



## Manna Books & Counseling Ministry

1720 Wilhurst Street  
Jackson, MS 39211  
mmdavis48@comcast.net  
www.mannabooks.org

## **PUBLICATIONS--Manna: Food for the Journey of Spirituality**

### **Articles**

#### **New Creations in Christ: The Transforming Power of God's Love**

By: Martin M. Davis

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!  
(2 Cor. 5: 17)*

Recently I had the privilege of attending the annual conference of Alcoholics Victorious (AV), held in Kansas City. AV is a network of Twelve-Step support groups for Christians in recovery from addiction. Not satisfied with the vague "higher Power" portrayed in Alcoholics Anonymous, the pioneers of AV saw a need for a Christ-centered approach to recovery from addiction. Today, there are approximately 150 AV groups scattered across the United States.

The conference was hosted by the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions in Kansas City. Many of the participants worked in various inner city ministries, including the Salvation Army. These ministries serve the homeless, the unemployed, and those who suffer with drug and alcohol addiction. Prominent among the attendees were the leaders of many AV groups from diverse parts of the country.

The conference had barely gotten underway when I became aware that I was in for something new (at least to me) in the field of recovery from addiction. To get the conference underway, one of the staff of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions welcomed us and outlined the schedule of events for the next two days. After taking care of the organizational nuts and bolts that would facilitate a smooth-running conference, the speaker began to reveal intimate, personal details of her life. This, however, was not the usual "drunk-a-log" that one may hear in a typical AA meeting. Instead, her words were a testimony to the transforming *power* of God's love as expressed to us in Jesus Christ. Without hesitation, she told us that, in contrast to her past lifestyle, she is today a woman of integrity who holds a responsible position in a vital inner city ministry. As she put it, she no longer has to steal to get what she wants, nor does she have to use alcohol and drugs to cope. Moreover, today she is able to remain faithful to her husband (who is in prison). These attributes of integrity and responsibility were plainly in contradistinction to the way she had once lived. She concluded her remarks by summarizing the incredible transformation that has marked her life: She said, "I have been delivered from the disease of alcoholism by the grace of God. Today, I am a new creation in Christ."

As the conference continued, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with many of those in attendance. I met men who had served time in prison because of crimes often related to their addiction. I met women whose unmet needs for love and acceptance had led to sexual

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*New Creations in Christ: The Transforming Power of God's Love Continued...*

promiscuity. I met one man whose addiction had brought him so low that he lived in cardboard boxes on the streets and survived by eating from garbage cans. Yet a common thread ran through the lives of these diverse people: Each one viewed himself or herself as a *new creation* in Christ, not merely as drunks or addicts who might otherwise hang their heads in shame because of their former lives.

I found this approach to recovery both fresh and exciting. In traditional recovery programs, and in the treatment industry in general, recovering persons are commonly reminded that they are nothing more than drunks and addicts, and will always be nothing more than drunks and addicts. Ask a typical AA "old-timer" how he is doing and he is likely to respond, "I'm doing pretty good for an old drunk." Even after decades of abstinence, many addicts still identify themselves in relationship to their addiction.

Among the participants at the Alcoholics Victorious conference, however, I detected a different attitude. Though mindful of their need to abstain from alcohol and other drugs, they no longer identify themselves in relationship to alcohol and drugs; instead, their identity is firmly rooted in their relationship to Jesus Christ. As living testimonies to the transforming power of God's love, they understand and live the gospel truth that they are new creations—men and women who have been both saved and *transformed* by God's love.

On two occasions, I was privileged to witness a loving and moving demonstration of the transforming power of God's holy love. The same woman who made the introductory remarks at the beginning of the conference performed an interpretive dance during the praise and worship service that preceded each evening's lecture. As popular praise music filled the room, this lovely woman acted out--through graceful arm and hand gestures, as well as elegant body movements--the words of praise and thanksgiving emanating from the sound system. The glow on her face, and the expression of gratitude that poured from her eyes, was remarkable. As she moved back and forth across the room, I could not help but think of the dedication of the women described in the gospel accounts of our Lord's life. As I enjoyed her dance of praise and utter adoration, I realized that I was witnessing the devotion of a Mary Magdalene standing outside the empty tomb, or that of the "sinful woman" who wept at the feet of the reclining Jesus, then after wiping his feet with her hair, anointed the Lord with the perfume she had brought in an alabaster jar (Luke 7:36-38). To be sure, even the most eloquent preaching or the most learned theological treatise paled in comparison to the witness this woman offered to what the good news of the gospel is really about. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God!" (1 John 3:1). Truly, those who have been forgiven much love much!

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### *New Creations in Christ: The Transforming Power of God's Love Continued...*

What is their secret? How have the members of AV become living testimonies to the transforming power of God's love and grace? I believe the answer is to be found in their willingness to turn their wills and their lives over to the care of Jesus Christ. The men and women I met in Kansas City are all-too-familiar with the disastrous consequences that come when we allow self—not God—to rule our lives. Years of painful experience have taught them that self-will results in devastation and ruin. The consequences of lives lived according to self-rule finally brought them nothing but powerlessness and the complete inability to manage their own affairs. Their painful stories offer ample testimony to the truth that life lived in service of self, rather than God, leads to destruction.

By contrast, in turning their wills and their lives over to God in complete surrender, the members of AV offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). In order to maintain an ongoing communion with Jesus Christ, they commit themselves to two periods of prayer each day, morning and evening, praying only for the knowledge of God's will and the power to carry that out. Because they realize that God's written word is a reliable guide for our lives, they commit to daily Bible study and the ongoing instruction of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, they realize their need for the fellowship and encouragement of other Christians; hence, they participate as active members of their local churches. Moreover, they commit to Christian service by helping others to overcome addiction. Finally, because they inhabit fallen bodies with genetic and behavioral predispositions to addiction, they abstain from alcohol and other drugs.

The sense of energy and enthusiasm I felt among these persons was attractive and inspiring. These were no mere cultural Christians who attend church on Sunday while living according to the values of the world the rest of the week. Rather their enthusiasm for the life-change wrought in them by Jesus Christ was evidenced by a *radical* obedience to God—an obedience that stems from the very root (Latin, *radix*) of their existence. In fact, I sensed that these former drunks and addicts lived their present lives with an ongoing, continual awareness of the presence of God. They seemed constantly mindful that we all live and move before an audience of One.

The radical Christians I encountered at the Alcoholics Victorious conference are living testimonies to the transforming power of God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ. Like the mythical Phoenix, they have risen from the ashes of life and been reborn as glorious new creations in Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the *power of God* for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16, NIV, emphasis added). The former addicts and alcoholics that I had the privilege to meet in Kansas City are irrefutable proof that the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to transform lives.