

Is Alcoholism A "Disease?"

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Alcoholism is a problem in our America Society, today. Thousands of individuals are wasting their lives and destroying their souls by getting caught up in this; homes are broken and children go unattended and un-nurtured, often developing criminal behavior and failing to achieve their potential contributing abilities to self, communities, and nation.

Misery, pain, and shame results from the conditions created and maintained by alcoholism. In addition to the problem that alcoholism produces in causing persons to be institutionalized, where tax dollars are spent in their treatment, lives are taken or and bodies maimed, crippled, and disabled on the high-way by drinking drivers, property is destroyed, etc. All of this cannot but be concern to the child of God, one who is interested in the total well being of every person, created in the image of God.

The Christian is to be a HELPING PERSON. Therefore, each needs to KNOW as much as possible about things that HURT and DESTROY people and the WAY out for them, if in deed there is a way out. Then, one must try with understanding to act patiently and effectively in rendering assistance to all such persona, considering self least he/ she be overcome with despair or the evil itself.

1. Recently, I met a person who was concerned about a remark I made in a sermon relative to the concept of "Disease," as being descriptive of alcoholism. I told him that I would do some research on the subject and give him a copy of my findings and conclusions..

a. I was pointing to various ways we classify. things and thereby shift the blame, as it were, consequently failing to face up to OUR responsibility. By this process we blind ourselves to the real danger involved in certain behavior, situations, environments, etc. We say that children are as they are DUE to society, thus we shift the responsibility; drunkenness is called a 'sickness" or "illness," thus we shift the blame away from the individual to some impersonal object or inherited system and go on believing an illusion.

b. This person's concern was that by so labeling people who have the problem a alcoholism, that they might be discouraged and detoured--driven away--from finding help and concerned people who could and would work with them in overcoming their involvement.

c. It is not my aim-now, nor was it then--to turn people away as being un-worthy of help charging them as being "no good," deserving what they have and etc. It is my conviction, however that one MUST face up to his / her responsibility that "I CONTRIBUTED TO MY OWN STATE OF UNDESIRABILITY," before help can be affective There are people willing and able to help but ONE MUST "want help" or accept it before be-she can be helped. My observation, and all that I have learned from books and other helping people, support this view. Until one is willing to accept his / her responsibility--at least partly-- and be willing to ACT in one's own BEHALF there is no help available that will succeed. However, may all be informed-KNOW-that there are HELPS and HELPING PERSONS waiting to assist if and when one will seek them!

2. Findings: As I look at the word "disease," I am surprised at the Dictionary's definitions: "(.;orig. a euphemism; see DISEASE), 1. any departure from health; illness in general. 2. a particular destructive process in an organism, with specific cause and characteristic symptoms; specific illness; ailment. 3. an evil or destructive tendency or state of affairs: as bigotry is a disease of society." Webster. Also, the SYN. for "disease-- may apply generally to any deviation of the body from its normal or healthy state or it may refer to a particular disorder with a specific cause and characteristic symptoms;"

So, a "disease" refers to the body that is NOT in a normal state of affair, and certainly the alcoholic is that: not normal in a functional order. The body has become dependent on alcohol to EASE a pain that has been caused by taking alcohol into it then it is unable to function ably with the amount of alcohol needed to take the pain away or deaden it. Realistically then, the person has taken into his / her body that which alters the mood for a while, deceptively giving apparent relaxation but in fact disabling it so that it can't respond so as to meet the environmental needs.

The reason for calling such a "disease" maybe to shift the blame, and if that is the reason, we contend that to do so is harmful, rather than helpful. Because one MUST come to grips with the fact that he, she volitionally has taken into the body a substance that has had a determinial effect on its ability to function adequately. If however, one is seeking a descriptive term to express one 's unhealthy state of affair, being in need of help then I have no reluctance in calling such a disease for it surely is an unhealthy state needing attention: if there is to be a RETURN to normalcy then treatment is indeed needed.

Also, I am aware of the fact that many other people may very well have consumed the same amount of alcohol and NOT have reached the same degree of dependence, just as many people may eat about all they want of whatever they like and still have a body that is not over-weight, while some are always struggling with the eating and over-weight problem. Yet, realistically we must deal with the fact that if one will push himself / herself away from the table and NOT eat too much, then the overweight problem will be manageable. It does take restraint, however; self-control is possible and each is responsible for the exercise of the same. Likewise, if one will NEVER take into his / her body alcohol, they can't possibly have the problem of alcoholism.

