

MORE THAN SOBRIETY

Resources
for Biblical
Substance Abuse
Counseling

Pamela Russell

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Preface

Thirty-two years ago when my husband and I were saved, we left behind the world of alcohol that is so much a part of military social and political life, and immersed ourselves in the Christian family of the air force chapel community. Twenty years ago, when Rick retired after twenty-five years of service, we entered civilian life and joined a local church. The church has been for centuries, and was when we joined it, pretty much isolated from the issue of alcohol or drug addiction. The church was mostly a safe haven from that evil world, yet it could send evangelists into that darkness with the light of the gospel. However, in the last two decades or so, things have changed. The problem is no longer just outside the church; pastors and members are having to deal with the problem inside the church. The church can no longer pull up the drawbridge and wait until the evil passes by. There is hardly a church today unaffected by it. There is hardly a church family today unaffected by it. Like it or not, we have to deal with it. It's the mission on our doorsteps; it's our Jerusalem and Judea.

I did not choose to make the world of alcohol and drug addiction my ministry focus—far from it. I had left that world behind, and I didn't want to be reminded of where I had come from; I didn't want anyone to know about my past. But God orchestrated circumstances to get me to the place where I had to deal with it. When my husband took a new career path post-military and we were almost empty-nesters, I sought the Lord for what He would have me then do. My mentor, missionary Nettie Miller, had been encouraged me to go beyond the church walls to reach people. So I did. The Lord had long burdened me to reach women. At a Bible study one Friday night, a couple who serve with the Gideons told about going into their local jail on Sunday nights, conducting church services with the male inmates. They mentioned the desperate need they saw among female inmates for someone to minister to them. At that moment, I knew God was speaking to me. I can hardly describe the sensation. It was like having God's hands on my shoulders, a gentle pressure, and the sense that I should listen to what was being said, for here was the direction I had been seeking.

I talked to my husband and then went to my pastor, who directed me to the chaplain of our local jail, and I applied. After some training, I was put to work as chaplain to the female inmates of the Howard County Jail. Working the female unit, I taught Bible studies, did counseling, managed library books, and ran the inmate-church adoption program. It didn't take long to find out that the majority of the women (this goes for the men too) were there on drug- and alcohol-related charges. Over 75 percent of jail populations are incarcerated on drug- and alcohol-related charges. The department chaplain, Pastor Andrew Green, always one to launch people into ministry, said he wanted me to start drug and alcohol classes with the women. I tell you, that was the last thing I wanted to do, and for more than one reason: I felt I had no training or qualifications; that ministry was

dirty and messy, not nice and clean like Bible study; and I did not want to be reminded of my past. The chaplain insisted and said he had been given material I could use. So, reluctantly, I said okay.

I took the material and looked it over. I could not make heads or tails of it. It was a hodge-podge of secular support-group teaching about addiction, psychology, and, for good measure, a few Scripture verses thrown into the mix. I knew that I could not teach psychology, and I knew I could not teach the secular support-group theories. I cannot teach what does not make sense to me.

God's Word makes sense to me, and it is what has changed my life. So I began searching for Christian materials to use. I found nothing useful. There was not a curriculum anywhere that dealt with addiction from a purely Biblical perspective. So I began to write my own. I had my own testimony to what Christ had done in my life, and I had the female inmates ever before me, displaying all the issues that needed to be addressed Biblically. I had handwritten notes in a binder, and I typed up handouts for the women. Their reaction to hearing what God had to say was immediate. They had believed there was no hope. To learn that there is freedom in Christ from addiction birthed new hope in them. The classes filled up fast. When my associate pastor who also ministered at the jail heard of the classes, he asked if he could borrow my notes to use with the men. And so the ministry started to grow. In 1996 I got a computer and began typing.

That is how Almond Tree Ministry got its start. Soon chaplains in other facilities wanted the material. Then, released inmates were asking where they could continue the classes, so we recruited and trained people from other churches to do the counseling and classes outside the jail, in the community, and in churches.

Three of those who took the Almond Tree classes while incarcerated in the Howard County Jail and who came to Christ have in turn become Almond Tree counselors. Two have been allowed to return to the jail to teach and counsel. One, a woman, has been given the privilege of becoming a chaplain at the Howard County Jail. Believe me, that was a hard-won privilege, for many did not want her back in the jail because her reputation had been so bad. One is now pastoring an inner-city church plant in Indianapolis. There is a similar story in a county in Illinois: a former offender is now ministering with Almond Tree. It is all testimony to the power of Christ to save souls and redeem lives, for whom many thought—and even they themselves thought—there was no hope.

