

**Setting Captives Free:  
Counseling Implications for Women Enslaved to Alcohol**

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## **Abstract**

Title: Setting Captives Free: Counseling Implications for Women Enslaved to Alcohol

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Alcohol abuse disorder has been labeled as a psychiatric illness. Where once even the secular world viewed alcohol misuse as a moral issue, the disease model has won the day, and sadly, it has infiltrated the church. “Alcoholics” are declared to be victims of a disease and are said to have lost the power of choice over alcohol. Not only does this narrative remove any and all culpability of the alcoholic, but it also removes all hope for lasting change.

Thankfully, God’s inspired, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient Word (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Pet. 1:3-4) gives us a lens through which to accurately view ourselves and all the struggles we face. The Bible turns the disease model of alcohol abuse upside down. The secular narrative keeps people in lifelong bondage to an “incurable disease” instead of setting them free by the gospel of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The forgiveness of sins, including the sin of drunkenness, is abundantly available to sinners through the cross of Jesus Christ. Drunkenness is just one of many forms of idolatry. An idol is something that we love, trust, treasure, hope in, cling to, or turn to more than God. Idols reveal who and what we worship; idolaters are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). Therefore, the solution to the “false worship” of the idol of alcohol is the “true worship” of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This research project is intended to be a tool for pastors, biblical counselors, and laypeople in the church who are seeking to minister to women who are enslaved to alcohol. It may also be used by women who themselves are struggling to find ways to put this sin to death in order to become the women God wants them to be (Titus 2:3-5). It is my prayer that the information from this project will put “feet to faith” with practical helps of learning to treasure Christ above all else.

## I. Introduction

A. Purpose Statement: The central purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that alcohol

“addiction” is, at its core, a spiritual problem rather than a physiological disease.

Therefore, the solutions offered by the secular disease model will not bring about lasting heart change which is only possible through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### B. Relevance and Significance

1. This thesis project is intended to help the Church minister to women who have become ensnared by the trap of alcohol. The Church must be willing and prepared to shepherd the souls under their care without sending them *outside* the Church in a futile search for help from the secular world.

2. The information presented in this project can be used as a guide for the Church and for biblical counselors to understand the issue of “addiction” from a biblical perspective in order to minister effectively from God’s Word with real hope for lasting change to those who are struggling.

3. For the past 100 years, “addiction” has become recognized as a physiological disease, and this unproven theory is now widely accepted as fact. In addition to drug and alcohol abuse, other “addictive” behavior problems have been lumped into the disease category such as, gambling, overeating, and video gaming.<sup>1</sup> Today, “alcoholism” is viewed by most as an incurable disease which at best can only be managed.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008), vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Frequently Asked Questions About AA* (New York, NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2018), 7.

scientific evidence, which will be explored in section three of this project, does not support the disease model of “alcoholism.”

4. While there can be physiological effects and physical dependency as a *result* of the overindulgence of alcohol, a physical or genetic *cause* for “addiction” has yet to be proven.<sup>3</sup> The Church must stand on the authority of the Scriptures which clearly describe enslavement to alcohol as sin and not sickness (Prov. 20:1; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Pet. 4:3).
5. When “alcoholism” is properly seen from a biblical perspective as the sin of drunkenness, believers in Jesus Christ can have real hope for change. God has given us a solution for sin, including the sin of drunkenness – the gospel of His Son! The goal of secular programs, and even some programs in the Christian community, is behavior modification. The goal of biblical counseling is heart transformation.
6. The Bible teaches that those who belong to Jesus Christ are no longer slaves to sin but are now able to walk in faith and obedience to their new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:16-19). Therefore, it is the goal of this project to develop a counseling plan that is wholly dependent upon the sufficient Word of God to plumb the depths of the human heart and be transformed by the power of the Word and the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.
7. The plan for counseling women enslaved to alcohol will include vital components for lasting change such as the necessity of humility, an understanding of godly sorrow, a robust practice of biblical confession and repentance, the habit of putting off/renewing the mind/putting on, growth in the fear of the Lord, development of the

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<sup>3</sup> Marc Lewis, PhD, *The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction Is Not a Disease* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2015), xi.

godly character of the Titus 2 woman, reflection on our union with Christ, and the critical role of the Church.

#### C. Intended Audience and Scope

1. The primary audience for this project is pastors, biblical counselors, and laypeople who are committed to bringing the light of the Scriptures into the lives of those walking in darkness in the realm of addiction. It is my desire that this project will help equip the Church of Jesus Christ to *skillfully* employ the truths of God's Word as we *lovingly* come alongside those enslaved to alcohol and *compellingly* offer gospel hope and practical help.
2. I also intend for this research to be of assistance to the women themselves who are seeking God's way of escape from their sin within the context of the local Church (1 Cor. 10:13-14; Heb. 12:1-3).

#### D. Research Methodology

1. In order to more fully understand the distinctions of alcohol "addiction," I will employ a variety of research methodologies including library resources, journal articles, and internet searches.
2. I will examine secular resources on causation, intervention, and treatment (disease model) and compare them with a biblical anthropology (sin nature) and a biblical process of change (sanctification).

