

# **The Pastoral Approach to Alcoholism**

*By: Thomas R. Schmidt*

[Prepared for and delivered at the Dakota-Montana District Pastoral Conference, Mobridge, South Dakota:  
April 2-3, 1975]

9 million persons - about 10% of the nation's drinkers - are described as alcoholics. About 25% are women, and 5% are persons aged 10 through 19. (US News & World Report, Oct. 29, 1973). Although the frequency of alcoholic abuse is considerably lower among church members, pastors, nevertheless, will have occasion to counsel people who have a drinking problem. What is alcoholism? II. What is Alcoholic's Anonymous' approach to alcoholism? What must our approach as pastors be? – The Scriptural approach! These are the three questions that I will attempt to answer. The reasons I felt these are the basic questions to answer are 1. if we are to know how to meet the problem, it will help if we know as much about the problem as possible; 2. Alcoholic Anonymous' approach is highly successful.- we can learn from it, its philosophy greatly influences current thought - we must watch out for some of it. 3. God's way is the best way. It always has been. It always will be.

## **What is Alcoholism?**

To begin with I am not going to start with definitions but with simple observations. Scripture doesn't require general, total abstinence. The Bible calls wine a gift of God, "that maketh glad the heart of man." (Ps. 104: 14, 15) God's apostle Paul recommends it to Timothy for therapeutic use. (I Tim. 5:23) Luther said it was possible to tolerate a "little elevation" when a man took a drink or two too much after working hard and when he was feeling low. He said "this must be called a frolic." (Luther's Works, Vol. 51, p.291.) Those who consider drinking with moderation all right have the lowest occurrence of drinking problems. The Jews, who frequently use it, have very little alcoholism. "If he (a Jew) gets drunk, he gets drunk only once because he is ridiculed and said to be drunk like a Gentile." (Film: Chalk Talk). Of the Lutherans who drink (85%) only 5% have drinking problems. Those who consider drinking per se as forbidden and condemned by God have the highest incidence of alcoholism. Of the Baptists who drink (48%), 16% have a drinking problem. One out of every two Mormons who drinks has a drinking problem. One out of every three Arabians who drink has a drinking problem. The Baptists, Mormons, and Islam forbid all drinking. That perhaps can tell us something. Many of those who have a drinking problem may have started out because of the appeal of forbidden fruit, and when they drank, they drank with guilt, and when they felt guilty, they drank to get rid of the guilt. Corrupt God's Word and, as usual, you get into trouble.

## **The Drug**

There would, of course, be no alcoholism without alcohol. Alcohol is a drug. It is erroneously looked upon as a stimulant since drunken people usually "let go." It is, however, a sedative drug, acting just like an anesthetic on the brain. If, as laymen, we looked at the brain step by step, it would look like this from top to bottom:

Intellect  
Emotions  
Motor  
Semi Voluntary  
Involuntary (digestive)  
Vital (heart, breathing)

One can compare the effects of alcohol dramatically with the effects of ether. First comes dryness, but it doesn't bother you because in a short time you're in a state of euphoria. You're happy. You don't care if they take one arm off or two now. The drug, of course, has hit your Intellect. Excitement is the next thing the drug of ether

produces. Here you may say weird things, incoherent things. The drug has hit the second stage of your brain: your emotions. Your emotions are drug effected. Because of this you have to be strapped down or you could hurt yourself. Your body isn't acting normally. The drug has hit the part of the brain that controls the motor functions. At this point you will feel nausea. But you don't throw up. The hospital staff has starved you to make sure you don't make a mess. Then comes pre anesthesia. Hem your semi-voluntary muscles go. You have feeling but you can't move anything. Finally comes anesthesia. The involuntary functions of your body stop functioning. You're out cold. You feel no pain at all. Death is one step away; that's when your vital functions go. That's why you pay so much for an anesthesiologist during an operation. He keeps you hanging between life and death. When you awake the order is in reverse. You come to, feel sick, but before you get excited you are given a shot to calm you down. You don't feel good for obvious reasons, and you need a drink of water.

You substitute alcohol and you've got the same effects. Take a stiff drink and you choke because it dries out your mucous membranes. That's why someone invented the chaser and the "mixed" drink. You become happy; your problems are gone. More of the drug makes you get excited, your motor functions such as your speech and walking become impaired. Nausea comes; more alcohol and you pass out. Get too much in your body before you involuntarily pass out and you'll die. Basically when you're drunk your emotions are ruling your intellect in this way:

[I (intelligence)/E (emotions)] + alcohol - E/I

Alcohol sedates the brain. That's a simple observation. And, by the way, drunkenness or alcoholism is noticeable. Most alcoholics drink to the euphoric stage except at special times. If you think its not noticeable in a particular alcoholic, it's because you've never seen him sober.