Other people began to come to us. They had never been in trouble with the law but had substance abuse problems, so we recruited counseling teams and opened counseling offices in churches. The Lord has continued to bless us with His favor and has expanded our reach into other counties, states, and countries, with our basic material being translated into Spanish, Russian, and Kinyarwanda (the language of people in Rwanda). The secular world offers little to no hope for addicts; they are doomed to be lifelong slaves to their addiction. But Christ in His amazing love and grace offers forgiveness and deliverance. What a marvelous message we have to share with those who so desperately need hope!

The purpose of this material is to put the Biblical perspective on addiction and substance abuse, together with the Biblical answers, into an easy-to-use workbook format to use when sitting across from someone who has a substance abuse problem, whether in the church office, the county jail, the homeless shelter, or the coffee shop.

How to Use This Book

This workbook is divided into two parts. Part I is for you. Read “The Biblical Foundation of Addiction” and “Drugs and Alcohol: Created for Good, Abused by Man” so that you are comfortably able to explain the Biblical foundation in your own words, defending them from Scripture, and to explain how God created everything good, for good reasons, but that mankind has abused the good plants He created. Then read the entire book to understand how it flows.

Part II is for you and the counselee. Before each session, study the lesson in this book. You may want to answer the Bible study questions on the worksheet. If you are able, become familiar enough with the content that you can put it into your own words and feel comfortable turning to related Scripture. Then familiarize yourself with the session’s agenda and worksheet. Make two copies of the worksheet, one for the counselee and one for you. The worksheets are at the end of each lesson and on the resource CD that came with this book.

Throughout the book, the generic masculine is used for both males and females. If your counselee is female, you may want to change the masculine to the feminine. In a mixed group, you could use the informal they/their/them, even when you talk about one person.

The worksheets include a memory verse. Memorize the verse and encourage the counselee to learn it as well. Ask the counselee to quote the verse at the beginning of the session, or quote it together.

Encourage your counselee to complete the homework. Each week, gauge his interest in doing it. After four or five weeks, if the counselee is not engaged in his part, consider cutting him off. However, if he is working on the assignments, consider asking him to keep a daily journal as well. This is a way for him to check himself to see if he is being ruled and led by the Holy Spirit or by something else.

After you review the homework, go through the worksheet, commenting as appropriate from the Prepare Your Heart and Mind section of your book, asking questions, and taking notes.

In closing, give the counselee his next homework assignment, pray, and offer words of encouragement.



**MORE THAN
SOBRIETY**
PART I

For the Counselor



The Biblical Foundation of Addiction

I did not come to Christ until I was thirty years old, for that is when I first heard the gospel, though I had been in church all of my life. Sure, I knew the Easter story about God's Son dying on the cross. Didn't everybody? But I had never heard that on the cross Jesus died for me. I was astounded by all that I did not know. Salvation revolutionized my life. I had not known that Jesus died to free me from sin's power and hold. I had had no idea that I was a lost sinner, but it surely explained a whole lot! Believe me, I felt free!

Theology

I developed an almost unquenchable thirst for the Word of God. I wanted to know what I had been missing all those years. I wanted to learn all I could about the Holy God, Who loves me, and Jesus Christ, Who died to save me. What I thrived on, though I did not realize it at the time, was theology. I had no time for what seemed to me the unsatisfying writings found in most Christian bookstores. My Bible teachers and mentors, Jesse and Nettie Miller, taught the sufficiency of the Scriptures and lived it, so I read the books that they were interested in reading. My attitude became that if the Scriptures alone are sufficient for my teachers, I want to prove that sufficiency true in my own life. God delighted to meet me at the point of faith in those precious early years.

Having such a solid foundation at the onset of my walk with Christ has made me a strong advocate for the sufficiency of the Scriptures in others' lives too. I believe that what a person learns and believes about God impacts the way that person lives. I believe that the more someone learns Who God is, the more he changes. The premise of Biblical counseling is that theology makes a difference. It made the world of difference in my life and in my family's life, for my salvation was the first in the chain that brought my whole family to the Lord. Before we were saved, alcohol played a big part in our lives. One of my husband's expressions had been, "Pour me on the plane in the morning." But when Jesus came in, alcohol was abandoned. I have spent the years since then reveling in learning and teaching God's matchless Word. I have never gotten over what God has done for me.

