

Alcoholism...

S **IN**
or
SICKNESS

?



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

ALCOHOLISM: SIN OR SICKNESS?

Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

Psalm 103:2-5 (NLT)

The "sin vs. sickness" controversy has probably hindered more Christians from getting help for their alcoholism/drug addiction than any single factor. Countless chemically dependent people within churches are not reaching out for help because they sense a judgmental attitude from their fellow Christians. How wary we all need to be of subtle, lethal poison of another variety – religious pride – or we may sound like the Pharisee who boasted, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men." Yet, it is only by the grace of God that any of us has escaped the ravages of alcoholism.

Though there are numerous references to "drunkenness" in the Bible, nothing is ever mentioned about "addiction" or "alcoholism." Neither are there references to "cancer," "diabetes," or "heart disease," yet these brutal killers must be dealt with vigorously or the victim will die. Denial of our condition can be an insidious enemy, actually the biggest obstacle to overcome. An attempt to rationalize how this happened only compounds the problem. The issue is not how people got sick (by smoking, sugar consumption, etc.) but rather that they **get treatment!**

The same is true of alcoholism. Although the alcoholic might not be responsible for being an alcoholic, he/she is responsible for seeking help, just as if he/she were battling cancer, diabetes or heart disease. Unfortunately, Christians sometimes sabotage themselves by turning up their noses at proven, available treatment just because it might not have a "Christian" label on it. In doing so, we actually limit God in all the different ways He chooses to work in our lives.

RECOGNIZING ALCOHOLISM

In examining the evidence, alcoholism seems to be the painful result of sin for people possessing this predisposition. Professionals in the Alcoholism Field refer to it as "an allergy of the body, coupled with an obsession of the mind." While the alcohol abuser chooses to get drunk, the alcoholic drinks involuntarily because his willpower is in service to his addiction and the craving is so overwhelming that he can't not drink! After the first drink, the alcoholic's behavior is unpredictable.

If alcohol is causing a continuing problem in any area of a person's life (family, job, health, financial, etc.) there is a distinct possibility that he/she is an alcoholic. There are an estimated 12 million people who suffer the painful consequences of this malady, with nearly 25% of them being teenagers! Most that have it don't realize it and are usually the last to know. They are under the delusion that all of their problems stem from something other than alcohol, because they sincerely believe that alcohol is what is keeping them sane! Each time they try to quit drinking on their own, they go through severe withdrawal symptoms, and drinking seems to relieve these symptoms and cause them to "feel normal" again. Actually, alcohol is the culprit that is making them sick, but by the time they are addicted they no longer drink in order to experience euphoria, but merely to feel "normal." If a person needs to drink in order to function comfortably, they are being controlled by that substance and they need to be FREED!

Many think of alcoholics as "skid row bums" or "bag ladies". Only a scant 3% fit into this category. Most alcoholics are successful men and women, professionals, housewives, even ministers! The myth of alcoholism is that its victims are weak-willed, selfish, reveling in their illness as if they felt no pain, as if they ought to control themselves and exercise "willpower". Perhaps no one exercises more control than an alcoholic who goes "on the wagon" for a week or a month, and fails over and over, often with their loved ones unaware of how many times they have attempted to stop drinking on their own. They make promises to quit, in all sincerity, but are unable to keep their word. Family members become resentful and bitter, viewing all these promises as "lies," not realizing that the alcoholic is not capable of keeping such a promise.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOLISM:

- + Alcoholism is no respecter of persons, striking young and old, rich and poor, those of all races and religions . . .
- + It ranks with heart disease and cancer as one of the world's three major health problems . . .
- + It is responsible for 50% of all auto fatalities, 80% of all home violence, 30% of all suicides, 60% of all child abuse and 65% of all drowning.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

While alcoholics usually go to any lengths to hide their problem from their loved ones and the rest of the world, the families also get on the "merry-go-round" by offering excuses and even telling lies to cover up. Not only does the alcoholic withdraw from friends and loved ones, but the family members also cut themselves off socially, struggling with insurmountable problems by themselves, particularly if they are part of a church where drinking is forbidden. It is said that one out of ten of a normal population who drinks will become an alcoholic. It is also said that of those who drink and are affiliated with a church that condemns drinking, one out of three will develop alcoholism! This is due to the tremendous amount of guilt involved. Not only must the alcoholic seek treatment, but the whole family needs help in dealing with all the accompanying problems.