#### E. Assumptions

1. My research will be conducted solely from a biblical perspective. Because the Bible is completely inspired by God, inerrant, and authoritative, it is therefore sufficient to

speak into all the issues of life, including the issue of addiction (Ps. 12:6; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:3, 21).

2. The psychologized world seeks to identify the causes of our problems in anything and everything except the human heart. My research will intend to show that whether or not there are physiological issues or external influences, enslavement to alcohol is rooted in a worship disorder of the heart which is only overcome through faith, repentance, and obedience (Prov. 4:23; Luke 21:34; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

## II. Defining the Problem

### A. Secular Definitions

1. Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) – “A medical condition characterized by a pattern of frequent and usually excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, by strong cravings for alcohol often accompanied by episodes of depression, anxiety, or distress, by symptoms (such as restlessness or sweating) of alcohol withdrawal, and by the impaired ability to stop or control the intake of alcohol despite adverse effects on one's work, school, or family obligations.”<sup>4</sup>
2. Alcoholism – “A chronic, a progressive, potentially fatal disorder marked by excessive and usually compulsive drinking of alcohol leading to psychological and physical dependence or addiction.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “Alcohol Use Disorder,” accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alcohol%20use%20disorder>.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “Alcoholism,” accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alcoholism>.



3. Alcoholic – “Someone who cannot stop drinking large amounts of alcohol, even when this is making them ill.”<sup>6</sup>
4. Addiction – “Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.”<sup>7</sup>
5. Compulsive – Behavior that is unable to be controlled; an irresistible impulse.<sup>8</sup>
6. Tolerance – Over time, the addict needs larger amounts of alcohol to feel intoxicated. However, when the liver is damaged, it cannot metabolize alcohol properly, thus tolerance may decrease.<sup>9</sup>
7. Withdrawal - When an alcoholic reduces the amount of alcohol she consumes or abstains from it completely, she experiences symptoms such as tremors, insomnia, nausea, or anxiety.<sup>10</sup>
8. Treatment – Depending on the severity of AUD, the immediate course of treatment is detoxification. After this, the alcoholic needs sustained psychosocial treatment through behavioral modification approaches, such as 12-step therapies (e.g.,

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<sup>6</sup> Collins Dictionary Online, s.v. “Alcoholic,” accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/alcoholic>.

<sup>7</sup> American Society of Addiction Medicine, s.v. “Addiction,” accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction>.

<sup>8</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Newman, “What is Alcohol Abuse Disorder, and What is the Treatment?,” *Medical News Today*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/157163>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Alcoholics Anonymous). Some treatment plans also include pharmacotherapy, such as anti-craving medications or anti-depressants.<sup>11</sup>

9. Recovery – “A process through which an individual pursues both remission from alcohol use disorder (AUD) and cessation from heavy drinking.”<sup>12</sup> “To bring back to normal position or condition.”<sup>13</sup>
10. Relapse – “The act or an instance of backsliding, worsening, or subsiding; a recurrence of symptoms of a disease after a period of improvement.”<sup>14</sup>

## B. Biblical Definitions

1. Drunkenness – The overindulgence in alcohol bringing about physical effects (Prov. 23:29-30; Isa. 19:14), mental effects (Gen. 43:34; Isa. 28:7; Hosea 4:11), and spiritual effects (Prov. 20:1; Eph. 5:18). It is a choice and a fruit of the flesh.<sup>15</sup>
2. Drunkard – A person who indulges in the excessive consumption of alcohol. God’s Word points to the fact that such a person must put off drunkenness which is a sin against the Lord or else she will incur severe judgment (1 Cor. 5:11, 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21).

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<sup>11</sup> Mary-Anne Enoch, M.D., M.R.C.G.P., and David Goldman, M.D., “Problem Drinking and Alcoholism: Diagnosis and Treatment,” *American Family Physician*, February 1, 2002, <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2002/0201/p441.html>.

<sup>12</sup> “NIAAA Recovery Research Definitions,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/research/niaaa-recovery-from-alcohol-use-disorder/definitions>.

<sup>13</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “Recover,” accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/recover>.

<sup>14</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “Relapse,” accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relapse>.

<sup>15</sup> Marshall and Mary Asher, *The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2014), 10.

3. Enslavement – Being controlled or ruled by sin brought about by the habitual practice of the sin (John 8:34; Rom. 7:15-20). Enslaving sin “defends itself from the truth, resisting the life-giving entrance of God’s Word.”<sup>16</sup> However, the believer in Jesus Christ can be set free (Rom. 6:6-7, 16-19; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).
4. Heart – “Mind, soul, spirit, self, i.e., the source of the life of the inner person in various aspects, with a focus on feelings, thoughts, volition, and other areas of inner life.”<sup>17</sup>
5. Idolatry – “Pleasing and worshiping oneself rather than pleasing and worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>18</sup> “Anything on which we set our affections and indulge in as an excessive and sinful attachment.”<sup>19</sup>
6. Worship Disorder – “A vertical problem, an attempt to live independently from the Lord.”<sup>20</sup>
7. Addiction (redefined biblically) - “The persistent, habitual thoughts, words, and actions, stemming from the desires within one’s heart, that are associated with excessive pleasure-seeking which are known by the user to be harmful and physically

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<sup>16</sup> Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021), 337.