Theology: What is true about God

As Biblical counselors, we know that what a person believes about God influences his life and actions. We assess what our counselees believe to be true about God, show them from the Scriptures what is true about God and Calvary, and encourage them to live in light of those truths. That's practical theology, theology impacting our lives practically.

Recently I had a conversation with a young woman who had come to Christ a few months before out of a lifestyle that included drug abuse and incarceration. She commented that she did not believe in Hell, even though she had attended church and had been in adult Bible class for almost a year. So I pointed out that in His Word, Jesus refers more to Hell than to Heaven, and I showed her a few Scriptures that speak about Hell. She said, "Well, I don't believe in it."

I replied that more was at stake than just whether she believed in Hell or not. The bigger issue was that in essence she was saying she did not believe God and His Word, that she was setting her beliefs above God's declarations, and that what God said was something she could take or leave. This conversation revealed why she had continued to sin in a particular area, making excuses for not abandoning the sin. She did not want to live in light of all God says in His Word; she had not embraced God's Word as the authoritative guide for her life. She had yet to filter all her prior worldly beliefs and behaviors through the Scriptures and submit to them.

Addressing addictions is no different. Unless the Scriptures guide our lives and thinking, some other beliefs will. We live in an age and culture where much of our knowledge and understanding of addictions comes from the secular world. We toss around terms like *treatment*, *recovery*, and *disease*, implying that the problem is biological. But is that Biblical? Are addictions just a biological problem? How does that stack up against our theology?

The Hold and Cravings

The addict suffers from terrible cravings; the cravings rule. Physically, he will feel cravings; mentally, he will experience a battle to give in or not give in; and emotionally, he will struggle with depression, anger, and guilt. The addict cannot just say no to the cravings. When users or addicts come to us for counseling, they feel, as step one of Alcoholics Anonymous states, that their lives are out of control and unmanageable, that they are powerless over their addiction. In his book *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, Edward Welch makes this observation: "Addicts feel as if they are trapped and out of control. . . . They feel desperate hunger and thirst for something. They feel like they can't let go. . . . They feel like they are in bondage[,] . . . stuck, and without hope for freedom" (2001, 27). The addict is held hostage. His habit has a grip of iron on him, and his habit demands he put it above everything else in life no matter the cost.

In 1956 the American Medical Association declared alcohol addiction a disease and called it alcoholism. I have been told, but I cannot corroborate this, that it did so to be able to fill empty hospital beds and bill insurance companies. It was an economic-based declaration, not a science-based one. Foxnews.com reported a similar situation in 2013: The AMA voted to recognize obesity as a disease, recommending that "physicians and insurance companies recognize obesity as a complex disorder" (June 19, 2013). America has pretty much operated on the disease model for addictions since that 1956 decision. Twelve-step programs operate on the disease model, and most treatment centers operate on

the same model. Prior to 1956, the idea of disease was used but only as a metaphor to describe the experience of the addict; it was an analogy, nothing more.

The disease model has ruled the belief system of the addiction culture for over half a century; the addict has a biological condition for which as yet there is no cure except, oddly, abstinence. We all agree on the end product of addiction, potentially a diseased body, should the addict live, but we do not all agree on the origin of addiction. Does addiction start as a disease? Is it a disease from start to finish, or does it start somewhere else? Knowing the right cause has everything to do with finding the right solution. The right premise will lead to a right conclusion.

Recently there has been a big move to recategorize alcoholism and drug addiction as mental-health problems. Because prisons are overcrowded and expensive to operate, and because incarceration is having no appreciable effect on the numbers of drug- and alcohol-related crimes, problem drinkers and users are being referred to the local mental-health association. So there may be fewer addicts in the criminal justice system; however, there are numerous other government agencies that have popped up to support the now overburdened local mental-health associations as they seek to help addicts and their families, and there are more taxpayers' dollars going to operate them.

A secular resource used by a probation officer in my area who handles drug and alcohol cases is called Prime for Life. It approaches addiction as a physical health-risk issue, comparing addiction to heart disease. It focuses on reducing the high-risk behaviors that lead to drug and alcohol problems, just as avoiding the high-risk factors for heart disease will reduce the likelihood of acquiring the disease. The resource is published by the Prevention Research Institute, which has a valid point about good choices reducing the risk factor, saying that addiction starts with choice. "Addiction is triggered when we make enough high-risk choices" (2004, 10). And there we would agree. But is it just a health or mental-health issue? Is it just a biological issue? What does the Bible say? What is the impetus behind all those high-risk choices?