### **Sin, Disease, or What?**

What is alcoholism then? Obviously it's a little more complex than saying alcohol + person = alcoholism because most people who drink don't become alcoholics. On the national average one out of 14 who drink is an alcoholic. An alcoholic has been defined as one whose drinking has become a problem beyond his control; one who once he takes a drink cannot determine how much he will drink; one who is addicted to alcohol; one who has a mental, physical, and spiritual disease. Everyone seems to have his own definition of what an alcoholic is or what alcoholism is. To one person "an alcoholic is my uncle" and he was a wife beater - the worst kind in many ways. To an alcoholic, an alcoholic is always one that is not like himself. He may have all the signs but he has good reasons for his drinking, An alcoholic has also been defined as "one that causes serious life problems." Alcoholism has been defined by the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association as a disease. In the state of South Dakota now, a drunk (as long as he's not driving) is no longer thrown into jail but taken to an Alcoholic Referral Center where "his disease can be treated." Wisconsin and Minnesota Insurance laws have alcoholism covered as a disease. Is it a disease? Let's make a few observations. One half of all homicides and one fourth of all suicides are alcohol related. Between 10% and 25% of welfare cases involve alcoholism. 60% of all divorces have drinking in the background. 75% of all crimes are committed by those under the influence. 95% of the inmates in the South Dakota State Penitentiary are in there because of alcohol in one way or another. 50% of all traffic deaths are caused by drunken drivers. In the first quarter of 1973, of the 25 drivers who were killed in South Dakota only three positively did not have alcohol in their system. In four they couldn't tell. Of those picked up on DWI (Driving While Intoxicated) charges 65% are social drinkers, 30% problem drinkers, and 5% are alcoholics.

If alcoholism is a disease, then it's the only disease known to man that increases sin. Scripture clearly describes homicide and suicide and divorce and crime as sin. The reason I go to such detail here is that well known clergy have said that drunkenness is a sin but alcoholism is a disease, as if once you become an alcoholic you aren't responsible for your actions. One of the main features of an alcoholic is excessive drinking. How much is too much? It's too much for the individual: E/I, emotions rule the intellect. As far as God is concerned

there is no difference between alcoholism and drunkenness. They are “mortal sins”, i.e. those which force the Holy Spirit to depart from ones heart, which destroy faith. For when God said,

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God, (I Corinthians 6:9a-10 NIV)

He was most certainly describing those who were “living” in such sins, or if you will, “addicted” to such sins. No one could say an alcoholic could be ready to face Gods judgment without abject fear after reading Luke 21:34:

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. (NIV)

In Romans 6:14 God says “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” Sin cannot dominate a Christian. It is absolutely impossible that a person who is in a state of grace shall be ruled by sin. In Rom 8:13,14 it is written:

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. (NIV)

In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul writes:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In Ephesians 5:18 it is written: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (NIV) The “instead” or in Greek, *αλλα*, is adversative. It means an either/or situation. Alcoholism is not a disease according to God’s Word. God defines it as mortal sin. Those who call it a disease do so admittedly against logic, do so usually because it helps minimize the overwhelming guilt feelings (after awhile an alcoholic has a pretty sordid past, and because people who have respectable causes for miserable failures more readily come out of hiding to get help. By the way, 3 - 5% of alcoholics live on skid row. 70% are living in respectable neighborhoods, hold down decent jobs and have families. The rest are somewhere in between. More will be said about the aspect of addiction to alcohol later.

