Jesus Christ being the Savior of his life. Both Wilson and Bob Smith (the other co-founder of AA) embraced and promoted a variety of spiritual experiences, which included practicing spiritualism and conversing with the dead and being heavily involved in séances (all of which the Bible forbids). Wilson also acted as a medium or channeler. It was while involved in these types of religious experiences, not biblical Christianity, that Wilson developed his Twelve Steps.<sup>33</sup>

One reference source critical of AA provides additional alarming details:

"It was during Bill Wilson's 1935 extended summer visit at Bob Smith's home that the OCCULT activities of Bob and Bill became evident, although this curiosity in the occult went back many years before the founding of AA. One book tells us that Wilson, alcoholics, and homeless men would gather at the Calvary Church's mission for lectures on

SPIRITUALISM! We also know that when Bill Wilson married Lois Burnham in 1918 he was already interested in occultism. You see, Lois' grandfather was a minister in the Swedenborgian Church, also known as the New Church or the Church of the New Jerusalem. The founder of the Swedenborgian Church was Emmanuel Swedenborg. He practiced automatic writing and astral travel. Bill knew of the Burnhams' involvement in this OCCULT group and he and Lois vowed to explore it more deeply someday. In fact, they were even married in the Swedenborgian Church in Brooklyn, New York. Both Dr. Bob and Bill were involved with all kinds of psychic phenomena such as ESP, seances, spiritualism, necromancy, which is communication with the dead, and channeling."<sup>34</sup>

Bill Wilson received some Christian influence from a highly experiential oriented organization called the Oxford Group. Sam Shoemaker, the leader of the Oxford Group, was responsible for many of the concepts that Wilson later incorporated into AA. But Wilson's relationship with Shoemaker and the Oxford Group was not without obstacles:

"Bill objected to the Oxford Group's aggressive evangelism, personal publicity seeking, use of coercion, and intolerant attitude toward nonbelievers. He felt the same way about the Group's growing dogmatism: it now insisted that members accept the 'guidance' they received as coming directly from God and that they engaged in evangelism for the Group. Such demands made it impossible for Catholics, among others, to be associated with it."<sup>35</sup>

At one time Wilson did consider becoming a Catholic, but similar to his antagonism toward the Oxford Group, he felt that the authoritative layout of the Catholic Church was too much for him. Besides he did not want to associate AA with any one religious sect. Tim Stafford sums up

Wilson's religious life well when he wrote:

"Though he was close to Christians for the rest of his life, and once took a year of instruction in the Catholic faith from Msgr. Fulton Sheen, he never could reconcile himself to any orthodox expression of faith. His continuing religious search led him to LSD and spiritualist experiments. 'God as we understand him' allows room for seekers — but it also leaves room for those who prefer to define God, rather than to allow him to define them. It is a profoundly ambivalent expression."<sup>36</sup>

Despite Wilson being "close to Christians for the rest of his life," he missed or ignored most of, if not all of, the basic tenets of the faith, including who God is and what He is really like. One publication which addresses AA's defective view of God explains:

"Is AA as bad as it really sounds? After all, they frequently have references about a 'Higher Power' and 'God.' Can you believe in God and still be influenced by the New Age philosophy? Again, we have to look at what AA actually means when they refer to God. They certainly DO NOT speak of the God of the Bible, although many people believe this is what is intended. Rather, AA recommends a 'God as YOU understand Him.' It doesn't matter whether you believe a supernatural being or the AA group itself is your 'God' or 'Higher Power.'"<sup>37</sup>

Ed Welch informs us as to how this defective theology plays out in one's worldview:

"The first grand deception is about God. The second is about us. At a very deep level, we believe that God is not as good as he says, and we think we are better than we actually are. Instead of believing that we are sinners who sin, we tend to think of ourselves as good people who

occasionally do bad things. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the literature on addictions. Secular (and most Christian) literature seems to work hard to say that addicts are not responsible for the cause of their problems. Addicts are responsible to change, but they are not responsible for getting where they are in the first place."<sup>38</sup>