Over three years, at a training conference I have attended for law enforcement chaplains, three different instructors recommended three different theories about addiction. When we look at addiction as not just a biological or an educational issue, but as a theological, spiritual issue, we find that the Bible has much to say on the cause of addiction and, therefore, much to say about the solution. The solution comes with the added benefit of eternal life, and it doesn't cost one penny of tax dollars! Believing that God's Word is the final authority for all matters of life and godliness, we turn there:

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue . . . exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:3).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Many treatment centers (hospitals and others) do not address a person's spiritual dimension, though twelve-step programs do, but usually the disease model rules the spiritual discussions. Theology doesn't guide the way. "God as we understand him," and "my problem is a disease," dominate the meetings. The god of the twelve-step programs is not the Holy God of Scripture: you won't find a Bible being used at the meetings. You won't find the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, invited to attend. Yet only in Christ is the promise and sure hope of lasting freedom. If the programs invited Jesus in, they would have to change their theories about alcoholism. The original twelve-step program was created by a group of students that named themselves The Oxford Group at Oxford University, England, in the 1930s. They were Christ-centered, but when the twelve steps crossed the ocean, Christ was left behind. In fact, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous in the US, Bill Wilson, was a spiritualist, which explains the phrasing, "God as we understand him," and "having had a spiritual awakening" in the twelve-step statements. The spiritual awakening was not from Jesus Christ.

Also stemming from the biological concept of addictions is the thought that the addiction is genetic: it's inherited. The addict is the victim of a genetic disorder; he is doomed to be an alcoholic. The genetic train of thought has not been proved scientifically, but many buy into the idea. An addict who has parents and grandparents that are or have been alcoholics could be tempted to buy into the idea.

The faulty premise that the source of addiction is biological puts everything on the table. However, it doesn't account for the example of identical twin children of alcoholics, where one becomes a heavy drinker and the other does not. Genetics influence, but they do not determine, which is in line with Scripture. Abusive backgrounds influence, but they do not determine outcomes. Environments influence, but they do not determine outcomes. Cultural backgrounds influence, but they do not determine a life course. I was born and raised in England, which influences who I am, but it has not determined who I am—Christ has done that. Moses was born into the Hebrew culture, raised and educated in the Egyptian culture, and those things influenced but did not determine his life course—God did that. In Egypt the Israelites were influenced by hard labor, abuse, and idolatry, but God redeemed them, taught them, and held them accountable to Him. God would not allow them to wallow in a victim mentality. God still holds each individual accountable for his own sin.

Many Christians have bought into the disease model. Edward Welch (2001)

says that you will find people who call themselves Christians worshiping the Lord on Sunday and then on Monday going to a twelve-step program for help with their disease issue. Their Sunday theology does not impact their Monday to Saturday belief about addiction. On Sunday Jesus is Lord, but from Monday to Saturday, another belief system is operative. You will hear Christians talking about their loved one who is “in recovery,” or that they themselves are in recovery. You will find pastors sending their sheep to secular programs, believing these programs know best how to help their sheep. Sadly, some pastors have not made the connection.

In the past few years the “Christian” twelve-step program has evolved. In an attempt to bring in the gospel and integrate the twelve-step philosophy with the gospel, Jesus is invited to the meetings. However, in most cases, the disease model still rules the discussions. The true Biblical understanding of addiction is missing from these programs. Like oil and water, they do not mix. The implication is that the twelve steps, not the Bible, are the authority on the subject of addiction.

The Bad News

So where do we, the Biblical counselors, go with the disease concept? Where is the hope in it? Do we counsel addicts as we would anyone who is struggling to cope with a lifelong debilitating disease? Take heart! Scripture is a great simplifier. From end to end, it is full of hope for the addict. But there is good news and bad news. The bad news is, as Scripture tells us, that addiction is a sin problem. It’s a sin problem that may result in a biological, diseased condition, even death, but a sin problem it is.

Our theology tells us that man’s deepest problem, the most common root of the problems in his life (and the most common root of the problems that come into the Biblical counselor’s office) is sin. We are all born in sin (Rom. 3:10, 23); we are all fallen creatures, sons of Adam. As one of my Bible teachers used to say, “We are ‘double-dipped.’ We are born in sin, but we also choose to sin.” You could say it is a genetic problem: we are all sons of Adam; it’s the sin gene. But if you start out by telling your addicted counselee, “Your problem is a sin problem,” he will probably never come back, because obviously you do not understand his battle. Many Christian counselors would say that I am being unmerciful and unsympathetic in this conclusion, but sin is a reality. We are neither unkind nor blind to the addict’s struggle.