### **Symptoms**

That brings us to the question: how can we tell who is an alcoholic, or what are the progressive symptoms or signs of alcoholism? For a detailed chart and a list giving the warning signs see the appendix. Most of the following characteristics are found in every alcoholic. 1. He drinks to excess. This applies to every alcoholic. His emotions are in control. 2. He experiences memory blackouts. A blackout is having present amnesia of what one did the day or night before. Even a non alcoholic can have a blackout, but it is a sign of long excessive drinking. 3. Gulping or sneaking drinks. This is an obvious indication that a person wants sedation and is guilty about the way he’s going about it. 4. He experiences loss of control. He plans three and drinks twenty-three. 5. He develops an alibi system. He provides all kinds of reasons for drinking the way he does. It may be the dog’s birthday. He may feel that if his spouse would just get “off his back” about his drinking, he wouldn’t drink so much, or he “has to relax or unwind” ad nauseam. He becomes a brilliant con artist and a very convincing liar. 6. He needs an eye-opener. This is not necessarily the morning drink. An

eye-opener is the one he takes to make him feel “all together” or to “pep up.” He could delay it until noon, night, or Friday night. 7. He starts drinking alone. He doesn’t like to be around people who make him feel guilty. 8. He changes his pattern to beer or some other brand of booze. He may decide to “go on the wagon” to prove to himself he doesn’t have a problem, that he can take it or leave it. In his pride he won’t admit he has a problem with his drinking; everything else may be a problem but not him or his drinking. One can become an alcoholic on beer, by the way. One and a half mugs of beer is equal to one glass of wine or one shot of 80 proof whisky. 9 Antisocial behavior. He may be wonderful when sober but .... 10. Loss of friends, family, job. His drinking is more important to him than God, family, or country, those most important to most others. He lives for drink. It is the center around which he organizes his life. As one alcoholic said when approached by an A.A. member: “How in the world do you celebrate New Year’s Eve?” By this time he may have entered a hospital to “dry out.” He experiences the D.T.’s, the delirium tremens, an agonizing withdrawal process made less painful now by drugs. He may remain sober for a long time, but if he takes another drink, it is a fact that he will quickly go back to the stage of his drinking where he quit and progressively get worse. No alcoholic has been known to go back to controlled drinking. 11. Tremors are his daily enemy. The need for a drink becomes clearly a physical thing now. He has to “drink to live,” to stop shaking. 12. He is very protective about his supply. It is desperation drinking now. All that matters is alcohol in almost any form. .He will do almost anything he can to get it. 13. Unreasonable resentments. 14. Nameless fears and anxieties. The fears are often indefinable, filling him with a sense of terrible impending doom and destruction. One recovered alcoholic said he was so scared he took an airplane flight out of the city. Why, he didn’t know. 15. Collapse of the alibi system or death. It is estimated that 35 out of 36 alcoholics just die.

### **Crisis**

It has been said that an alcoholic will ask for help only when he reaches bottom. “Bottom”, however, is not just after the 15<sup>th</sup> stage listed above or when he drinks to kill the pain and drinking increases the pain. It is when the desire for sobriety outweighs the need for intoxication, when a person gives up his rationalization and is willing to do anything for sobriety. And that is clearly an act of the will! Although many say will power has nothing to do with stopping, one can be helped if he wants help badly enough. That point in an alcoholic’s life may be called a crisis situation. Crisis situations can be created. A recovered alcoholic stopped his drinking because while drunk, his daughter, whom he loved deeply, said, “I hate you.” His daughter’s love was more important to him than his drinking. The reason he drank was he felt inferior about his lack of a “gift of gab,” even though God had given him a wonderful, strong but silent personality. Another man quit for basically the same reason. His wife told him he would teach his children to be alcoholics. He quit. He loved something more than what alcohol did for him. Northern States Power Company has a program whereby they evaluate a person’s job performance. If it is down and they find out that he is alcohol dependent, they offer him help in a recovery program. If he refuses, he loses his job on the basis of poor job performance. NSP is 75% effective with those it approaches. Hit a man in the pocketbook (“the love of money”) and you create a crisis situation. Convince a person that he cannot be saved if he is an alcoholic - this is the approach the Salvation Army uses - and he also may ask for help.

### **Why?**

In one of the sentences above a hint was given why one person drank. He had an inferiority complex. Why do alcoholics drink? Is there a general reason? Here are some: 1. I needed it to sleep. 2. I needed it to kill the terrible pain, 3. I felt like one of the gang when I drank. 4. It helped me forget my loneliness. 5. I had an unhappy childhood. 6. My parents never made me feel acceptable. 7. My wife makes life miserable. These are a few of the 45 different reasons 45 alcoholics gave. There were 38 other reasons given. One man said there are two defects in character in every alcoholic that causes him to drink. One is perfectionism. He feels he has to be perfect at everything he does. When he obviously can’t, he is frustrated. The second defect is self-centeredness. He looks down on everyone else. This is due to fear. He puts up a big front to cover up his fear. He is the great big perpendicular I-beam. The sun never sets in the east, but always on his right, his left, etc. Basically,