<sup>17</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, xi.

<sup>19</sup> Edward T. Welch, “Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 20.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 337.

enslaving; these are sinful, willful choices to disobey God whether one acknowledges it or not.”<sup>21</sup>

8. Transformation – The power of God to change a believer’s heart to desire and want to do the right things (Rom. 12:2).<sup>22</sup> “To change in character or condition.”<sup>23</sup>

### III. The Secular View of Alcoholism (and Problems Associated with It)

#### A. The World’s Perspective on Alcoholism

1. Secular entities label alcoholism (and other addictions) as chronic brain disorders of varying severity, yet they purport that the cause of the disease is attributable to how much, how often, and how quickly a person consumes alcohol.<sup>24</sup>
2. The risk for developing the brain disorder is said to be increased by:
  - a. Genetics
  - b. Family history/parents’ drinking habits
  - c. Mental health conditions
  - d. A history of trauma<sup>25</sup>
3. The world says that alcoholism/addiction is the compulsive use of a substance, inferring that the harmful behavior *cannot* be resisted, and the addict is hopelessly out

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<sup>21</sup> Mark D. Shaw, “The Practical Outworking of the Holy Spirit in Addiction Counseling,” accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.atharvest.church/images/doc/ACBC-Destroying-Stronghold-Series/Session-4/presentation-deck-the-practical-outworking-of-the-holy-spirit-in-addiction-counseling.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “Transform,” accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform>.

<sup>24</sup> “Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-alcohol-use-disorder>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

of control.<sup>26</sup> However, even by secular standards, we can readily observe that this is a false dichotomy as many “addicts” are able to stop using and become “clean and sober” without “treatment.”

4. Researchers in neuroscience from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) claim that the research in support of the view that addiction is a disease of the brain has gained traction in the past two decades. Yet, they admit that there are serious problems with this concept because of “the failure of this model to identify genetic aberrations or brain abnormalities that consistently apply to persons with addiction and the failure to explain the many instances in which recovery occurs without treatment.”<sup>27</sup>
  - a. Neuroscientist, Marc Lewis, opposes the disease model of addiction based on a lack of pathology, specific causation, and an accepted repertoire of treatment. He quips, “There is evidence willpower can be crucial in beating addiction, yet it doesn’t work for cancer, pneumonia or malaria.”<sup>28</sup>
  - b. Lewis clarifies that the brain does in fact change *due to* addiction, from learning and development, but not from disease. The addiction results “from the motivated repetition of the same thoughts and behaviors until they become habitual.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Nora D. Volkow, M.D., George F. Koob, Ph.D., and A. Thomas McLellan, Ph.D., “Neurobiologic Advances From the Brain Disease Model of Addiction,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 374:363-371 (January 28, 2016): <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMra1511480>.

<sup>28</sup> Marc Lewis, Ph.D., “Why It’s Wrong to Call Addiction a Disease,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/07/addiction-not-disease-science-stigma>.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, *The Biology of Desire*, xi.

## B. The World's Diagnostic Process

1. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), to receive a diagnosis Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD), there must be a pattern of drinking that leads to “significant impairment or distress” as manifested by at least two of the following 11 criteria within a 12-month period of time.
  - a. Alcohol is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended.
  - b. There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol use.
  - c. A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain alcohol, use alcohol, or recover from its effects.
  - d. Craving, or a strong desire or urge to use alcohol.
  - e. Recurrent alcohol use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home.
  - f. Continued alcohol use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of alcohol.
  - g. Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of alcohol use.
  - h. Recurrent alcohol use in situations in which it is physically hazardous.
  - i. Alcohol use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by alcohol.

- j. Tolerance, as defined by either of the following:
    - i. A need for markedly increased amounts of alcohol to achieve intoxication or desired effect.
    - ii. A markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of alcohol.
  - k. Withdrawal, as manifested by either of the following:
    - i. The characteristic withdrawal syndrome for alcohol. (These criteria are specified in the DSM-5, pp. 499-500.)
    - ii. Alcohol (or a closely related substance, such as a benzodiazepine) is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.<sup>30</sup>
2. Diagnosis of AUD is made based on the answers to a series of questions which assesses the person's thinking and behavior; the diagnosis is not based on brain scans or lab tests.

### C. The World's Solution

1. In some cases of AUD, the first line of treatment for the alcoholic may be detoxification. For those with physical symptoms when alcohol intake is reduced (e.g., headaches, insomnia, mood changes, heart palpitations, seizures, etc.), withdrawing the substance may need to be medically managed, sometimes with the use of medications, which can take anywhere from two to seven days and often in an inpatient treatment center or hospital.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2017), 490-91.

<sup>31</sup> Leah Miller, "Alcohol Withdrawal Symptoms, Treatment, and Timeline," American Addiction Centers, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/withdrawal-timelines-treatments/alcohol>.