However, some may protest and say that such criticism is unwarranted because AA itself claims that it is not a religious society nor does it require specific beliefs for membership. Herein is the major concern that we have with AA — and other such recovery groups — that, contrary to their denial, they really do constitute a religious system. For example, they believe and talk about God, they pray, they have a creed, Alcoholics Anonymous is their bible, and they fellowship in a church-like setting. Cathy Burns also responds to the non-religious disclaimer set forth by AA advocates and maintains:

"Regardless of this denial, AA IS religious. Reading through numerous pamphlets and books which are approved by AA, shows definitely that AA is religious in nature. Since AA is not Christianity, yet it promotes a spirituality, what kind of spirituality is represented? Although many individuals in AA are unaware of it, Alcoholics Anonymous actually is encouraging New Age beliefs and practices."<sup>39</sup>

Just like all religions — with the sole exception of Christianity — Twelve-Step recovery groups *cannot* bring a person into a right relationship with God; for their god is not the God of Scripture, their prayers are to whatever power (or powers) they choose, their bible is not God's Word, and their salvation is from "addiction," not sin. Satan, the enemy of our souls, is more than happy to provide sobriety in the place of salvation. Alcoholics Anonymous and recovery movements are false religions, which attempt to lead mankind to a better and happier life, yet bypass the Cross.

## THE TWELVE STEPS

The philosophy and values which constitute AA and other such recovery groups is established in their Twelve Steps. While individual recovery groups may word the various steps somewhat differently to fit their own needs and objectives, the steps are all based upon the Twelve Steps of AA. Basically, the other recovery groups simply mimic what AA has done. Codependents Anonymous, for example, believes codependency is an illness (mental); Sexaholics Anonymous would teach that addiction to sex is an illness.

The twelve steps are:

**Step One:** "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable."

While this step may sound biblical, it is not because, unfortunately, AA defines alcoholism as a disease. Tim Stafford says, "The 'disease concept' of alcoholism — not invented, but certainly popularized by A.A. — seems to remove any moral dimension from drinking."<sup>40</sup> Martin and Deidre Bobgan wrote:

"Step One is a dangerous counterfeit for both Christians and non-Christians. It serves as a substitute for acknowledging one's own depravity, sinful acts, and utter lostness apart from Jesus Christ, the only savior, and the only way to forgiveness (relief of true guilt). ... Many Christians attempt to make Step One coincide with biblical confession. But they generally substitute powerlessness for sinfulness and admit a life that has become unmanageable without confessing disobedience. In fact, most of the popular codependency/recovery books indicate that feeling guilty is the last thing a codependent needs."<sup>41</sup>

Various other recovery groups simply replicate what AA has done. Codependent Anonymous changes only one word in this first step for their codependents: "We admitted we were powerless over *others* — that our lives had become unmanageable."<sup>42</sup>

**Step Two:** “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

Wilson and AA’s greater “Power” is unbiblical and dangerous because it (or he) is subject to the beholder. As the Bobgans emphasized:

“The ‘Power greater than ourselves’ can be anybody or anything that seems greater than the person who takes Step Two. It can be a familiar spirit, such as Carl Jung’s Philemon. It could be any deity of Hinduism, Buddhism, Greek mythology, or New Age channeled entities. It could be one’s own so-called higher self. It could even be the devil himself.”<sup>43</sup>

And for the Christian who may balk, arguing that his greater Power is Jesus Christ (or the Holy Spirit), the Bobgans further show the error of such thinking:

“The extreme naivete of Christians comes through when they confidently assert that their higher Power is Jesus Christ. Since when did Jesus align Himself with false gods? Since when has He been willing to join the Pantheon or the array of Hindu deities? Jesus is not an option of one among many.”<sup>44</sup>

**Step Three:** “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*” (italics in original).

As earlier stated, AA denies being a religion. Nevertheless, when the central activity of a society is to turn one’s will and life over to God, that society is a religious society. What makes AA unique and unsafe for the Bible-believing Christian is that it doesn’t care which god you choose, so long as that god is loving and nonjudgmental. Of course, we would agree that sobriety is important, but one can go to Hell sober if he or she turns their life over to any but the true God as revealed in Scripture.