alcoholics drink liquor because they like the sedative effects. It dulls the conscience, guilt, responsibility and frustration in their lives. It is an escape. It is an evident sign of unbelief. Drinking to excess over an extended period of time leads to a mental and physical dependence on alcohol and its effects. One becomes enslaved to a cruel taskmaster. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34) It is a behavior, habit or way of life that can be taught or caught by example. Of 4372 alcoholics polled, 57% were from broken homes, 52% had an alcoholic parent. When children of alcoholic parents were adopted out, there was no such correlation. It's not something inherited. It's behavior caught. I quote these statistics only to show alcoholism is behavior that can most definitely be taught. In no way do I want to take away from the truth that "with God all things are possible." God can deliver us from evil and trouble in spite of overwhelming statistics. God can do it. He did it when he delivered Daniel out of the lions' den. Before Daniel, 100% of all those cast into the lions' den were devoured.

### **What is Alcoholic's Anonymous' Approach to Alcoholism?**

It is one thing to know. It is another thing to help. A.A. has at the present 800,000 members. That number represents about 50% success in treating those who darken their doors. Its approach is effective. Although we can't agree with their motives and philosophy, we can learn from their approach. I realize, of course, that what a person thinks about a problem is very closely connected with how he will approach a problem. I will, therefore, immediately state that I think A.A.'s approach is the most effective for these two reasons. One, most alcoholics who want help, go to A.A. for help. Two, their method uses a great deal of truth. A.A.'s philosophy and approach can best be summed up by the "Twelve Steps" including the comments made by those who took the steps. Remember, the comments attached to each of the "Twelve Steps" are the comments of those who have taken them. Following the "Twelve Steps" will be the "Slogan." I think it will be best to let A.A. speak for itself before commenting.

"Here are the steps we took:"

1. "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable." Simply put, I can't. I am an alcoholic."
2. "Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Simply put, He can! Why not try God. Our ideas did not work but Gods idea did. Here's proof! (Here the recovered alcoholic points to himself. 90% of us alcoholics are agnostic. They told me I wasn't an atheist but an agnostic. That made me feel better. I could accept a higher power at this point but not "God." That was religion.
3. "Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him." Simply put, I think I'll let Him. Above everything we alcoholics must be rid of our selfishness, or it will kill us. God makes that possible. My higher power was my sponsor for the first year and a half until I got him off the pedestal and back down to being a man. Mine was A.A.. God can keep a man sober if he will let him. God's way is more than just going to church or living a moral life. It's practicing loving your neighbor as thyself.
4. "Make a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves." (See appendix for a sample of a "Step 4 Meeting"). Our liquor was but a symptom. We have to take personal inventory and honestly search out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure, being convinced that self in various ways was what defeated us. We always felt others were wrong. We lived a life of resentment. The people who wronged us perhaps were spiritually sick.
5. "Admitted to God' to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." There is a constant fear and tension thinking someone might have observed you while drunk. You must tell all

your life story to another person. You must be entirely honest. You must pocket pride. The result will be that your fears will fall away. You'll experience real freedom. (One said this step usually takes one to two years after joining A.A.)

6. "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." Willingness is indispensable. There's nothing wrong with being an alcoholic, but there's one --- of a bit wrong with not doing something about it.

7. "Humbly ask him to remove our shortcomings." Pray daily.

8. "Make a list of all persons we had harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all."

9. "Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Remember' it was agreed at the beginning we would go to any lengths for victory ever alcohol. Faith without works is dead. You will be amazed before you are half way through. Former enemies will praise and wish you well.

10. "Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admit it." Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear. They will crop up. Ask God to remove them. Don't be cocky and don't be afraid.

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. Prayer and meditation work if we have the proper attitude and work at it. Review each day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe anyone an apology? After the review ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken. Upon awakening ask God to divorce your thinking from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives.

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." Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. Never force yourself upon an alcoholic. Don't moralize or lecture. Tell your own story. Let him see himself through you. Remember, if you fail in helping him, trying helps yourself. Watch out if he thinks he has to get on his feet (get some money, his family back, a decent home or clothes before he can quit. Burn the idea into him that the only condition necessary is trust in God and clean house. Recovery is not dependent on getting back your family but on your relationship with God. We know! Point out that his defects will not disappear overnight. If he is spiritually fit he can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do (go where liquor is served. Try the 24 hour plan. Anyone can stay sober for 24 hours if that person really wants to. This plan will help break the addictive role. Invite him to an A.A. meeting where his chief liability will be an asset to the entrance to the group. Be a sponsor if he wants you for a friend. Suggest that he read the "Big Book" which promises recovery if you do a few simple things and be willing to have the desire to drink removed.

