

addiction in the beginning — will he or she be able to find the sought after peace.

It is of the utmost importance that we, as Christians understand that just as an addict seeks to find people who can identify with his or her specific addiction — *we all* have the *afflictions of sin* — so the addict should be able to identify with all of us who have recognized our lost condition and have found saving power in the blood of Christ.

A recovering addict must *first* realize that he or she needs a *Savior* — a Savior who is able to wash away sins — not just the presence of or recognition of a higher power — a spiritual presence — to fill a spiritual void. Sin is an *eternally* destructive affliction that can only be taken away by the blood of Christ.

*Admitting* to the presence of an addiction that one *can not remove* alone is the necessary first step for *earthly* recovery. *Admitting* to the presence of sin that one *can not remove* alone is the necessary first step for *spiritual* recovery. Just as an addict will always be a “recovering addict” all of us who are saved by the blood of Christ will always be “recovering sinners.”

A clean addict may not be a saved addict. But to find the peace for which addicts (as well as many others) search, they must understand that Jesus Christ is the *only* way to God and their spiritual recovery cannot be complete without acceptance of Christ *for the forgiveness of sins*. Then and only then will the illusive peace be found — even in the face of continuing trials and troubles. All of us — including the recovering addict — will *always* face difficulties during our stay on this earth. Peace comes from knowing that our Savior has taken away the punishment due us for our sins. Peace is knowing that He paid the price for those sins. Peace is knowing that we *can* face the trials *because* we have an eternity to look forward to with Him — no matter what *this* life offers to us. Christians must welcome addicts to the fellowship admitting that we are *all* sinners and have the same need. Those who are long members in the Body have the same strength of longevity that a long time addict might have in the program for addicts. We are all “recovering sinners.” Just as the sponsor for an addict leads and walks him or her through the tough and difficult times, so we as disciples of Christ must walk new believers through the tough and difficult times.

The joy of a non-addicted life is undoubtedly a wonderful thing for an addict. But his or her acceptance of the Gospel *for the forgiveness of sins* will complete the joy by giving him or her the peace that results from the promise of salvation for continuing to live a life faithful to God and His teaching. *That’s* the illusive peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

**Note — Watch for a very special series of articles beginning June 15<sup>th</sup>.**

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# DILIGENCE

*“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11*

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## The Saved Addict

Our world is filled with programs aimed at assisting those who fall victim to numerous addictions. Drugs, alcohol, gambling, and sex are just a few of the things that consume individuals to the point that they either do something drastic to themselves, to others, or decide to cry for help. That cry for help might consist of becoming involved in a 12 step program of some sort, or getting involved in a group counseling program or a variety of other techniques specifically designed to assist an individual who has realized that he or she must have help in overcoming an addiction.

At the core of any successful attempt to break the bonds of slavery to an addiction is the self-realization and acceptance that the individual does in fact have an unhealthy addiction and needs help *beyond* his or her own personal abilities. Knowledge of this fact becomes the motivating force that propels the individual to admit to whatever weakness has befallen him or her. There is seldom any progress made toward the recovery of an addict unless he or she first *admits* to *being* an addict. But where does one go to make such an admission? Conveniently there are often organized groups of individuals with the same addiction and those individuals are available to accept the newly admitted addict *with* all of his or her weaknesses. So once the ice is broken by making the admission that he or she is in fact an addict among other addicts, the process of recovering can then begin.

The old adage that states “once an addict, always an addict” is widely accepted to be true. So although an admitted addict might be able to find help to begin the process of pulling away from the negative impact the addiction is having on his or her life, he or she is now obliged to carry the knowledge that s/he is an addict without hope of being cured for the rest of his or her life. The only hope is that the addiction can be *controlled to a point* of no longer having a negative impact on the addict as well as on those close to the addict. But to consider one’s self as *cured*, is an open invitation to become entangled in the habit again. So the term “recovering addict” has been coined to keep the reality of the weakness forever before him or her.

Since *overcoming* the addiction *begins* with admitting that there *is* an addiction that can not be overcome alone, admitting to the addiction in the presence of *other* addicts immediately creates a circle of support from those individuals who either have in the past or are currently experiencing similar feelings and weaknesses. Many times a “sponsor” is assigned to the addict for the purpose of taking comfort  
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in the fact that there is someone who can identify with and help the newly admitted addict deal with the various feelings associated with attempting to overcome the addiction. Even with this support group surrounding the individual, an empty spot is left that still needs to be filled. The developers of most recovery programs recognize that empty spot as the need for a “higher power” in one’s life. That empty spot is the spiritual part of every human that was placed there by God Himself.