**Step Four:** “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

As in the case of determining one’s own greater “Power” in Step Two, here again the AA member is left to a subjective determination, this time by constructing a personal record of wrong. For the Christian, the Word of God is the objective source used to gain a proper understanding of his or her sinfulness and in examining one’s heart to identify desires and idols of the heart. Psalm 119 repeatedly speaks to the necessity and importance of employing God’s Word. For example, verse 59 says, “I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies.” Scripture is our ultimate counselor in making a “moral inventory of ourselves.” Our meditation must center on God’s Word.

**Step Five:** “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

As with several of the steps, Step Five has a biblical ring to it — but only if we are talking about the search for and confession of our own sins. With AA, all too often this is not the case. Rather it is an opportunity to discover who has wronged us in the past. On the other hand, confession of sins to other people should ordinarily be only as broad as those affected by those sins. Keep in mind, as well, that in AA God can be any form of higher power (even self); therefore, these steps are not the same as confession or repentance of sin as outlined in the Bible.

In addition, without the absolutes of Scripture, how is one to decide when he is morally wrong? Is the standard AA, or the majority of people, or our own hearts? Like many false religions, the steps of AA sound very close to biblical teaching until examined closely.

**Step Six:** “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

**Step Seven:** “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

While moralistic, once again these steps are not biblical. God would have us recognize our total depravity, turn to Him in faith, and be transformed (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corin-

thians 5:17). The real problem of man is not that he has “defects” and “shortcomings,” but that he is not in a proper relationship with God.

**Step Eight:** “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

**Step Nine:** “Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

The major concern with Steps Eight and Nine is that they are self-serving. The addicted person is doing these things to make himself feel better. Melody Beattie in *Codependent’s Guide to the Twelve Steps* says:

“We are on our way to freeing ourselves from guilt, taking responsibility for ourselves, removing ourselves as victims, and restoring these relationships.”<sup>45</sup>

The dedication of Beattie’s book *Codependent No More* says plenty: “*This book is dedicated to me.*”<sup>46</sup>

**Step Ten:** “Continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

As the Bobgans note, “Step Ten is actually a reminder to repeat Steps Four through Nine. Therefore, Twelve-Step recovery programs never end. They are a way of life — a religion.”<sup>47</sup>

The Bobgans further emphasize the subjectivity within Step Ten:

“This sounds terrific. However, by what standard is this ‘honest analysis’ to be made? What is the basis for an accurate self-appraisal? Because the Bible is not the standard for judgment, personal inventory depends upon subjective values to determine what is right or wrong. Subjective values or morals may be pronounced by various members of recovery groups or one’s therapist or ‘sponsor,’ or found in any number of recovery books. Subjectivity reigns and whatever subjective opinions seem to have the most authority will become the shaky standard.”<sup>48</sup>

*Step Eleven:* "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" (italics in original).

The question must be asked, "If these people are not praying to the true God, what kind of responses are they receiving, and from whom?" Beattie, whose books are regularly sold in Christian bookstores, has this to say:

"Now I have found a spiritual path through some Native American practices, Zen meditation, and shamanistic practices. ... We build a connection to God by building a connection to ourselves."<sup>49</sup>

She also has this to say about the messages we receive from "our god":

"When it is time, we will receive all the guidance, power, and assistance we need to do what we have to do, and we can let go of the rest. If we wait until it is time, our part will be clear. It will be possible. It will happen — naturally, gradually, and with ease. ... When in doubt, when confused, stop and ask: What do I need to do to take care of myself? Then listen, and trust what we hear."<sup>50</sup>

*Step Twelve:* "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles."

