

The Dangers of Self-Help Philosophies

Mark Shaw

Introduction

Warnings¹

II Cor. 10:3-6 *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*

I. Words Matter

A. Words are _____ that _____ us in a clear direction...either to _____ as the _____ or they point away from Him to medical or man-made so-called "spiritual" solutions.

B. All Christians are fluent in two languages. **I Cor. 2:12-16** *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

C. Worldly Words vs. Biblical Words

1. What's in a Name?

"Affair" _____

"Kleptomaniac" _____

"Manipulation" DECEIT/ DECEITFUL (liar)

"Alcoholic" _____

"Addiction" IDOLATRY

2. Compulsive vs. _____

a. Habits can be in Thoughts, Words, & Actions

b. Jay Adams: 4 characteristics of habits: Automatic, Unconscious, Skillful, & Comfortable

¹ I understand how sensitive this topic is for many based upon their past experiences. Not trying to offend. Praying you will listen with an open mind (as A.A. asks you to do, too!).

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3. Disease vs. _____ (flesh)
- a. Theory developed in 1930's by Bill W. and Dr. Bob.
 - b. Dr. Lance Dodes: "...it has become common practice to suggest that alcoholism, or any addiction, is a genetic disorder – and overlook the FACT that nobody has ever found a gene for alcoholism (contrary to what you might have heard), or that if one person has alcoholism, his or her identical twin, with exactly the same set of genes, is more likely not to have alcoholism than to have it."²
 - c. Nowhere in the Bible does God call this problem a "disease" (**I Cor. 5:11 & 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; I Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7**).
 - d. Personal Responsibility: **Proverbs 23:19-21** *Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.*

4. Recovery vs. _____
- a. "Recovery" = to regain or to recapture one's old self.
"GET YOUR OLD LIFE BACK!" (No!)
 - b. "Transformation" = to change in "character or condition; conversion." God provides a total transformation.
 - i. **2 Cor. 5:17**
 - ii. **Rom. 12:1-2**

D. Biblical counseling offers a new way of speaking! **Eph. 4:15** *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*

- II. Analyzing Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) – includes other 12 Step/Self-Help Groups
- A. What is A.A.? A.A. says it "is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from **alcoholism**. The only **requirement** for membership is a desire to stop drinking."
 - B. Bill Wilson
 - 1. Never professed to be a Christian
 - 2. Long-term adulterous relationship; left money to her in his will
 - 3. Participated in séances and believed he spoke to a 15th century monk named Boniface; had a "spook room"

² Dodes, Lance. *The Heart of Addiction*, Harper, NY: 2003, p.8.

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4. Claimed in his autobiography he wrote the "12 & 12" book by channeling Boniface
 5. Experimented with LSD at end of his life to have another spiritual awakening
- C. A.A.'s Spiritual Roots
D. 12 Steps³

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Quoted directly from <http://silkworth.net/aa/12steps.html>:

"1. Newcomers are not asked to accept or follow these Twelve Steps in their entirety if they feel unwilling or unable to do so.

³ Found on the <http://silkworth.net/aa/12steps.html>. Copyright © [Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.](http://www.aa.org)

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2. They will usually be asked to keep an open mind, to attend meetings at which recovered alcoholics describe their personal experiences in achieving sobriety, and to read A.A. literature describing and interpreting the A.A. program.

3. A.A. members will usually emphasize to newcomers that only problem drinkers themselves, individually, can determine whether or not they are in fact alcoholics.

4. At the same time, it will be pointed out that all available medical testimony indicates that alcoholism is a progressive illness, that it cannot be cured in the ordinary sense of the term, but that it can be arrested through total abstinence from alcohol in any form.”

E. 12 Step Underlying Philosophy: Progressive, Incurable, and Fatal “Disease”

III. Analyzing Celebrate Recovery (C.R.)

A. Creation of C.R.

B. Many of C.R.’s teachings are constructed from eisegesis rather than exegesis – misusing Scripture with an erroneous hermeneutic.⁴

C. C.R. uses the 12 Steps and its 8 Principles (supposedly based upon the Beatitudes - acronym spells “recovery”)

1. Realize I’m not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable. (Step 1)
“Happy are those who know that they are spiritually poor.” Matthew 5:3
2. Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him and that He has the power to help me recover. (Step 2)
“Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4
3. Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control. (Step 3)
“Happy are the meek.” Matthew 5:5
4. Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust. (Steps 4 and 5)
“Happy are the pure in heart.” Matthew 5:8
5. Voluntarily submit to any and all changes God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects. (Steps 6 and 7)
“Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires” Matthew 5:6

⁴ Excellent critique and source for this comment is from a blog by Eric Davis at <http://thecripplegate.com/should-recovery-be-celebrated-a-review-of-celebrate-recovery/> which has a part 2 that is very good, also.

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6. Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others when possible, except when to do so would harm them or others. (Steps 8 and 9)

"Happy are the merciful." "Happy are the peacemakers" Matthew 5:9

7. Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will. (Steps 10 and 11)

(my note: no reference to the Beatitudes for this 7th principle)

8. Yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and my words. (Step 12)

"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires." Matthew 5:10

D. Some of Celebrate Recovery's theology clashes with sound Christian theology on the following topics:

- God
- Humanity and the Problem
- Salvation
- Sanctification
- The Church

E. Alternatives to Celebrate Recovery

- Equip church leaders to counsel people biblically
- Several resources exist as biblical alternatives to CR
- Banquet in the Grave and Cross Roads (Welch)
- The Heart of Addiction (also workbook and leader's guide) and Relapse: Biblical Prevention Strategies (Shaw)
- Freedom That Lasts (Berg)

IV. Myths of Addiction

Secular author and psychiatrist, Dr. Lance Dodes, critiques the so-called "spiritual" approach to addiction popularized in the 1930's in chapter 8 of his book, *The Heart of Addiction*. Dr. Dodes debunks some of the myths in secular addiction counseling and treatment. Below are his 10 myths in addiction⁵ and my comments in the column on the right because his solutions to the myths are man-centered and I wanted to provide you with a biblical rationale to debunk each myth.