In summary, as two recovered alcoholics put it, "The Twelve Steps helped correct my defects of character and so helped remove the obsession to drink. I learned honest thinking instead of wishful thinking, open mindedness and a willingness to try and a faith to accept. The "Twelve Steps" meant patience, tolerance and humility and above all the belief that a power greater than myself could help. That power I chose to call God." The second one put it this way. "They helped me to learn that I could not have my own way as I used to.

I learned to do constructive acts of love without expecting any return. The less you think of yourself the more of a person you become.” The more you give the more you get.

### **Slogans**

The slogans of A.A. that are usually posted in every A.A. meeting room in plain sight and the comments made about them by recovered alcoholics are as follows.

“First things first.” This means let’s solve the immediate problem first, the drinking problem. We’ll attack the other problems later. If we try to get them all we won’t get one.

“Easy does it.” Relax a little. No individual can carry all the burdens of the world. Everyone has problems. Getting drunk won’t solve them. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

“24 hours a day.” Today is the day. Doing our best, living each day to the fullest is the art of living. If we do a good job of living today and if tomorrow comes for us then the chances are that we will do a good job when it arrives, so why worry about it.

“Live and let live.” Keep your noses out of other people’s business. All alcoholics are short on tolerance before they hit A.A.. Don’t judge the other guy. If he wants to get drunk, that’s his business.

“But for the grace of God.” This reminds us that we are not different or better than the next drunk, just luckier. You’re one drink from a drunk yourself. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for the ‘Man Upstairs.’ I owe it all to God.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning I stated that A.A. is effective because I felt it uses much truth. A.A. teaches an alcoholic virtues, or if you will, “good works,” to be truthful, humble, generous, calm, helpful, thankful, forgiving and so on. These “works of civic righteousness are very useful. They enable men to live together in a community, as a nation. They may even result in blessings in this world.” (*Basic Doctrines of the Bible*, p. 58). The rewards of civic righteousness for the alcoholic are evident: sobriety, friends, a job, loss of anxiety, fear, guilt, etc., As one A.A. news bulletin put it, recovered alcoholics are the nicest people in the world.

A.A.’s motive is, admittedly, sobriety. Helping others is a selfish motive: insurance that the alcoholic remain sober. You give in order to get, not because the Savior wants you to, not out of appreciation for what He has done. All this, of course, doesn’t save a person’s soul. For “without faith it is impossible to please him (God)” (Heb. 11:6). The specific faith required is in Jesus Christ who said, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5) - nothing God-pleasing. Speaking on civic righteousness one person aptly said:

God preserved in man the ability to choose in matters of civic righteousness. He preserved in them the ability to choose between stealing and not stealing, murdering and not murdering, getting drunk and staying sober. Alcoholic Anonymous rescues drunkards by mobilizing the mental and emotional resources of drunkards, without recourse to religion, although they agree that religion helps. (p. 97 Vol. II *Abiding Word*)

Bluntly speaking, a recovered alcoholic who doesn’t believe in Jesus Christ is literally a “damned” nice guy. And yet he may not even be a nice guy. Some alcoholics learn to kick the bottle but never learn to stop, for example, kicking their wives.

### **Can We Use A.A.?**

As one who is concerned about body and soul, can a pastor refer a member to A.A.? All A.A. groups teach the philosophy of the “Twelve Steps” and the slogans. As you saw, they can be interpreted in many different ways. Each of the two different groups I attended began with the serenity prayer and ended with the Lord’s prayer. Promiscuous prayer was there. Deistic teaching, I feel, will sometimes creep into the meetings. That is something, however, that one cannot be certain of unless one’s member tells him, since non-alcoholics

cannot visit “closed” meetings where the nitty gritty (step work) goes on. In “open” meetings any person can attend. There he will hear a person’s life story and have a social hour afterwards.