Although this sounds a lot like evangelical witnessing, listen to the focus of this step as explained by Bill Wilson:

"Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail."<sup>51</sup>

Tim Stafford observes:

"In other words, A.A. members share their testimony not simply out of concern for others, but

also out of concern for themselves."<sup>52</sup>

Beattie makes this even clearer for codependents:

"It is a message of self-love, self-nurturing, paying attention to our own issues, and taking responsibility for ourselves, whether that means addressing our own behaviors or owning our power to take care of ourselves. ... Our message is that we are lovable and deserving people, and we need to begin loving ourselves."<sup>53</sup>

Christians must never be persuaded into approving of AA and its Twelve Steps simply because of their widespread use and acceptance or because of the pragmatic nature of the organization and its methods. Whether something "works" or not, is never the criteria for discerning truth. Only scrutiny of the Scriptures can reveal truth. Cathy Burns provides a good summation of the Twelve Steps:

"If you gave a superficial glance at the above steps, you may think they look good. After all, doesn't Christianity teach some of the same ideas? Don't Christians believe in restitution, prayer, God, a spiritual awakening, and confession? Yes, we do, but if these steps are looked at in closer detail, many problems start to arise. First of all, AA's terminology is different and has ANOTHER meaning than what Bible-believing Christians accept. Notice that instead of saying that the alcoholic has committed sin, it is only called 'defects of character' or a 'shortcoming.' AA does not consider drinking alcoholic beverages wrong; it is only 'wrong' for those who become alcoholics."<sup>54</sup>

In the light of the Word we know that Twelve-Step programs are unbiblical, but it is worth our time to at least ask the question: Do these programs even work? Based on the statements and conclusions made by researchers, we really do not know.

In chapter 7 of *The Effectiveness of Alcoholism Treatment: What Research*

*Reveals*, an extensive investigation spanning several years revealed numerous significant observations:

"In spite of the fact that it inspires nearly universal acclaim and enthusiasm among alcoholism treatment personnel in the United States, Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) wholly lacks experimental support for its efficacy."<sup>55</sup>

The researchers further observed:

"Only two studies have employed random assignment and adequate controls to compare the efficacy of A.A. versus no intervention or alternative interventions. Brandsma *et al* (1980) found no differences at 12-month follow-up between A.A. and no treatment, and at 3-month follow-up those assigned to A.A. were found to be significantly *more* likely to be binge drinking, relative to controls or those assigned to other interventions (based on unverified self-reports). Ditman and Crawford (1966) assigned court mandated 'alcohol addicts' to A.A., clinic treatment, or no treatment (probation only). Based on records of rearrest, 31% of A.A. clients and 32% of clinic-treated clients were judged successful, as compared with 44% success in the untreated group."<sup>56</sup>

The fact is that most who recover from alcoholism do not do so as the result of treatment. Probably no more than 10% of alcohol abusers are ever treated at all, but as many as 40% recover spontaneously. And some say those figures are generous. The Orange Papers, a website that provides information on the ineffectiveness of AA, states:

"Even the most ardent true believers who will be honest about it recognize that A.A. and N.A. [Narcotics Anonymous] have at least 90% failure rates. And the real numbers are more like 95% or 98% or 100% failure rates. It depends on who is doing the counting, how they are counting, and what they are counting or measuring. A 5% success rate is

nothing more than the rate of spontaneous remission in alcoholics and drug addicts. That is, out of any given group of alcoholics or drug addicts, approximately 5% per year will just wise up, and quit killing themselves. They just get sick and tired of being sick and tired, and of watching their friends die. (And something between 1% and 3% of their friends do die annually, so that is a big incentive.) They often quit with little or no official treatment or help. Some actually detox themselves on their own couches, or in their own beds, or locked in their own closets. Often, they don't go to a lot of meetings. They just quit, all on their own, or with the help of a couple of good friends who keep them locked up for a few days while they go through withdrawal. A.A. and N.A. true believers insist that addicts can't successfully quit that way, but they do, every day."<sup>57</sup>

This online research paper further stated:

**"The Harvard Mental Health Letter**, from The Harvard Medical School, stated quite plainly: **On their own** - There is a high rate of recovery among alcoholics and addicts, treated and untreated. According to one estimate, heroin addicts break the habit in an average of 11 years. Another estimate is that at least 50% of alcoholics eventually free themselves although only 10% are ever treated. One recent study found that 80% of all alcoholics who recover for a year or more do so on their own, some after being unsuccessfully treated. When a group of these self-treated alcoholics was interviewed, 57% said they simply decided that alcohol was bad for them. Twenty-nine percent said health problems, frightening experiences, accidents, or blackouts persuaded them to quit. Others used such phrases as 'Things were building up' or 'I was sick and tired of it.' Support from a

husband or wife was important in sustaining the resolution."<sup>58</sup>

Thus, several studies repeatedly demonstrate the group's ineffectiveness and that those who quit drinking via AA actually have higher relapse rates than those who quit on their own.