MYTHS of ADDICTION

⁵ Dodes, Lance. *The Heart of Addiction*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2002, p.91-102.

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<p>Myth 1: You are addicted to things that are addictive.</p>	<p>This idea makes one think that the object of addiction (any pleasurable activity) has addictive “properties” and that the object is to blame rather than the heart of the idolater (Heb. 4:12; Ezek. 14:1-11). While some drugs may produce cravings or withdrawal symptoms, not all people become addicted to drugs! The drug is not the problem - instead, it is the fallen heart desires of the flesh.</p>
<p>Myth 2: You have to hit bottom before you can get well.</p>	<p>Consequences alone do not change the human heart. The Holy Spirit changes and regenerates the heart. When a “bottom” or “consequence” occurs, some ignore it requiring another “bottom” to occur.</p> <p>Only when the Holy Spirit brings conviction (John 16:8) and God grants repentance (Rom. 2:4), does someone truly hit “bottom.”</p> <p>If someone under conviction fails to repent, then a person may be “given over” to the sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) which is the very opposite of a “bottom.”</p>
<p>Myth 3: If you have an addiction, you are self-destructive.</p>	<p>While some people are reckless and do not care if they die, most sinners believe the delusion that the addiction is actually benefitting and helping them! The Bible presupposes that people love themselves and that’s their problem (Matt. 22:37-40; 2 Tim. 3:2). They love the drug more than life itself. This is the definition of idolatry, self-</p>

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	love, and self-worship; it just has devastating consequences (Eph. 5:18).
Myth 4: You need to surrender.	Here's where Dr. Dodes' approach falls short of the Bible. He thinks a sinner must take control and manage his own life. He thinks an addict is exerting will power in a wrong way (i.e. drugs) and must re-learn to exert willpower in a positive way. On the contrary, Christianity teaches a person must learn to trust Christ (not themselves) and relinquish control. We call this surrendering and it occurs for both eternal and temporal life (Prov. 3:5-8). The Christian must surrender to Christ (not to a 'new self') and ask for power from the Holy Spirit to be transformed day-by-day.
Myth 5: You should count your days of sobriety.	He calls a relapse a "slip" and does not endorse the "punishment" of starting over after a slip. I agree that one need not count the days because it can foster pride in self by taking the focus off of being sober for the glory of Christ (I Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9). But counting days is not necessarily a bad thing – it depends on the heart motive for counting those days!
Myth 6: You should be treated by someone who also has an addiction. (In other words, it takes an addict to help another addict – limiting anyone else from helping.)	We believe that God's Word is the message and we are messengers so our experiences are not as important as the truth of His Word (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Addicts are not "special" sinners requiring only addicts to counsel them! The Word of God is sufficient and can be ministered by anyone who has

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	the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.
Myth 7: Addiction is basically a problem of brain chemistry.	According to secularists, life is too complicated to reduce to simple biology and genetics. Plus, no study identifies a specific gene linked to addiction. Identical twins where one is an "alcoholic" are more likely to NOT have the other twin be an "alcoholic." The Bible addresses the issue as a sin issue in the fallen heart of mankind and not a purely physical problem or a disease (I Cor. 6:9-11).
Myth 8: People with addictions have an addictive personality.	Secularists say that "personality" has nothing to do with "managing certain feeling states" (p. 100-101). To suggest an entire "personality" for addiction is incorrect because "addicts" are not different from everyone else! (Rom. 3:23) They have the same personalities as anyone else yet their heart desires in the flesh are to please self rather than to worship and please God.
Myth 9: People with addictions are impulsive.	Secularists believe much <i>planning</i> goes into an episode of addiction! (Prov. 23:29-35; Eph. 4:20-24) It is HABITUAL not impulsive or compulsive though it might look impulsive or compulsive.
Myth 10: Denial is a failure to recognize reality.	No one admits they are "helpless" when they are not; therefore, the question of "are you an alcoholic?" is "no" when one thinks someone is asking them if they are powerless to choose. When "no" is the answer, people think the addict is in denial

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People with addictions are choosing to control their lives with addictive pleasures so they will not admit they are "helpless" when they recognize they are truly not "helpless."	when truly not since there is no such thing as being "helpless." "It is a choice" say secularists and that's what the Bible teaches, too (Eph. 5:18-21).
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Other Resources that Critique the Secular Self-Help Movement:

Stanton Peele, Ph.D., wrote a book called *The Truth about Addiction and Recovery* in 1992. His first chapter is entitled, "Why It Doesn't Make Sense to Call Addiction a 'Disease'" – he's not a Christian! He has written several others books as well.

Some Christian books:

The Useful Lie by William Playfair

Where Sin Abounds: Does Grace Abound More? by Don Bowen

The Heart of Addiction by Mark E. Shaw (only first few chapters attack the idea of "disease" but I give the biblical alternative which secular writers do not because their answer is NOT Christ!)

V. Conclusion

Colossians 2:8 *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*