

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUBSTANCE & OTHER ABUSE

ABUSE AND ADDICTION AS A PERSONAL AND FAMILY DISEASE

1) Alcoholism and Drug Abuse are illnesses or diseases which must be treated medically, spiritually and behaviorally. Addiction to chemicals, food, sex, gambling, spending money and relationships are manifestations of the broader illness qualified as Abuse or Addiction. The transition line from abuse to addiction is not always clear cut, but the ineffective and potentially life threatening ways of avoiding challenges, problems and pain runs consistently throughout every facet of the disease.

2) A large percentage of abusive behavior and addictions exist because of contributing factors, such as spiritual and emotional emptiness or psychological or emotional problems. The user or abuser self medicates with their "drug of choice" to avoid the pain, emptiness, depression, frustration, low self esteem, loneliness or combination of issues existing in his or her life. However, addiction to alcohol or drugs may also begin with casual, social or episodic use which may grow into full blown dependence. Another percentage of people appear to be predisposed towards drug addiction, alcoholism or other abusive behaviors. Some people have been known to jump directly to levels of addiction without a period of escalating abuse. Part of the mental health and substance abuse treatment communities believe that a predisposition towards alcoholism or addiction can be transmitted genetically or inherited.

3) In either scenario of personal predisposition or lack of family history, the environment in which a person is raised or lives contributes significantly to the onset of addiction. Addiction or Abuse is therefore seen as a family disease, affecting every person who interacts with the addict and the family behavioral rules or patterns. People are assigned roles and are unconsciously expected to behave in certain ways. Children or spouses may be ascribed blame, guilt or attributes that have no basis in reality. Severe enmeshment of issues from one person to another results in the negation of personal responsibility and ambiguous, codependent accountability for the satisfaction of others. Communication is skewed, passive aggressive and blaming. Parents try to live vicariously through their children and people pursue unattainable, self defeating dreams.. The basic emotional needs and security of everyone are never met. Once sobriety enters into the addict's and family's lives, it may take three generations of Recovery to leech the dishonest, manipulative and other unhealthy behaviors from the family dynamics. Anyone who tries to change and heal their life should commit to participation in a 12 step program such as AA, NA or CA for the Addict or Alanon or Alateen for other family members. Twelve step programs exist for every addiction and for most of the family members and friends of the Abusers or Addicts.

4) Substance abuse often expands into other areas such as domestic, child, sexual and interpersonal abuse. Support systems and treatment for victims and perpetrators is essential to break the cycle. The dynamic of personal and family healing is dependent upon full honesty, commitment, hard work and prayer to God. Also the support of other recovering people cannot be understated. The development and flourishing of the spiritual life, long starved or unknown, is part of the discovery of self and God's love.

4) The history of the Church makes reference to Sobriety (the goal of Recovery) as living in an honest, disciplined and moderate manner. The early monastics who practiced asceticism preached sobriety as the path for all beginning monks and also for the laity. Any disciple of Christ practices the discipline of the Lord, dedicating or consecrating everything in their life to God and living as if they stood constantly in the presence of the Lord. Sin, human weakness and turning away from God necessitates metanoia or repentance. We confess, change and repent from all that offends God's holiness and separates us from accepting the love and grace of Christ. The process of Recovery espouses right living as paralleled in the Christian Life and Way of Salvation. We hope to come before God with the virtues our soul has acquired in hope and faith of His love and Paradise. The gestation of this life, our choices, our sacrifice of vanity and pursuit of truth and

righteousness determines eternal life or eternal hell. Hence S1. Paul writes that "profligates, deceivers, drunkards, effeminate and doers of darkness" will have no part of the Kingdom. The power of Recovery and Salvation rests upon us throwing any recurrent sin, weakness and failure upon the mercy and redeeming grace of God.

5) Substance abuse often accompanies other illnesses such as Depression, Anxiety, Attention Deficit, Mood or Character Disorders. People with two or more afflictions are referred to as Dually or Multiply Diagnosed. While addressing the symptoms of substance abuse, we must seek treatment for the other contributing problems or disabilities. Also, it is paramount that physical health be considered, examined, addressed and promoted. Again, substance abuse is a multiply faceted, prone to be terminal disease. Its antithesis is health, fellowship and new life.

6) Secularism and new age relativism have permeated some 12 step groups over the past 30 years. God as the higher power has been depersonalized and grace substituted for an a spiritual power which still recognizes the innate powerlessness of step 1. As Christians, the truth of the saving Christ need not be compromised but also the recognition of the power of recovery as it works for people from other religions must not be denigrated. The teaching of St. Nils Sorsky to pray for those outside of Orthodoxy and not condemn is so paramount to witnessing the truth and allowing the mighty hand of God to work His wonders. The goal of recovery is to live rightly. The goal of our Salvation is to live fulfilled as an eternal light with Christ, the Father, the Spirit and the Kingdom forever.