### A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Twelve-Step recovery programs, as practiced in secular society, are clearly non-Christian and unbiblical attempts to solve the problems of life apart from bowing before the One and only God. The Scriptures provide answers and solutions for every "addiction" and struggle people face:

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

However, natural man would rather "discover" his own way than yield to God's way. We expect such behavior from the unsaved, but when the Church trades in the Scriptures for Bill Wilson's revelations, it amazes us. We agree with the Bobgans' conclusion:

"In spite of all that the Lord has given to His children through His Word and Holy Spirit, Christians continue to look elsewhere to solve their problems of living."<sup>59</sup>

This is nothing new, and the words of God's prophets ring just as clear today:

"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

"And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and

mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19-20).

Some have suggested, however, that believers could bring the Twelve-Step programs into the Church and "Christianize" them. We are told that the struggler could be pointed to the true God and at the same time take advantage of a secular program that seems to work. Yet it is beneficial to know that:

"AA has common sense and compassion, but it is not Christian. The church has theological horsepower and both the mandate and power to love, but it doesn't always apply either its theology or its practice to addictions. Some opt for a Christian version of AA, of which there are more and more. Yet these groups seem to have more in common with AA, and its strengths and weaknesses, than the church."<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no evidence that recovery programs are effective, we must ask why would a believer want to use a recovery program? The believer has the Spirit of God and the Word which is all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:2-3). What does he need with constantly changing human wisdom and the methods of man? Besides, God already has revealed to us a Two-Step recovery program:

**Step One: Salvation** — The forgiveness of sin, being justified by God, and therefore being made the righteousness of God (Romans 3:21-31). The Apostle Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Christ shed His blood upon the cross, dying in our place and rising again the third day so that we may have forgiveness and the fellowship with His Father that our sin prohib-

ited (1 Peter 3:18; Titus 3:5; Isaiah 53:5). Our response to this is to repent and believe. When we repent, we turn from our rebellion and sin to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, with a desire to live God's way. When we believe, we are trusting alone in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; we trust in nothing of our own (works included), but only in the complete and finished work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

**Step Two: Sanctification** — Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). As Edward Welch instructs:

“The process of doing battle with internal temptations, or taking our souls to task, is called progressive sanctification. It means that the battle with our own sinful desires will gradually progress over time. In God's sovereign plan, conversion does not bring about instant moral perfection. Instead, sinlessness waits for the return of Christ. Meanwhile, God's plan is that we fight indwelling sin. ... We are given all the resources of Jesus Christ in our fight. Victory is assured. Yes, the battle must be waged, but it is now waged with the passion of an army that knows the momentum has shifted. The fighting may be fierce, but those who know they can and will win can fight with abandon.”<sup>61</sup>

We would do well to “work” God's Two-Step program, rather than man's Twelve-Step program!

### Endnotes:

1. Although Frank Minirth died on Jan. 24, 2015, the psychological practices he integrated into biblical principles live on as he authored or co-authored more than 100 books and 50 self-help workbooks, many of which are still available and widely used.
2. Marshall and Mary Asher, *The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms*. Bemidji, Minn.: Focus Publishing, 2004, pg. 41.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Martin and Deidre Bobgan, *12 Steps to Destruction*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: EastGate Publishers, 1991, pg. 15, italic in original. The quotation used by the Bobgans is