2. After detoxification (if it was warranted), the alcoholic is treated using a variety of methods, including, cognitive-behavioral therapy, motivational enhancement therapy, counseling for other mental health issues, various medications, and support groups.<sup>32</sup> These treatment options may be used on an outpatient basis or within an inpatient treatment facility.
3. The twelve-step platform established by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in the 1930s has become the backbone of almost every treatment center, court system, and recovery program. In 1943, AA linked arms with E. M. Jellinek, the father of the disease theory of alcoholism (who eventually denounced the theory). The disease model supported AA's notion that the behavior exhibited by the alcoholic is uncontrollable.<sup>33</sup>
  - a. Despite its popularity, peer-reviewed studies have found AA's efficacy to be somewhere between 5 and 10 percent – certainly a failing grade for any medical “treatment.”
  - b. The Cochrane Collaboration, whose thirty thousand researchers focus on compiling studies with appropriate protocols and verifiable science (no solely observational or uncontrolled studies are permitted), concluded in 2006 that AA and twelve-step approaches have no data supporting their effectiveness in reducing alcohol use and abuse.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/treatment-alcohol-problems-finding-and-getting-help>.

<sup>33</sup> Lance M. Dodes and Zachary Dodes, *The Sober Truth* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 17-25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 56.



4. Interestingly, adherents to the disease model of alcoholism relay that recovery from such a disease is dependent upon the alcoholic making a decision requiring a deep commitment to change. This process is broken down into six stages.
  - a. Pre-Contemplation – The alcoholic recognizes the negative impact of her drinking but has no intentions of doing anything about it.
  - b. Contemplation – The alcoholic recognizes that change has become necessary but does not feel capable of addressing the problem.
  - c. Preparation – The alcoholic is still drinking but is making a detailed plan of action for treatment.
  - d. Action – The alcoholic acts on the plans she has made and seeks treatment for both the physiological and psychological issues surrounding her addiction.
  - e. Maintenance - The recovering alcoholic employs the tools and coping mechanisms she has learned in treatment to everyday life.
  - f. Termination – Because the addiction is considered chronic and incurable, the recovering alcoholic, although stable in this stage, will benefit from ongoing, less intensive treatment for life. In this final stage, she has achieved full sobriety, has no cravings for alcohol, and has a low risk of relapse.<sup>35</sup>

#### IV. The Biblical View of Drunkenness

##### A. The Biblical Perspective

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<sup>35</sup> “The Stages of Alcoholism and Recovery,” Gateway Foundation, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.gatewayfoundation.org/addiction-blog/stages-of-alcoholism/>.

1. God’s inspired, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient Word gives us a lens through which to accurately view ourselves and the struggles we face, including the struggle with alcohol (Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).
  - a. There are biblical examples of drunkenness including Noah, Lot, and Nabal (Gen. 9:20-27; 19:30-38; 1 Sam. 25:36-38).
  - b. There are biblical prohibitions of drunkenness (Isa. 5:11; Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:3).
  - c. There are biblical descriptions of the harmful impact of the abuse of alcohol (Prov. 20:1; 23:19-21, 29-35; 31:4-7; Isa. 28:7-8; Hab. 2:15).<sup>36</sup>
2. In contrast to the secular disease model, God calls “alcoholism” drunkenness and identifies it as a sin problem (Prov. 20:1; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:3). This sin, like all sin, is rooted in the heart, or inner person, and while it may be affected by outside influences, it is not caused by them.
  - a. Primarily, drunkenness is an attempt to live autonomously from God our Creator. It is, therefore, a worship disorder as one worships and serves the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). This is the essence of idolatry.
  - b. Drunkenness is bondage – slavery to sin (Rom. 6:12-13, 16, 19). As one repeatedly submits to sin as her master, she resists the liberating impact of God’s Word (John 3:19-20) and becomes wise in her own eyes (Prov. 12:15).
  - c. The “addiction” of drunkenness becomes a life-dominating and life-devastating sin. The drunkard becomes astonishingly foolish as even the cruel consequences of the behavior does not lead her into repentance (Prov. 23:19-21, 29-35). She

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<sup>36</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 336.

comes to love and serve her substance more than her family, reputation, job, health, and even more than the Lord.

- d. Essentially, the drunkard sees her condition as both a willing rebel (“I want to continue drinking”) while also an unwilling slave (“I want to stop, but I can’t help it”). Both of these evaluations are seen in Proverbs 5:21-23 and Romans 7:14-25.<sup>37</sup>

## B. The Biblical Diagnosis

1. Secular descriptions of the “alcoholic” from the DSM-5<sup>38</sup> unmistakably reflect God’s assessment of the drunkard in Proverbs 23. The drunkard:
  - a. Is willing to sacrifice work and possessions (vv. 20-21)
  - b. Experiences physical and emotional pain and relational conflict (vv. 29-30)
  - c. May have hallucinations and perverse thoughts (vv. 32-33)
  - d. Desires continued and repeated use of the substance (v. 34)
  - e. Will be prone to mistreat others, possibly even violently (v. 35)
  - f. May experience blackouts and memory loss (v. 35)
  - g. Has an ongoing yearning for continued overindulgence of alcohol (v. 35)<sup>39</sup>
2. Outward behavior gives evidence to what is in the heart. Therefore, when one exhibits the signs of drunkenness and enslavement to alcohol, we know that she is succumbing to the sinful desires in her heart (Mark 7:20-23; Gal. 5:19-21).