The Good News

If the bad news is that God says addiction is a sin problem, the good news is that God has sent a solution for sin: His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! Simple! Scripture has much to say about addiction and has much help to offer in Christ. But we must get our terminology right first. Whereas today’s secular term is *alcoholism*, a medical condition, the Biblical term is *drunkenness*, which implies something different. We talk about abuse of alcohol and drugs, for there are

good uses for both. Many legal drugs are derived from plants, which, as Genesis 1 says, God made and declared good. One favorite question or excuse posed by addicts is, Why did God create something as destructive as alcohol and drugs for the people He loves? The answer is He did not; He created all things good and for our good—medicinal plants and all. It is man's abuse of what God created for good that is the problem. Abuse takes medicinal plants and makes illegal varieties of drugs to fulfill unlawful desires. Abuse takes properly prescribed drugs and uses them to fulfill unlawful desires. The Bible teaches the medicinal use of alcohol, for Paul said to Timothy, "Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake" (1 Tim. 5:23), and the writer of Proverbs 31 said, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish" (v. 6). This implies moderation, limited use. When used as prescribed, God's creations are beneficial; when abused, they lead to addiction. When we get our terminology and facts right, we will get the solution right.

The Idolatry of Addiction

In Scripture we find the case study of the nation of Israel as a great example for us. You know the story. Israel would periodically leave the one true, covenant-keeping God, go after idols, and adopt the practices and belief systems of the idols they worshiped—idols and belief systems that deceived them, idols and false beliefs that actually led, not to paradise on earth, but to captivity. The people of Israel would forsake worship of God for the worship of their own desires as seen in the idols they chose. Their desires were their unlawful appetites, wanting things that God had forbidden and guarded against, like sexual immorality, debauchery, gluttony, and drunkenness. Think of the episode with the golden calf, recorded in Exodus 32. The idols were the tools the Israelites used to get their desires fulfilled. An idol was the means to an end. To a substance abuser, the drug is the tool to get him what he wants, whether it be kicks, the high, relief, escape from problems, energy, or acceptance in a group. It is the means to an end.

Biblical Metaphors for Sin

Scripture uses comparison figures of speech, metaphors for sin, such as idolatry, adultery, and slavery. The accounts of Israel leaving God and turning to idols, God called adultery, which in turn led to slavery, captivity, bondage. It is certainly picturesque speech. Romans 1:26 tells us that in such disobedience, God "gives them up" to their sinful, unlawful appetites, so that they become enslaved to them. In the book of Hosea God likens Israel's sin of idolatry to adultery. Think of how God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and how when they subsequently disobeyed Him repeatedly, He sent them into slavery, slavery to the very nations and gods they had chased after. Addiction is no more than bondage to sin, bondage to the sin we have pursued. Jesus defines it for us in John 8:34: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."

What are the false beliefs of the addict? What are the false beliefs that lead to captivity?

- I can stop at any time.
- I am in control.
- I am not hurting anybody.
- I am the victim of a tricky disease.
- People with addictions are different.
- I need this to function.
- I need this to cope.
- God has given me more than I can handle.

G. K. Beale (2008) makes the case that the people of Israel became like the gods they worshiped: blind, deaf, and dumb—spiritually blind, deaf, and dumb to God, to their sin, and to the needs and pleas of the people around them. Read Psalm 115:4–8. The addict, then, becomes blind, deaf, and dumb in his addiction. This is theology: we become what we worship. Look at Proverbs 23:29–35 and the description of the alcohol abuser. Note the warning first, then the craving for the wine, the fearful hallucinations, and the life consequences; but despite all of that, when he wakes up, he goes back to it again. He is blind, deaf, dumb, and hooked.

The Biblical Model

Though today we have a plethora of drugs that people are addicted to, and though every imaginable alcoholic beverage has come on the scene since my husband and I were consumers, the Bible mainly addresses addiction to alcohol. Drunkenness is the Biblical model for all addictions. Notice I called it, as the Bible does, *drunkenness*, not *alcoholism*. Think about it: *drunkenness* casts the problem in a different light, in a Biblical light, in a theological light. Drunkenness is always referred to as sin in Scripture, never as sickness or disease, and it is always seen as contrary to God's law. The Old Testament reveals nothing but episodes of sinful failure in connection with drunkenness. From Noah to Lot, Samson, Nabal, and Kings Elah and Ben-Hadad, there is nothing but a record of immorality, loss, defeat, death, and destruction associated with it. The New Testament always associates drunkenness with the sins of the flesh, never with disease. There is no account of Jesus doing a miraculous healing of an alcoholic.