- from Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987, pg. 27.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 15. The Bobgans cite Robert Subby and John Friel, “Codependency: A Paradoxical Dependency” in *Codependency: An Emerging Issue*. Hollywood, Fla.: Health Communications, Inc., 1984, pg. 31.
6. Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*. Center City, Minn.: Hazelden Information & Educational Services, 1987, pg. 36, quotation rendered in italics in original.
7. Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meier, *Love Is A Choice*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, pg. 5, italic in original.
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9. *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 17, italic in original. The quotation used by the Bobgans is from David Treadway, “Codependency: Disease, Metaphor, or Fad?” *Networker*, January-February 1990, pg. 40. Bold emphasis added by Bobgans.
10. *Codependent No More*, op. cit., pg. 33, italics in original.
11. *Love Is A Choice*, op. cit., pg. 8.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
13. See further, *ibid.*, pp. 27-32.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-55.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 58, italics in original.
16. *Ibid.*
17. John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, Inc., 1988, pg. 64.
18. “Codependency,” University of California Berkeley, *Wellness Letter*, October 1990, pg. 7, cited in *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 33, bold emphasis and ellipsis added by Bobgans.
19. *Codependent No More*, op. cit., pp. 42-52.
20. *Love Is A Choice*, op. cit., pg. 165.
21. *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 46.
22. *Love Is A Choice*, op. cit., pp. 275-277.
23. “Popular Recovery Groups and Programs” from Treatment4Addiction.com website, italics in original. Document accessed at: [www.treatment4addiction.com/treatment/types/recovery-centers/](http://www.treatment4addiction.com/treatment/types/recovery-centers/).
24. *Love Is A Choice*, op. cit., pg. 6.
25. “The Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous)” from Wikipedia. Document accessed at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Big\\_Book\\_\(Alcoholics\\_Anonymous\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Book_(Alcoholics_Anonymous)).
26. Edward T. Welch, *Addictions*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2001, pg. 119, italics in original.
27. *Ibid.*, pg. 46, italics in original.
28. Francis Hartigan, *Bill W. - A Biography of Alcoholics Anonymous Cofounder Bill Wilson*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, pg. 61.
29. Alcoholics Anonymous, ‘Pass It On’: *The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1984, pg. 121.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 125, italic in original.

31. *Bill W.*, op. cit., pg. 7.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 6.
33. ‘Pass It On,’ op. cit., pp. 198, 275, 278-280.
34. Cathy Burns, *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked - Deception and Deliverance*. Mt. Carmel, Pa.: Sharing, 1991, pp. 24-25, capitalizations in original.
35. *Bill W.*, op. cit., pg. 97.
36. Tim Stafford, “The Hidden Gospel of the 12 Steps,” *Christianity Today*, July 22, 1991, pg. 17.
37. *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked*, op. cit., pg. 33, capitalizations in original.
38. *Addictions*, op. cit., pg. 193.
39. *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked*, op. cit., pg. 45, capitalization in original.
40. “The Hidden Gospel of the 12 Steps,” op. cit., pg. 14.
41. *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 91.
42. Italic added to emphasize word change.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Melody Beattie, *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps*. New York: Fireside, 1990, pg. 137.
46. *Codependent No More*, op. cit., pg. vi, italics in original.
47. *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 212.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 213.
49. *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps*, op. cit., pp. 174, 175.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 179.
51. *Alcoholics Anonymous*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1984, pg. 89.
52. “The Hidden Gospel of the 12 Steps,” op. cit., pg. 18.
53. *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps*, op. cit., pg. 184.
54. *Alcoholics Anonymous Unmasked*, op. cit., pg. 28, capitalization in original.
55. William R. Miller and Reid K. Hester in William R. Miller and Nick Heather, Editors, *Treating Addictive Behaviors - Processes of Change*. New York: Plenum Press, 1986, “The Effectiveness of Alcoholism Treatment - What Research Reveals” (Chapter 7), pg. 135. Cited by the Bobgans in *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 190.
56. *Ibid.*, italics in original. Cited by the Bobgans in *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 190.
57. A. Orange, “The Effectiveness of the Twelve-Step Treatment,” from The Orange Papers website. Document accessed at: [www.orange-papers.org/orange-effectiveness.html](http://www.orange-papers.org/orange-effectiveness.html).
58. *Ibid.*, bold in original. The quotation used by Orange is from *Treatment of Drug Abuse and Addiction — Part III, The Harvard Mental Health Letter*, Volume 12, Number 4, October 1995, pg. 3.
59. *12 Steps to Destruction*, op. cit., pg. 175.
60. *Addictions*, op. cit., pg. 118.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 234.