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<sup>37</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 337-39.

<sup>38</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 490-91.

<sup>39</sup> John D. Street and Janie Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2016), 106.

3. Physical addiction is born out of the habitual practice of satisfying a desire with a momentary pleasure. After repeatedly following this pattern, one becomes the servant and slave of the transient “fix” instead of being the master and “in control” over it.<sup>40</sup>
  - a. Appetites are neutral and are God-given. When they are satisfied outside of God’s biblical parameters, they become sinful, and when substances are involved excessively, physical addiction and its consequences becomes possible.<sup>41</sup>
  - b. Cravings are a real, physiological result of repeated alcohol abuse. When a natural appetite has been excessively and habitually satisfied with alcohol, physical dependence, tolerance, and cravings can result.<sup>42</sup> Just like the Israelites who craved meat in the wilderness, cravings can lead us away from God. Instead of being satisfied in God, they ate the meat that He provided in excess until it came out of their nostrils (Num. 11:20). They were struck down because of their rebellion and idolatry and were buried in Kibroth-hattaavah, which means “graves of cravings” (Num. 11:34).<sup>43</sup> Cravings can become deadly.

#### C. The Biblical Solution

1. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is our only hope for lasting change. For women who have been saved by faith alone in Jesus, they must live out the realities of who they are in Him. It is our union with Christ which empowers us to please Him in all that we do.
  - a. In Christ, we are given new life (Eph. 1:4; 2:4-5) and have every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3).

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<sup>40</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> David R. Dunham, *Addictive Habits: Changing for Good* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 29.

- b. In Christ, we receive the blessing of His grace (Eph. 1:6).
  - c. In Christ, we have redemption and forgiveness (Eph. 1:7) and have received His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).
  - d. In Christ, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) who has been sent by God the Father to help and teach us (John 14:26).
  - e. In Christ, we no longer stand condemned (Rom. 8:1).
  - f. In Christ, we are conquerors and cannot be separated from God's love (Rom. 8:37-39).
  - g. In Christ, we are being sanctified and are able to obey Him (John 15:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:6).
  - h. In Christ, we have the future of hope of being glorified with Him (Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).
2. We must realign our hearts to love and worship our Creator finding our ultimate satisfaction in Him and not in the things which He has created (Ps. 34:8; Isa. 55:1-2; Jer. 2:12-13, 17:5-8).
3. Rather than learning to cope by living in "recovery" from a lifelong "disease," God desires that the drunkard be transformed from the inside out into the likeness of His Son (Rom. 12:1-2). This transformation is possible as the Holy Spirit replaces her heart of rebellion and gives her a new heart that desires to please God (Eph. 2:1-10).
- a. At the moment of salvation, the drunkard is no longer a slave to her idolatrous lusts, but she is freed from the bondage of sin and self and able to live a life that is pleasing to God (Rom. 6:15-19; 2 Cor. 5:17).

- b. Transformation into the likeness of Christ is a lifelong process called sanctification. Followers of Jesus die to themselves and live for Him (Luke 9:23) and sacrifice their wants, desires, and wills in exchange for His (Rom. 12:1) as they renew their minds with His Word (Rom. 12:2).
- 4. Once there has become an awareness and conviction of sin, believers must confess and repent. “True biblical repentance, which is the beginning of permanent change, must involve a total acknowledgement and ownership of one’s personal sin of seeking self-gratification over the Savior’s glory” (Ezek. 14:6; 2 Cor. 7:10).<sup>44</sup>
  - a. Through daily confession and repentance, the believer learns to replace sinful habit patterns with renewed, God-honoring habits. These habits are not merely behaviors, but also patterns of thinking, speaking, feeling, and responding which must be renewed.<sup>45</sup>
  - b. Repentance allows former drunkards to replace being filled with wine by being filled with, or controlled by, the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
  - c. God is so gracious and merciful that as we begin to walk in obedience, He actually increases our desire to do so (Phil. 2:12b-13). God gives us the mercy and help we need as we confess *and* forsake our sin (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9).  
Forsaking our sin is making our actions agree with our confession.<sup>46</sup>
- 5. In Ephesians 4:22-24, we are taught how to put off the old sinful habits, to renew our minds with the Word of God, and then to put on godly habits that please the Lord. As

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<sup>44</sup> Street and Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women*, 111.

<sup>45</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Mark E. Shaw, *Cross Talking: A Daily Gospel for Transforming Addicts* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2010), 23.

we cooperate with the Holy Spirit and rely on His power, we are able to put to death the remaining sin in our hearts and to live a renewed life rooted in Christ (Rom. 13:13-14; Col. 3:5-10).

#### V. A Suggested Plan of Counseling

Please note that before counseling can begin, if the CE has developed a physical dependence on alcohol, she must first go through the detoxification process *under the supervision* of her doctor.