A church member most certainly will have to be warned and instructed about the pitfalls. The support an alcoholic receives from those who have experienced his problem is a big help. This kind of help may be difficult to find anywhere else. “If a member joins the A.A. for help, the pastor should continue his counseling, directing his member to the only source of genuine strength, Christ Jesus, his Savior, as promised in Scripture.” (*Shepherd Under Christ*, p. 218)

### **What Must Our Approach Be As Pastors?—The Scriptural Approach!**

As pastors our approach must be the Scriptural approach: It is not in the scope of this paper to discuss the various aspects of counseling: eg. active listening, directive and indirective counseling, nonjudgmental - accepting attitudes, etc. Professors Schuetze and Habeck give invaluable advice to pastors in counseling troubled sheep in the book *The Shepherd Under Christ*, pages 179-224. Keeping in mind the specific problem before us I will try to present an approach that involves not simply giving advice, but assisting the alcoholic in finding help from the Word of God as they face their problems, troubles, griefs, burdens, and fears.

Many alcoholics look upon pastors as the man with a code book of ethics under his arm that he applies with divine authority. At least many outsiders picture us as moralistic and legalistic. I hope our members, at least, don’t think so. The alcoholic usually has a super-ego that is extremely sensitive to dictatorial, authoritarian methods - a natural feeling we all have to some degree. Scripture warns the pastor not to “Lord it over the flock.” (I Peter 5:3) What must be evident is the love the Savior has for souls. As Luther put it: “hate the sin but love the sinner.” Here Galatians 6:1 applies “Brothers, if a man is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” (NIV)

It will help the alcoholic if he knows you understand his problem. If they say, “I don’t think he knows what I am going through” they will have little confidence in your help. They may feel that your help is not relevant, and they might be right.” (*The Shepherd Under Christ* - p.187) That’s why I felt this paper should include all that it does. At the appropriate time you might want to read Proverbs 23:29-35 which so aptly describes an alcoholic’s misery in order to let him know that God knows what his problem is:

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? 30. They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. 31. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. 32. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33. Thine eyes shall behold strange women (things) and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of the mast. 35. They have striken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

To love him you will have to hurt him. You must make him realize that his abuse of alcohol is a deadly, serious sin before God. If he comes to you, he may have a good idea of that already. If you must go to him, it will be more difficult. Here I would make use of the passages previously quoted: I Corinthians 6:9a-10, Luke 21:34, Romans 6:14, Galatians 5:19-21, and Ephesians 5:18 at the appropriate times. Remember, if he is an alcoholic, he has been drinking heavily to sedation on and off on the average of 2 to 25 years. He has been putting his trust in, his dependency on a bottle. He has been acting as a poor little uncared for god, expecting the universe to bow to him. One recovered alcoholic (who had been told to stop drinking or he’d die - and kept drinking - who had finally reached his physical bottom said he would never forget the words that finally gave him hope: “God loves him.” Here the preaching of objective justification is a must. Forgiveness is what the Father gives for the sake of Jesus Christ. You don’t have to be nor can you ever be perfect to be “accepted in the Beloved..” (Ephesians 1:6) He needs to know that.



What the alcoholic also needs is to make confession. He is plagued by feelings of guilt. A true alcoholic has a sordid past. The average alcoholic has adversely affected the lives of 20 people. Among the 20 are the spouse, the children, the parents, and other close relatives; frequently the employer and immediate coworkers. As one man said "Their repentance must needs be twentyfold." (*Northwestern Lutheran* p. 315, Sept, '71) It is destructive to bear the burden of guilt silently. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long," (Ps. 32:3) is the way David saw the destructive effect of silence when plagued by guilt. True confession will be accepting responsibility for one's action. Allow the confession to take its full course and don't cut it off before the person has completed it, or you will minimize the guilt and the holy sweetness of the absolution to come. (One alcoholic's confession took three hours to make.)

Absolution then must follow. A pastor must make the repentant alcoholic realize he has full forgiveness in Christ. Beautiful are such passages as I Timothy 1:15-16:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (NIV)

And a good Word for us pastors to remember is Luke 17:3-4:

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him. (NIV)

Now must come living for Christ. "Faith without works is dead." (James 2:26) "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." (II Cor. 5:17 NIV) If his repentance is genuine he cannot help but want to make restitution. It might be well to suggest a list of offended persons to whom he would want to make amends. If he has stolen, he will want to return the goods. If he has unpaid bills, he will want to pay them as promptly as possible. He must learn to live one day at a time trusting in God's help. As one man put it: Life is a cinch by the inch but it's hard by the yard. As it is written:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matt. 6:34,35 (NIV)

He must learn to put Christ and His will first in his life. He must be made aware that temptation will come, that all his life's problems aren't going to be overcome overnight but the Lord will go to bat for him.