chosen people that would produce a Savior for all mankind, the Liberationist's lesson from Exodus is that wealth should be taken from the rich and given to the poor. The poor are automatically on God's side — loved by Him just for being poor.

In Liberation Theology there is no original sin. Sin itself is redefined as having possessions and wealth while others do not. The rich are all villains. There is no "all have sinned," because only the rich are sinning by having wealth.

In the true biblical scenario, God extends His love to all — rich and poor, high and low — and invites them to salvation in Christ, our Passover. The Liberation Theology movement encourages violence and conflict by the lower classes as defined by the leaders.

While there is indeed social injustice in this fallen world, ushering in social justice alone is not the same as bringing salvation in Christ. Liberation Theology is primarily a horizontal movement that focuses on man, whereas true Christianity is both horizontal and vertical (forming a cross) seeking to reconcile man with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Liberation Theology emphasizes sharing the wealth. But a ruling class dictates how the wealth is used and distributed. This ruling class is necessary only until society evolves to the point where all people are equal, say its supporters.

Some forms of Liberation Theology take a wicked turn into anti-Semitism. All Jews are seen as poised to take over the world. There are forms of Liberation Theology that assert the superiority of one race over the another.

One new twist is Palestinian Liberation Theology. Its originator is professed Christian and Jerusalem educator Naim Ateek. He speaks of the need to liberate Palestinians from Zionist Israeli oppression. Rather than use the Exodus story, he cites 1 Kings 21, where Ahab becomes the Zionist taking land from Naboth the Palestinian and killing him. Never mind that both Ahab and Naboth were Jewish and that Ahab worshipped Jezebel's idols. Ateek has redefined the terms. There is no condemnation of terrorism in this narrative and no addressing of Israel's need to defend itself. Israel is always to blame and makes terrorism occur by enslaving the masses of Palestinians and taking their land — or so we are told.

Christopher Katulka, in an article appearing on the website of The Friends of Israel, wrote:

"Naim Ateek believes you cannot take the Bible literally. He has a particular problem with the Torah (Pentateuch), which he considers a 'Zionist text,' and the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings — all of which confirm God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. He speaks of

peace and nonviolence but makes no apology for Palestinian terrorism. In fact, much of his rhetoric regarding Israel is indistinguishable from that of a Palestinian Muslim. But Naim Ateek is not a Muslim. In fact, he is a highly respected, American educated, Palestinian Christian and ordained Episcopal priest. At 75, he is the president and director of the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, also called the Sabeel Center (Arabic for 'the way'), which he helped found in the 1990s" ("Palestinian Liberation Theology," accessed at [www.foi.org](http://www.foi.org)).

Ateek enjoys the freedoms afforded in Israel to publish his anti-Israel rhetoric. If he were in Gaza or Samaria and spoke harshly of Hamas or the Palestinian Authority, he would likely be jailed or killed. He is causing Palestinian Christians to hate Israel and accept Replacement Theology, which holds that Israel has been cut off from any biblical promises of future blessings, which have been spiritualized to refer only to the Church and its blessings.

Another offshoot of Liberation Theology — with proponents hiding behind the theme of The Third Quest — casts Jesus as coming to organize social revolution and being only a prophet of radical social change. These views are promoted by Gerd Theissen, R. David Kaylor, and Richard A. Horsley. This makes Jesus more politician than Savior. Jesus certainly cared about society and the downtrodden, and social change may occur when people are born again or a community is affected by the Gospel. But it will happen only as a byproduct.