##### A. Initial Session(s)

1. The first session should focus on establishing a relationship with the counselee (CE) through expressions of care and compassion, asking good questions, and giving biblical hope. A helpful tool for data gathering is the CE's Personal Data Inventory (PDI) as a springboard for asking questions and gaining understanding.
2. Most women seeking biblical counseling profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. Yet, it is critical in the first couple of sessions to seek to understand if they have a biblical understanding of the gospel and have responded to it in faith and repentance. Lasting heart change is unattainable apart from saving faith in Christ.
3. Giving Christ-centered hope is a high priority as women often come to counseling overwhelmed and hopeless. Using passages such as Matthew 11:28, 1 Corinthians 10:13, and 2 Peter 1:3, hope must be anchored to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and to His sufficient Word.
4. In the first session or two, homework should help the CE to focus on the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures. Some ideas include:

- a. Assign a chapter each day from the gospel of John with questions designed to help her engage with the text. (Daily Bible reading and prayer should be incorporated into the homework every week.)
- b. Memorize and meditate on a passage such as 1 Corinthians 10:13 or 2 Peter 1:3 to give hope and that will be useful in upcoming sessions.
- c. Attend a Bible teaching church and write down things that she learns or that give her hope.
- d. Fill out the Spiritual Convictions questionnaire as a helpful tool to ascertain where the CE is in her understanding of spiritual realities.<sup>47</sup>

#### B. The Liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ

1. Sufficient time should be devoted to clear teaching on the gospel. Dependent on where the CE is in her relationship to Christ will determine the amount of time which should be allotted.
2. An excellent resource for sharing a comprehensive explanation of the gospel is the Gospel in Context presentation<sup>48</sup> with an outline for her to fill out.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Stuart Scott, "Spiritual Convictions Questionnaire," Oneeightyministries.Org, Last modified 2013, <https://oneeightyministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/spiritual-convictions-questionnaire-counselee.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Stuart Scott, "Gospel-In-Context.Ppt", Potterville-My.Sharepoint.Com, Last modified 2010, [https://potterville-my.sharepoint.com/:p:/p/jonathan/EdOx3\\_LVYgBEhMbzwAcU9MBfzFbWX4jrC5u3j4d1RV\\_wg?rttime=56kAAugU2kg](https://potterville-my.sharepoint.com/:p:/p/jonathan/EdOx3_LVYgBEhMbzwAcU9MBfzFbWX4jrC5u3j4d1RV_wg?rttime=56kAAugU2kg).

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Scott and Elizabeth Townley, Oneeightyministries.Org, "Gospel in Context Outline," Last modified 2020, <https://oneeightyministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Gospel-in-Context-Outline-Fill-in-the-Blanks-Study.pdf>.



3. If the faith of the CE is unclear or in question, it is crucial to share the gospel and give opportunities for her to respond in faith and repentance. Clear teaching on God, man, Jesus, and faith/repentance is essential.
4. If the CE demonstrates an understanding of the gospel and professes faith in Christ alone for salvation, it will still be beneficial to walk through the gospel with an emphasis on how it impacts our lives on a daily basis. The gospel will be the foundation upon which all subsequent sessions must be built.
5. Gospel homework ideas include:
  - a. Continue daily reading from the gospel of John.
  - b. Read *What Is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.<sup>50</sup> Underline impactful statements and write down at least one statement or question from each chapter to discuss.
  - c. Assign Scriptures for the CE to read and then write what she learns about:
    - i. God – Genesis 1:1; Exodus 34: 6-7; Psalm 24:1; Romans 1:18-20; Colossians 1:15-16
    - ii. Man – Psalm 53:1-3; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:20, 23; 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3; Titus 3:3
    - iii. Jesus – John 1:14; 10:30; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 2:9, 13; 1 Peter 3:18
    - iv. Faith and Repentance – Isaiah 55:6-7; Mark 1:15; Luke 9:23; 14:26-28; Acts 17:30; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 2:8-9

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<sup>50</sup> Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

- d. For daily encouragement and as a means to connect the gospel to daily life, assign *The Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent.<sup>51</sup>

### C. The Heart

1. Teach that at the root of all behavior are underlying desires in the heart (Matt. 15:19; Luke 6:43-45). Teaching through the “Y Diagram” is a helpful tool to help her see how her internal desires are motivating her choices to either live for self or for God.<sup>52</sup>
  - a. At times, we are motivated by sinful desires, and at other times, we may be driven by good desires that have spiraled down into idolatrous lusts. Helpful Scriptures include Genesis 3:6, Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 17:9, and 1 John 2:16 (desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and pride of life).
  - b. It is “easy” to be ruled by our emotions and live to please ourselves. This will often result in difficult consequences (Prov. 13:15, 21; Gal. 6:7-8).
  - c. Although it can be difficult and require great perseverance, believers in Jesus Christ are no longer slaves to sin and can live by His truth in a way that pleases Him (Matt. 11:28-30; Luke 9:23; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9).
2. Use of the Three Trees diagram helps the CE see how her sinful behavior is rooted in the desires of her heart, and subsequently, how the gospel transforms her desires to produce good fruit (Jer. 17:5-8; Luke 6:43-45; Gal. 5:19-21).<sup>53</sup> In preparation for the

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<sup>51</sup> Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> “Y Diagram,” IBCD, accessed April 4, 2022, <https://ibcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Y-Diagram.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> “The Three Trees,” Graceky.Org, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://graceky.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Three-Trees.pdf>.

change process, begin to help her see how the specific “bad fruit” in her life is inextricably tied to the “bad roots” in her heart.

