

*NECMA, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

Let me stand amongst you and introduce myself.  
My name is Richard Ashton. I'm an alcoholic.

You may be puzzled. That is the way someone new at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous introduces himself.

Usually, if pressed, they will go on to say something like this...  
Without help from others, I shall always stay that way.  
Therefore I cannot trust in myself alone.

I remember an episode of the 1980s New York police drama series "Hill Street Blues" featuring the police station officer-in-charge, several of his middle management team, and prosecutor, in an AA meeting, and using those identical words. It was very effective in one of the better scripted cop-shows, that many real life policemen watched because of the portrayal of believable situations.

I would like you to now consider the status of a sinner, recognising that help is at hand, from Jesus Himself.

Whether or not I was an alcoholic at one time is irrelevant, because my history is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, the reason being that He Himself has "plucked me from the pit" as the old fashioned saying goes.

There is a worship song which has as its refrain, or the repeating part between the verses, the following:

*"High above me, way high above me,  
stooping down to find me, so low to hold me,  
stooping down to save me, to sanctify me"*

and I believe this is a beautifully graphic portrayal of the nature of Christ Jesus my Saviour, in His relationship with not just me, but with all who are fully prepared to come to Him, and not just make a half-hearted attempt to do so.

Last time, I included some thoughts by a wonderful old preacher in Seattle, Joe McKnight, who wrote this...

*"The call, the invitation for salvation has gone out to every generation and every nation. No one who responds will in any manner be excluded. Jesus experienced death for EVERY MAN. Therefore all are included in the plan of salvation. Not*

***that all SHALL be saved, but all COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED.  
The provision has been made for ALL.”***

Yes, we should ask ourselves if we have genuinely said “yes, please”, and “thank-you” to Jesus for His gift to us of salvation. We should also ask ourselves if we realise how precious a gift, how great, is that salvation? I coupled this comment of Joe’s with the piece from John’s gospel, 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, verses 14 to 17, which in the King James translation reads...

***John 3:14 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,  
15-16 “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

***17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”.***

And the punch-line is in verse 17...

***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but rather that the world through Him might be saved”.***

Slight change of topic.

The 12-step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous is the ONLY detox programme that actually works every time - providing the person is dinkum in wanting to give up being a drunk.

Did you know that Alcoholics Anonymous is based on the concept that the individual has to acknowledge that there is a higher power? Someone external to ourselves, to whom we need to submit, because we cannot do it alone?

That is why a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, if honest with himself, describes himself as still being an alcoholic.

That is why a Christian, if honest with himself, describes himself as still being a sinner.

It matters not that they may not positively identify that someone as the Lord Jesus... it is sufficient to sow, implant, nurture and grow the thought that we are incompetent on our own. Leave to the Holy Ghost the opportunity for the gospel to be preached to them.

As Paul wrote in 1Cor 3: 6 ...

*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*

It also does not matter if our addiction is to other chemicals, whether derived from tobacco, cannabis, opium poppy, or petrol in a container being sniffed. Or indeed any other addiction of this world - such as gambling or pornography - which day by day is falling further and further from the beautiful pristine state in which God created it.

Yes, there was a time in my life when I drank to excess. At the time it seemed to me to be a good way to eliminate sadness, anxiety, and emotional pain. But it was dumb with a capital D. I had to step outside my sphere of control – at least what I thought was total control, but which was actually zero control.

It was necessary for me to admit I didn't have the solution to everything - or anything - in my hands. That is the basis of the 12-point programme - which applies just as much to all forms of addiction, including gambling, porn, and smoking.

I heard an interview on the old 5DN radio station maybe eighteen years ago, of someone who like me had found Jesus and who Jesus had led out of his addiction (which was different from mine). This man was an American, had been a practicing homosexual, and he was touring the world sharing that Jesus saves from whatever you choose to give to him, to save you from.

Overnight, he had given up the practices which God condemns in that field. A different scenario from that which one hears of from some confused churchmen who say "Father Christmas loves you and just wants you to snuggle up to him". This man pointed out exactly where his errors in attitude were, and how he was not prepared to compromise, and how, as a result, he had deliverance.

It was glaringly obvious sexual errors in the established church in the 70s on the West Coast of the USA, which drove Keith Green and his wife Melody to take a totally inflexible line towards sin. The title of his biography written by his widow, was "No Compromise".

In it, one can read pretty graphic descriptions of corruption among the faculty at Oral Roberts University when a senior member of staff publicly discouraged a young man from repenting homosexuality at an altar call at which he had confessed his sin.

Do we not see this level of compromise, and worse, in our country,

where what the public perceives to be “The Church” openly accepts as ministers in good standing, and their supervisors too, those who cohabit in unmarried hetero-sexual and in homosexual relationships, flaunting their sin quite openly?