If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (I Corinthians 10:12, 13 NIV)

After awhile he may realize how much he has abused his body and feel aches and pains he didn't realize he had before. He needs to know he isn't going to feel good all the time. Good eating and sleeping habits are a must. He must learn to find good substitutes for the drink before a meal, for instance washing his face and hands to relax and refresh himself.

New habit patterns come from new thoughts, new thinking. As one man put it "As I think, I make choices, as I make choices, I form habits, as I form habits I fix the direction of my life." (*God Is For The Alcoholic*) Or better as it is written in Philippians 4:8,9:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, wherever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (NIV)

Whether the alcoholic with whom you are dealing is a member or not, a good way to help him "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) and with the fruits of the Spirit would be taking him through an Adult Information Course such as "The Wonderful Works of God" and applying the Word of God to his particular case on a regular basis. Counseling with the alcoholic can be time consuming if it is to be effective in bringing the Word of God to bear on the problems with adequate thoroughness. That the pastor must take the time when his help is called for is self evident (*The Shepherd under Christ*, p.216)

### **The Alcoholic's Family**

Ten times out of ten the entire family of the alcoholic of the heavy drinker suffers as a result of his actions. Just because you don't see it on the surface doesn't mean a great deal of suffering isn't there. The alcoholic is like an iceberg. What's there is mostly under the surface, hidden from the unsuspecting eye. There is nothing like an alcoholic to make a wife feel insecure. (We will pick on the man primarily for the sake of consistency.) He usually blames her for everything. Alcoholics are known to personally pick a fight with their wives so they have an excuse to drink. Oftentimes they will demand perfection from the wife - nothing can even look slightly out of place in the house while their own life is neatly organized around the bottle. With this constant harassment the wife may often feel it's her fault for his excessive drinking. She may have feelings of resentment, shame, self pity, and guilt. To relieve her guilt feelings she will often "cover" for him, "baby" him, give into his foolish whims, call in to his place of employment "sick" for him, make excuses to friends why he was drinking now. In short, she becomes an "enabler." She makes it easy for him to act irresponsibly.

She may finally give up on him, go to work, wear the pants, make the decisions, treat him as a child and try to ignore him as much as possible, and with the children live in the same house with him - living exactly one whole world from him. The children receive no fatherly guidance, learn to look down on authority since "the authority" is making a mess of his own life and constantly embarrassing them in front of their friends, if they have them anymore. How do you get it out to your fellow peers when you find yourself coming home and ducking a chair your father threw at you in rage, or coming home with your friend and finding your mother passed out lying naked in the living room.

Each spouse will usually rationalizes "I need to drink; no one cares about me." "If you loved me, you wouldn't drink." What God says about the whole matter is usually ignored. Here the pastor will counsel the spouse of the alcoholic that the sin of drunkenness is to be condemned, not supported, Love for the alcoholic will involve rebuking his sin without a "holier than thou" attitude. Counseling with the alcoholic's spouse may very well reveal that there are sins in her own life that need to be repented of. Again the pastor will from his own personal study of the Scriptures be able to strengthen both her and the children with the Word of God so they may bear the anxieties, doubts, fears, and privations that they may be encountering. Al-Anon for the spouse of the alcoholic and Alateen for teenagers in the family may be helpful as additional means of finding help but never replacing the solid support which we pastors can provide through God's Holy Word.

In conclusion, I would define alcoholism as a sin. One comes to depend on alcohol psychologically for the effects it gives you. Finally, one becomes physically addicted to it. Alcoholics Anonymous helps to cure addiction, but not unbelief. Since "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (I Cor. 10:26), all things are ours to use provided they do not violate God's Word. One will explain who "God" really is to the counselee who belongs to AA. Our approach as pastors must always be the Scriptural approach - to apply God's Word at the right time. And that is something the Holy Spirit alone can teach us. The key to victory for the alcoholic lies not in self-control but rather in Spirit-control. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16)

## Warning Signs

Some of the danger signals. A person is in the early stages of alcoholism or in serious danger of entering them if:

1. He uses alcohol rather than his personality resources as a persistent means of solving his problems.
2. Alcohol holds a prominent place in his thinking and the planning of his activities,
3. He uses alcohol as a persistent means of gaining social confidence or courage.
4. He spends money for alcohol which he really needs for the necessities of life.
5. He is defensive about how much or when he drinks.
6. He gulps drinks or drinks in secret.
7. He drinks in the morning to cure a hangover or to “pep up” for the day.
8. He has blackouts when he is drinking.
9. His drinking behavior is in defiance of the drinking standards of his important social or fellowship group.
10. He begins to feel “normal” only when he has alcohol in him.
11. His drinking interferes with his homelife, his job, his social life, or his health,

but can still rationalize “These don’t apply to me. I have very good reasons for my drinking behavior. I can quit when I want to.” (Taken from *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic (through Religion and Psychology)* by Howard J. Clinebell, Jr.