3. At this point, the CE should understand that her “addictive behavior”:
  - a. Is rooted in sin not sickness and is something for which she is responsible.
  - b. Comes from the desires in her heart – the things she has worshiped, cherished, and lived for.
  - c. Reflects both her rebellion against God and the enslaving nature of her sin.
  - d. Has brought damaging consequences on herself and on others.
  - e. Cost Jesus His life, yet because of His sacrifice, she is offered forgiveness and the power to be free from her enslaving sin.<sup>54</sup>
  
4. Homework ideas include:
  - a. Memorize and meditate on Proverbs 4:23.
  - b. Answer David Powlison’s “X-ray Questions” in order for the CE to begin to make connections with her heart’s ruling desires.<sup>55</sup>
  - c. Assign daily reading from books that begin to help the CE uncover the heart issues behind her enslavement to alcohol. *Cross Talking: A Daily Gospel for Transforming Addicts*<sup>56</sup> and *Addictive Habits: Changing for Good*<sup>57</sup> are good choices.

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<sup>54</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 343-44.

<sup>55</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 132-140.

<sup>56</sup> Shaw, *Cross Talking*.

<sup>57</sup> Dunham, *Addictive Habits*.

#### D. The Process of Change

1. Now that a solid gospel foundation has been laid as well as an understanding of the heart, the CE is ready to learn how to seek to change for the glory of God. Where the world offers “addicts” a form of “recovery” that returns them to who they were before their “addiction,” God wants to transform them into the very likeness of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17).
2. Women enslaved to alcohol must be taught the biblical view of their sin as outlined in section four of this paper.
3. The CE should understand the differences between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow can result in actual brokenness, however, it is focused on the loss of what had brought security, comfort, or pleasure. Godly sorrow brings about brokenness over the breaking of God’s law and the breach in relationship with Him. Worldly sorrow leads to death; godly sorrow leads to repentance without regret (2 Cor. 7:8-11).<sup>58</sup>
4. Often CEs do not know what biblical confession and repentance look like. They must be taught that they need God’s grace to recognize and confess their sin to God and to those who have been affected by it (Ps. 32; 51). They then rely on this same grace to rest in God’s forgiveness and cleansing, and subsequently, seek His grace to change (Prov. 28:13; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 1:8-9; 2:1-2).<sup>59</sup>
5. The CE needs to be taught how to apply the put off and put on principle through the renewing of her mind with God’s Word (Eph. 4:22-24). Sinful patterns of behavior

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<sup>58</sup> Heath Lambert, *Finally Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 33-35.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-25.

must be replaced with righteous patterns of behavior. This dynamic is clearly taught in Martha Peace's *The Excellent Wife*.<sup>60</sup>

6. The CE needs to be prepared for an ongoing battle with her habitual sin (Eph. 6:10-20). She will need to apply the principles of radical amputation (Matt. 5:29-30). She will have to continue to mortify her sin (Col. 3:5).<sup>61</sup> She will have to learn to reject and starve her sinful desires. She will gain victory as she makes no provision for her flesh by the power of her union with Christ (Rom. 13:14).
7. Homework ideas include:
  - a. Memorize and meditate on passages such as Ephesians 4:22-24, Romans 6:11, 12:2, and 13:14, and 1 John 1:8-9.
  - b. Listen to "Crafting Temptation and Repentance Plans to Help Addicts" by Keith Palmer and follow the accompanying notes.<sup>62</sup> This resource is very practical and easy to apply.
  - c. Assign the put off and put on dynamic homework in *The Excellent Wife*.<sup>63</sup>
  - d. Assign a study of slavery and bondage to sin and the freedom found in Christ alone. Use passages such as Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7-10, Romans 5-8, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Peter 2:16.

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<sup>60</sup> Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1999), 251.

<sup>61</sup> Martha Peace, *Biblical Counseling in Practice*, vol. 1 (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2021), 148-50.

<sup>62</sup> Keith Palmer, "Crafting Temptation and Repentance Plans," IBCD.org, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://ibcd.org/crafting-temptation-and-repentance-plans-to-help-addicts/>.

<sup>63</sup> Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, 251-53.

- e. Assign a study on the necessity of humility. Humble people no longer hide or rationalize their sin, rather they “turn their backs on their sin and their face to God in submission and obedience.”<sup>64</sup> A helpful study tool is *From Pride to Humility*.<sup>65</sup>
- f. Since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10), helping the CE grow in her fear of the Lord is important. Suggested resources include *Precious Truths in Practice*,<sup>66</sup> *I Am*,<sup>67</sup> and *God Is*.<sup>68</sup>
- g. Assign an ongoing study using *The Heart of Addiction*<sup>69</sup> and *The Heart of Addiction Workbook*<sup>70</sup> either with the CR or with another mentor within the Church.