*“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen. 2:7 KJV)*

Mankind’s nature is such that he was created by God with a living soul — a soul that has a need for its Creator and will subconsciously pursue God. It is of course possible for the fleshly being to become so hardened against God that there remains little or no desire to search for the Creator that gave life but we are not addressing that kind of situation in this article.

Secular recovery programs teach addicts that recovery is based on entrusting themselves to “God as they understand him.” Therefore, many recovering addicts are on a quest or journey seeking the spiritual path *they* should follow. Recovery programs also distinguish between “spirituality” and “religion” — preferring spirituality *over* religion. “Spirituality” refers to *whatever* the addict *chooses to recognize* as his or her god or higher power whereas “religion” refers to formal doctrines and /or institutions. This means that a recovering addict is in search of a “higher power” of his or her own making. That higher power might be anything from Buddha to Bahá’í, to the God of the Scriptures, to the New Age concept of god within, to any denomination or even to the recovery group *itself* (which is often strongly encouraged). This very *vague* “god as you understand him” goal for finding a higher power certainly suggests that *content* of belief is totally and completely irrelevant — especially since it’s often strongly suggested that the group itself can meet that need. The addict needs only to find the *spiritual* path that is comfortable for his or her own situation. When a recovering addict “stumbles” onto New Testament Christianity as a result of his or her search for that higher power, there can be a serious problem if the addict doesn’t abandon the *programs* teaching that all paths lead to God. That belief is simply not compatible with Christianity. Consider these words of Jesus Christ.

*“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 NIV)*

As Christians, it is impossible to hold onto the view that there are many paths to God and at the same time accept Jesus Christ as a Savior. There is little to misunderstand in this statement from Christ Himself. Either it is true, or it is a lie. If it’s true, there is only *one path* to God. This is further complicated by the fact that many recovery programs teach that no one should ever question the “higher power” an addict has *chosen* since his or her continued recovery is *very closely tied* to his or her belief *in* that “god as [he or she] understands him.” So are we starting to see why this is an important issue concerning saved recovering addicts?

Over a number of years we have known several addicts. They all seek a spiritual relationship with a “higher power.” More often than not, they seek the spiritual relationship *after* the addiction is well under control and they feel they are ready for a next step — the step of continuing to put their life back in order. If the next step is to add a spiritual component — recognizing the need for a “higher power” — to their life rather than seeking God’s forgiveness for their sins, they are in search of something *other* than a Savior. When they find a place that gives the feeling of spiritual wellness — a place that “fits” their needs — they take comfort in having completed one more step in the program that has already brought them to a far better life than they previously had. Unfortunately, it is just that — satisfaction that they have met the need for spirituality and recognition of a “higher power” in their life. They are often still burdened with the weight of sin because their search was for something far different than what Christ offers. First and foremost, Christ offers salvation through forgiveness of sins. That is a far greater gift than simply the presence of a higher power in one’s life and whatever spiritual feeling may result. Addicts too often, search for peace as a result of recognizing a “higher power” rather than peace as a result of forgiven sins.

*“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)*

When an addict has taken the step of accepting a “higher power” into his or her life — yet he or she continues to be plagued with temptations and problems, there can easily be a feeling of disappointment — a feeling that he or she may not have made the best choice to suit his or her needs. The addict may then begin to ask “where is the peace I’m supposed to get from accepting this “higher power?” Unfortunately, the addict has failed to understand that peace is the result of forgiven sin — not the removal of life’s troubles.

We have observed many addicts “accept” Christ in the waters of baptism, be faithful for a period of time and then drift off to *continue* their search for “something that suits them better” or in other words — the feeling that they *thought* would be theirs for committing to a higher power and for taking one more step in the program that has been *so* successful in helping them to progress as far as they already have. If they simply viewed their baptism as a fulfillment of the *need* their spiritual side has for a higher power rather than a recognition that they are a sinner and need the blood of Christ for forgiveness of those sins, their conversion was quite possibly to something *other* than to Christ. Remember, near the beginning of this article, we stated that overcoming the addiction *begins* with admitting that there *is* an addiction that can not be overcome *alone*. Accepting Christ for the purpose of infusing a higher power into one’s life isn’t the same as admitting that there is sin that can not be forgiven *alone*. Not until an addict understands and *admits* that there is sin (*including* but not *only* the addiction) in his or her life that *can not* be overcome alone — just as he or she did with the