I wish to express my view of alcohol here: there is hardly ever a real NEED for alcohol in the proper maintenance of the body. Now days there is a better medicine, although the scriptures do permit it when needed for medical purposes, (1 Tim. 5:23 "for thy stomach's sake") there is something that will do the legitimate job better, then "WHY SHOULD ANYONE DESIRE TO ENDANGER ONESELF BY TAKING ANY AT ALL" Although I drank a lot when I was young, fortunately, I did not become an alcoholic; but I was a sinner in drinking; I wasted my money and misused resources given me by my heavenly Father, acting foolishly. I did a lot of harm, and I was accountable--needing to see the sinfulness involved and the harm done and repent and turn to God.

3. Evil of: God has told us that drunkards will NOT inherit heaven, 1 Cor.6:9-11). He has set forth restrictions on this due to the harmful effect it has upon the body, here and now, and upon the soul, eternally! We need to understand that this is the reason God has restricted man in various behavior: knowing what is GOOD and beneficial, (Psa. 19:8) - that which will and does rejoice the heart" he sanctions the RIGHT CONDUCT! Why will one argue and contend that they have a RIGHT to DRINK SOME? He who will not SEE is the blindest of all people! Beloved, be reasonable and act according to what is eternally good for you and others.

4. Classifying SINFUL behavior: There is behavior that is "sinful"--alienating one from God, (Isa. 50:1-2) and there is benefit to be derived from so classifying I agree with Karl Menrnger, when he said, "I believe there is 'sin' which is expressed in ways which cannot be subsumed under the verbal artifacts such as 'crime,' 'disease,' 'delinquency,' 'deviancy.' There is immorality; there is unethical behavior; there is wrongdoing. And I hope to show that there is usefulness in retaining the concept, and indeed the word SIN, which now shows some signs of returning to public acceptance. I would like to help to that end." (Whatever Became of Sin? Page 46)

5. In dealing with the problem, helping one overcome the destructive, unhealthy condition, one may very well use the model or "disease concept," as some Therapist recommend, to help one who is caught up in the blame-assignment-cycle. If one is having a real problem in shifting from "others" to self, then I would not disagree to using such. I could and would employ such to help the person deal effectively with himself and his problem. (Practical Approaches to Alcoholism Psychotherapy, edited by Sheldon Zimberg, John Wallace, Sheila B. Blume, pages 33-34).

There are paradoxes in American society today relative to this alcohol problem. Many may not understand and, or feel in a way toward the alcoholic that will enable them to help. There is a sense of concern for the alcoholic but there is strong resistance to change in drinking habits: many have a distaste for the violence associated with drunkenness but "stubbornly oppose measures that might restrict the free use of alcoholic beverages." (On Becoming A Counselor, Eugene Kennedy, page 326). All of us have seen so much pain and harm done by alcohol, that we may find it extremely difficult to work with a person who is an alcoholic. We need to understand the problem, love the person as we rightfully hate that which is about to destroy him, and work patiently and effectively.

We need to recognize that the success rate of dealing with such people is not all that great, regardless of the approach employed. There is a certain amount of irrational behavior to be expected from them: rationalization, denial, and / or isolation, defenses, etc. Yet, each person is an individual loved of God, who sent His Son to die for, And if we can challenge the person and get him to respond appropriately so as to allow God to redeem him, we will have achieved a great deal.

My appeal: let us try to understand the extremely difficult and complex problems involved and pray for wisdom and patience in dealing with each person. There are many, many people involved in each alcoholic's world, so let us react instead of waiting for them to approach us.

Beloved if you have friends and or relatives who are in this web, try to assist them in seeking help.

I have no problem in identifying and classifying the problem a "disease," but let us see some of the root and dynamics involved and the way out is UP.

Two Books I would recommend for all Christians in trying to understand the problem are:

1. What the Christian Should Know About Alcohol and Alcoholism, by Willard Ails, R. Ph. Restoration Publications Box 241 Greensburg, IN 47240, 1975.
2. Social Drinking and the Christian, By Don Humphrey, Christian Communications, Inc. P.O. Box 238 Arvada CO 80001, 1978, 47 pages