My opinion is that there is not much further that the church established by Jesus can fall - , the church against which scripture tells us “the gates of hell shall not prevail”. We should note that Jesus did not promise that its leadership would not be led astray, nor that all its members would not either.

*Matthew 16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

*16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*17-19 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

*22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*

*23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

Let us remember that Jesus told us the parable of both wheat and tares – corn and weeds – growing together in the kingdom until harvest time. Consider, just because every man-made church is flawed, does not mean that can not be a faithful remnant in each.

My overseas friend, Brother McKnight, writes to me in an email received this week...

*“Of one thing I am certain. There is about to be one tremendous move, and cleansing sweep of the Holy Spirit through the church, world wide.*

*The compromise that is so evident today is astonishing.*

***Things that would have never been allowed in the church of yesterday are permitted, practiced and encouraged.***

***This is Thanksgiving week here in the states and we cannot have services during the week because people will not come to church, they are too busy.***

***Somewhere along the line we got things twisted. We really should be in church and express out thankfulness there. That too will change."***

**I suspect that Joe, like me, is looking forward greatly to being taken home. I'll be honest, that day cannot come soon enough for me. I have absolutely no fear of death. It is the dying process that worries me; I am a born coward and have a low pain threshold.**

**I remember from 50 years ago when I served in the Royal Air Force, there was a stupid saying, coined by those who towards the end of the war used to say...**

**"Roll on death... demob is too far off".**

**Demob is a short form of "Demobilised" or "Demobilisation" – the end of the indefinite enlistment in the military during wartime.**

**That needs explaining, because these days very few people are acquainted with matters military, and often they would not choose to enter the service voluntarily these days... and would object if they were drafted, because it infringed upon their liberty.**

**In my day it WAS a service. A service to your country, where we willingly served our country-folk, to ensure a fortunate life for those of this current generation who followed us, a generation who now seem to take it all with outstretched hands and then demand more, a generation often called the "Baby Boomers". Surprisingly to me, the generation after that, and those at school now are more understanding and accepting the concept of going to war to protect posterity, and are appreciative of those who did.**

**You know that is also what the gospel is all about. Service to others. Not putting ourselves first, and then being prepared to make what euphemistically is called the "Supreme Sacrifice".**

**November 11<sup>th</sup> is known round the world as "Remembrance Day" where the war dead, and the injured and maimed are remembered.**

**It was at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh**

month in 1918, that both the victors and the vanquished together sat down around a long table in a railway carriage in France. They signed the document that brought to an end the first World War, euphemistically described as being the “War to end all Wars”.

*“They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall weary them not, nor the years condemn; at the going  
down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them.  
Lest we forget”*

Brother McKnight posted the following as part of his November 11<sup>th</sup> daily devotional, which I find interesting, giving the current world scene...

*“We are such spiritual paupers. So comfortable with the knowledge that we have been saved. So satisfied with the ritual of church attendance once or twice a week. Smug in the fact that we have enough religion to make us different from all those poor sinners.*

*There is nothing in life like those moments of time when we have made our way into the SECRET PRESENCE OF THE MOST HIGH. The ecstasy, the gladness, the blessing of His glorious presence exceeds all other joyous occasions which may occur in this life.*

*The thrill of His glorious presence can only be experienced for oneself. There are not enough words in all the languages of the world to express fully the glory of His presence.”*

*“BEHOLD, HE STANDS AT THE DOOR KNOCKING.  
Mind you, this is not the door of the sinner's heart but the door of the church, the Laodicean church at that.*

*The church which more than any of the others is indicative of the last day church. The church which will be rebuked of the Lord, chastened by Him, and commanded to repent.*

*All this as a sign of His love; acts of love that are little understood by a generation which has never been corrected in such a manner. His purpose being to lead them to repentance that He might fellowship and feast with His own. Rev. 3:20-2”*

*20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup*

*with him, and he with me.*

**21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.**

**22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

**We recall Brother McKnight wrote in his notes that...**

**The call, the invitation for salvation has gone out to every generation and every nation. No one who responds will in any manner be excluded. Jesus experienced death for EVERY MAN. Therefore all are included in the plan of salvation. Not that all shall be saved, but all COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED. The provision has been made for ALL.**

**So, to go back to my opening statement. Maybe I could rephrase it.**

**My name is Richard Ashton. I'm a sinner.**

**Help from others is useless, I shall always stay that way.**

**Fortunately I am saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Are you?**

**Therefore I don't need any others; I trust on Him alone, and not in my own strength, nor that of any mortal being.**

**Do you?**

**Lord, you know each of our hearts. We ask You to affirm to us, deep down in our hearts, that we have genuinely said "yes, please", and "thank you" to Jesus for His gift to us of salvation, and that we are dinkum, we genuinely mean it when we say we accept Jesus' sacrifice absolutely and totally for ourselves.**