A pastor said to me, "Well, it doesn't matter to me to call alcoholism a disease, because Jesus heals diseases," and I would agree in part. Jesus does indeed heal diseases, but if all an addict wants Jesus for is to heal his disease, where does he go with his sin, guilt, and shame? What about salvation? What about repentance? What about sin's slavery? What about having power to withstand temptation? He will not be offered those vital benefits, and he will wonder why he cannot obtain victory. Theology must guide the way.

The Authority of God's Word

Let's dig a little deeper. How is drunkenness a sin against God? Isn't the drinker hurting just himself? Biblical counselors know this: our job is to get the

counselee to be able to determine if he is worshiping God or his own desires. Who is in charge: God or personal desires? Having desires is not in and of itself sinful. God has given us passions and desires. It's His idea, for if we did not have certain desires, we would never eat or drink, we would never marry, and there would be nobody on the earth. But when we become willing to sin to fulfill those desires, they become evil desires, and they end in death (James 1:13–15). Drunkenness is a selfish act. In it one's own desires are served. One's own desires are put before God and everyone else.

At the beginning I mentioned a young woman who said she did not believe in Hell. I started to look at the issues in her life in light of that statement. She says she is saved but still lives with her boyfriend, though they are planning a wedding, sometime. Why has she not shed the sinful behavior? Why keep making excuses for continuing? The answer is that she has not accepted God's Word as the authority for her life. Part of that is because it is a fearful, risky thing to surrender all to God, and part of it is plain stubbornness.

So I have to ask myself, Have I made it clear to her that God—because He is the only true God and our creator—is our judge, “the Judge of all the earth,” as Abraham said (Gen. 18:25)? Have I made it clear that we answer to Him and will answer to Him at the end of this life? In Genesis 17:1 God declares Himself to be “the Almighty God,” Who says to Abraham, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” God tells us to be holy, for He is holy (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16), and we answer to Him for our walk. Jude 25 says that God is “the only wise God.” Abraham asked rhetorically, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). God is the only truly just, wise, holy, and infallible judge, and because He is, we can trust Him to judge us.

God's Word, the Bible, reflects God's character. It, too, is holy, wise, just, and inerrant. We are and will be judged by it: “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened” (Rev. 20:11, 12).

Because the Bible is holy, wise, and just, we can trust it as the authoritative guide for our lives (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 119:105; 19:7, 8). It is a wonderful guide for life, full of precepts, principles, and promises, and lives are blessed for following it. We can choose to live by its precepts, or we can choose to reject it. But we must accept that there will be consequences for both; we will reap what we sow. We cannot choose to live our lives by just some of the precepts in God's Word, choosing the ones we like best, like the Twenty-Third Psalm, and rejecting the ones we don't like, like the Ten Commandments. We take all or reject all.

Either God and His Word are the complete authority for our lives, or they are not. Commonly, those who reject God's Word as the authority for their lives do so because it means dealing with sin. They do not want to give up their sin.

To make God's Word the authority for our lives is something that we must carefully consider. One thing to remember when we offer a person the free gift of salvation is to tell them that accepting Christ means accepting His authority in his life. There we have theology again, for understanding Who God is leads to the fear of God and to accepting the authority of God and His Word in a believer's life. Accepting the free gift of salvation is much easier than submitting to His authority for the rest of this earthly life. I know this from my own experience, for my mentor made it very clear that the two were inseparably connected. That is why I took one year after hearing the gospel to surrender to Christ. I counted the cost of forsaking sin and surrendering to God's authority.

Your addict must wrestle with and settle this issue. Will he surrender and accept the authority of the Word of God in and for his life? Will he give diligent heed to reading and studying the Word so he knows what he is responsible to do? When he finds some area of his life that does not align with the precepts of God's Word, will he be willing to make the changes necessary to be compliant? Jesus says that the proof of our love for Him is found in the measure of our obedience. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21). Though the act of receiving Christ as Savior takes only a minute, remember it takes time to process life and beliefs through God's precepts. Give the addict time and treat him with grace. However, you may be wasting your time on someone who adamantly refuses to submit his life to God's authority.