Liberation Theology offers a worldly kingdom. Jesus refused to have the kingdoms of this world apart from the godly program of the Bible. Given the history of so many failed Utopias, the Bible and logic tells us that we are going to have to wait for Jesus' return to see a perfect society and perfect kingdom on earth. Only then will there be perfect justice. Liberation Theology is not the blessing it is advertised to be. It is a delusion of fallen men seeking Utopia with Christ.

—GRF

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Gothard and his ministry have long battled allegations of sexual wrongdoing. In the early 1980s, the organization weathered the storm of Gothard's brother, Steve, who served as administrative director for the institute, having affairs with several of the ministry's secretaries at its Northwoods retreat center in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Additionally, Gothard himself recently had to step down from his leadership role at IBLP due to his own inappropriate conduct with female employees.

—MKG



# Books in Review

## GIVE THEM TRUTH

by Starr Meade

P&R Publishing, 208 pages, \$14.99

Survey results have shown that many young people leave the local church, disconnecting during or after high school. Some put the drop-out number as high as 86 percent. While the numbers are often disputed, the trend demands the Church's attention and action.

The exact reasons behind these "drop-outs" may be debated as much as the statistics, but one thing is certain: biblical illiteracy is a primary cause. As one youth ministry researcher said, "I'm convinced that the single most important area where we've lost ground with kids is in our commitment and ability to ground them in God's Word."

*Give Them Truth* calls attention to just how serious the education deprivation is and seeks its urgent correction. But the book doesn't just tell us what's wrong. It is a volume rich with biblical truth and wisdom and loaded with encouragement and practical application. We live in a day when doctrine is devalued and belittled. The problem is compounded because "churches often substitute entertainment in place of education for their young" (pg. 32). And it goes without saying that those failings are not just confined to children and youth, but to adult believers as well.

Meade presents her argument in three parts. She writes: "Part One makes my case: too many children from Christian homes do not know their Bibles and do not grasp Christian doctrine. ... Part Two showcases basic Christian doctrines children should grow up learning, providing some hints on ways we can communicate these things to our children and pointing out some of the clashes that occur between these teachings and the ideas of the culture our children will inhabit. Part Three details some specifics for teaching our children: first, general principles, then specific Bible content, and finally, doctrinal truths" (pg. 11). Meade is highly effective in each of her objectives.

In Part One, Meade tells us "why our children need to know" and stresses the necessity of laying a doctrinal

foundation for children. She reminds us "that a robust theology, a strong, well-connected belief system, is the most helpful thing we can give our children to prepare them for the suffering they will inevitably face as they live in a world spoiled by sin" (pg. 37).

Part Two maps out what we should be teaching our children, starting with a proper understanding of the greatness of God through a review of His character and attributes. Additional chapters in this section — the largest of the book's three parts — continue with a study of Scripture, anthropology, the person and work of Jesus Christ, salvation, the Church, and the role of the Law. Nearly all of these chapters present multiple foundational tenets of the subject and many provide excellent illustrations to help the young person more easily understand and grasp the doctrinal truths.

In her discussion of the church, Meade stresses that children can and should participate in the church's worship services. This means *no children's church*, because children "need to be present when the people of God gather to praise him and to hear his Word proclaimed" (pg. 143). While many may balk at such a view, Meade makes several strong arguments for her position, and, at the very least, should be given a hearing.

Part Three presents the foundational "how-tos" — how to help our children know. Here Meade sets forth a "diligent, systematic plan" involving memorization, drilling, and patience. Her plan also includes setting high standards as "Children will not rise *higher* than our expectations. When we keep our expectations high, they stretch to reach and will actually perform better than when we lower the standards to try to help them" (pp. 165-166, italic in original). Meade also maps the three components of learning: grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and how these play out in a child's education (pp. 162-165).

If there is any blemish in this book, it would be citing and quoting Michael Brown, apologist for *Charisma* magazine and former "theologian" of the Pensacola Revival. Perhaps Meade is unaware of Brown's theological leanings and affiliations.

While this volume is aimed at encouraging and providing a framework in which to biblically guide and instruct children, it will deepen the reader's own understanding of the importance of doctrine and how essential it is in the life of a believer — young or old!

—MKG

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