## VI. Conclusion

God’s perfect Word declares that the sin of drunkenness is not a brain disorder but an enslaving sin from which the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to set its captives free from the prison of “addiction.” The world can offer the “addict” tools to alter her behavior, but Jesus can set her free. May we never be satisfied with a temporary solution whose goal is behavior modification but rather seek the One who can transform hearts to treasure Christ above all else.

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<sup>64</sup> Jim Berg, *Help! I’m Addicted* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2020), 47.

<sup>65</sup> Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Martha Peace, *Precious Truths in Practice: Holding Fast to God When You are Overwhelmed* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> Brian Russell, *I Am: A Biblical and Devotional Study of the Attributes of God* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2019).

<sup>68</sup> Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*.

<sup>70</sup> Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction Workbook* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008).

## A. The Role of the Church

1. In many cases, the Church has not known how to help “addicts” and therefore sends those who are enslaved to alcohol *outside* the Church to 12-step recovery or other treatment programs. Yet, without change wrought in their hearts through God’s Word by the power of the Holy Spirit, the best these programs can offer is behavior modification.
2. The Church must be good stewards of the sufficient Word which has been entrusted to us as we walk with the broken pointing them to the hope for lasting change found in Christ alone (Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). “The redemptive solution to our disoriented worship is God’s redeeming grace; it recaptures and transforms us at the core of who we are. No other ‘treatment plan’ can offer this kind of good news.”<sup>71</sup>
3. God’s love and grace have the power to change people’s lives. In churches committed to walking out the one-another commands, “sinners of all kinds and degrees will find welcome, embrace, comfort, encouragement, grace, power, and a call to grow in love of God and neighbor.”<sup>72</sup>
4. The Church must demonstrate humility and gentleness to all “for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3a). We were all once “unrighteous” and were headed for eternal damnation. Praise God for washing, sanctifying, and justifying us in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-

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<sup>71</sup> Timothy S. Lane, “Godly Intoxication: The Church Can Minister to Addicts,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26, no. 2 (2012): 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

- 11). We are not defined by who we once were; this is a different message than the world offers. They say that an alcoholic must always bear that identity. God's Word says that the former drunkard of 1 Corinthians 6:10 can be redefined and released from the enslavement as well as the label (6:11). This is the power of the gospel!
5. Counselees need a plan for accountability within the Church. They should be connected with at least one mature woman who can provide encouragement, guidance, and support. In addition to helping the woman with her enslavement to alcohol, the Titus 2 mandate outlines many areas in which she can help her grow in godliness (Titus 2:3-5).
  6. The Church should help strugglers to view life with an enlarged future hope. We must help them put their ultimate hope in Christ's future and final deliverance, and this truth should empower their present faith and obedience (1 John 3:2-3).<sup>73</sup>
  7. There are many valuable resources which will be useful for all who want to help women be set free from the chains of alcohol enslavement. The bibliography contains the resources cited in this paper, as well as others to be used by churches and counselors.

#### B. A Word of Caution

1. Instead of, or perhaps in addition to, looking to the power of the gospel to transform those with "addictions," the Church has sometimes turned to spiritualized versions of the world's recovery and treatment programs. For example, Celebrate Recovery (CR)

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 347.



has been utilized in over 35,000 churches with over 5 million participants in the United States since 1991.<sup>74</sup>

2. CR's core text, the Beatitudes from Matthew 5:3-12, is stated as "eight ways to be happy" as an outline to the path of addiction recovery. The program teaches a recovery principle and wrongly links it to one of Jesus's Beatitudes.<sup>75</sup> For example, CR teaches that "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3) is a recovery tool which espouses that the addict must "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."<sup>76</sup> This is a serious twisting of Jesus's teaching that kingdom citizens (genuine believers) recognize our abject spiritual poverty apart from the grace of Christ, and that our only contribution to our salvation is our sin.
3. Two major concerns with the program should be understood.
  - a. Though claiming to be biblical, the Beatitudes are stripped out of their context, and CR imposes meaning onto the Scriptures using a flawed hermeneutic.<sup>77</sup>
  - b. Though claiming to be a Christian program, CR compromises sound theology with erroneous doctrines of God, humanity, salvation, sanctification, and the Church.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "History of Celebrate Recovery," Celebraterecovery.com, accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.celebraterecovery.com/about/history-of-cr>

<sup>75</sup> Eric Davis, "An Analysis of Celebrate Recovery Addictions Program – Part 1," The CrippleGate (blog), accessed March 2, 2016, <https://thecripplegate.com/should-recovery-be-celebrated-a-review-of-celebrate-recovery/>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Davis, "An Analysis of Celebrate Recovery Addictions Program – Part 1,"

<sup>78</sup> Eric Davis, "An Analysis of Celebrate Recovery Addictions Program – Part 2," The CrippleGate (blog), accessed March 3, 2016, <https://thecripplegate.com/an-analysis-of-celebrate-recovery-addictions-program-part-2/>.

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