CASE FOR "DISEASE CONCEPT"

Alcoholism has been recognized by the American Medical Association for over 35 years as a primary disease with identifiable, progressive symptoms that, if left untreated, lead to mental damage, physical incapacity and premature death. They maintain that it is a disease that can be arrested, but **not** cured. From the Christian perspective, we know that our Lord heals diseases, and many times delivers people from addiction. It has been documented over and over again that once a person is caught in the grips of alcoholism they can never drink alcohol successfully again, not even a thimbleful! In order to stay well, they must avoid alcohol in any form, including most cough medications! There are numerous reports from disappointed Christians who felt that they had been "delivered" from alcohol, but they began to be "sipping saints" again, eventually relapsing and not only ending up where they were before, but even further down the road, since alcoholism is a "progressive" disease, whether the alcoholic is drinking or not.

Many professionals in the Alcoholism Field now refer to alcoholism as "Jellinek's Disease," named after Dr. D.M. Jellinek (1890 -1963) who conducted his research at Yale University and served as a consultant to the World Health Organization. Dr. Jellinek was the first to define it medically and to chart the progression of the disease into its various stages: early, prodromal, crucial and chronic.

To witness an alcoholic in the throes of withdrawals (producing life-threatening symptoms) or to be close to an alcoholic suffering in the last stages of Cirrhosis of the Liver causes us to take a very close look at the medical aspect.

IS ALCOHOLISM INHERITED?

Dr. Anderson Spickard, M.D., noted Christian physician and author of Dying For A Drink, has said that "Alcoholism follows a predictable pattern and has a pronounced inheritance factor." Hard information is now available to show that alcoholics are genetically predisposed to this disease and that their blood chemistry and brain electricity demonstrate a pathological response to the ingestion of alcohol that is different from a normal person. Those who have lost their power of choice seem to have crossed over an "invisible line" and are controlled by alcohol or drugs.

POWERLESSNESS

Just as a diabetic is still considered to be a "diabetic" even after his/her body receives the relief of insulin, so an alcoholic is still considered to be an "alcoholic" whether drinking or not, due to the fact that they are only a drink away from their alcoholism. Admitting our weaknesses is a "positive confession" that our strength is in the Lord, not within ourselves. It wasn't until the Apostle Paul accepted his "thorn in the flesh" that he experienced any victory!

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 (NLT)

It isn't until an alcoholic accepts the fact that he or she is different from others, stops struggling alone and surrenders that any victory is experienced.

In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.
2 Corinthians 1:9 (NLT)

In essence, this is what "let go, let God" is all about.

GETTING HELP

Whether sin or sickness, wickedness or weakness, the bottom line is the urgency of getting help! The "sin" standpoint tells us that alcoholism is strictly a spiritual problem. The "disease" model claims that it is an addictive illness that encompasses body, mind, emotion and soul – and all aspects need to be addressed. When a house is on fire, we don't have time to figure out what caused it – we grab a hose and send for help!

How futile it is for family members to argue, nag and sermonize, when the alcoholic is already laden with a huge dose of guilt! What a waste of our own energy to attempt to affix specific labels to our loved one's infirmity. We would do better to first get help for ourselves, and then consider the possibility of participation in a professional intervention for our loved one. So many brain cells are damaged by the poisonous results of substance abuse that it sometimes takes a loving family member or caring friend to come to the alcoholic's aid – in effect to "raise the bottom" and perhaps even save his life!

WHERE CAN A CHRISTIAN GET HELP?

Help is readily available for the alcoholic, drug addict or prescription pill abuser, and their respective family members who are obsessed with the behavior of their loved ones. Life-saving, practical help can be obtained at the worldwide fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, etc. Family members can find help at meetings of Al-Anon, Families Anonymous, Tough Love, etc. Professional treatment centers and effective intervention programs are saving many lives and putting families back together again. These options are designed to help save lives not souls – even though many are finding Christ in the process of seeking their "higher power".

Jesus Christ can and does bring hope and healing, whether instantaneously or over a prolonged period. He works in many different ways, and in keeping an open mind we exercise our faith.

*He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.
Psalm 103:3 (NLT)*

The best news for the Christian alcoholic – drug addict and family members is that there are Overcomers 12-Step support groups all over the country, within churches of every denomination, to address this problem. Overcomers Outreach support groups are not designed to replace A A, Al-Anon and/or other groups; they provide a place where Christians may share not only their recovery, but also their faith in Jesus Christ! Now there is a "safe" place where we can share our hearts in confidence, talk freely about Jesus, study the Scriptures along with the 12 Steps and pray for one another! Churches are becoming the healing communities that God intended them to be, where His children can find help for their problems –without judgment!

For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

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