## Questionnaire For A Step-4 Meeting

Although everyone has faults, it is always difficult to admit them. Thus Step-4 is the most difficult Step to take. One group has found an almost painless way of achieving this end, and the results have been rewarding in the extreme.

These forms may be passed out to members for filling in. However, to fill in this form is only a beginning. After discussion and consideration and a lapse of time, the forms should be brought back to the meeting and gone over again to check the improvement.

### Debits

1. Self-Pitying
2. Resentful
3. Critical
4. Suspicious
5. Angry
6. Tense and apprehensive
7. Emotionally uncontrolled
8. Withdrawn
9. Jealous
10. Fearful (Afraid to assert self)
11. Selfish, self-indulgent
12. Domineering
13. Self-righteous
14. Stubborn
15. Intolerant
16. Dishonest with self
17. Depressed, gloomy
18. Smug, narrow-minded
19. Feeling superior

### Credits

- Unselfish, thoughtful of others
- Not holding grudges
- Charitable
- Trusting
- Patient
- Relaxed
- Calm
- Outgoing
- Loving in attitude
- Confident
- Generous and loving
- Yielding
- Uncritical
- Agreeable
- Forgiving
- Truthful
- Optimistic, cheerful
- Open-minded, gracious
- Humble

20. Expecting too much too soon	Realistic
21. Hypersensitive	Willing to admit faults
22. Despondent	Hopeful
23. Sullen (Silent treatment)	Having a sense of humor
24. Apprehensive of the future	Living 24 hours a day
25. Procrastinating	Being prompt
26. Aimless and indifferent	Finding a purpose
27. Worrisome, over anxious	Serene
28. Ungrateful	Thankful for all blessings
29. Prone to gossip	Protecting confidences of others
30. Obsessed with own problems	Helpful to others

### Bibliography

- A Clergyman Asks About Alcoholics Anonymous*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1961
- Alcohol - Some Questions and Answers*. Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1971.
- Alcohol and Alcoholism: Problems, Programs, and Progress* Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1972.
- Alcoholics Anonymous*. New York; AA World Services, Inc., 1955.
- Alcoholism - Merry-go-round named Denial*. New York: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1969.
- "Alcoholism: New Victims, New Treatments." *Reader's Digest*, August, 1974
- Chalk Talk*. A Film narrated by Father Joseph Martian. Produced by the US Navy.
- Clinebell, Howard J. Jr., *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.
- Do's and Dont's for the Spouses of Alcoholics*. North Carolina Alcoholic Rehabilitation Program.
- Doberstein, John W, and Lehmann, Helmut T, (ed.), *Luther's Works* (Vol- 50). Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959.
- Dunn, Jerry G, *God is for the Alcoholic*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1965.
- Johnson, Rev. Vernon E. "A Trilogy of reports on selected alcohol problems." Yankton: Yankton State Hospital, 1968.
- Keller, John E. *Drinking Problem?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Kellermann, Joseph L. *Guide for the Family of the Alcoholic*. Long Grove, III.: Kemper Insurance Group.
- Laetsch, Theodore D.D. (ed.), *The Abiding Word*. (Vol 2). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947.
- Milt, Harry. *Alcoholics and Alcoholism*. New York: Public Affairs Pamphlets, 1970.
- "Rising Toll of Alcoholism: New Steps to Combat it." *US News & World Report*, Oct. 29, 1973, p.45.
- Schuetze, Armin W. *Basic Doctrines of the Bible*. Publishing House, 1969.
- Schuetze, Armin W. And Habeck, Irwin J. *The Shepherd under Christ*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974.
- Sioux Falls Area Business and Industrial Occupational Alcoholism Seminar. Sioux Falls, South Dakota. August 30, 1974.
- The Alcoholic American*. National Association of Blue Shield Plans, 1972.
- Toppe, Carleton. "Alcohol and Twenty Lives," *The Northwestern Lutheran*, September 26, 1971, p. 315.
- Various Personal Interviews