

The Christian and Psychology

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THE CHRISTIAN AND PSYCHOLOGY

By any standard psychology has had a major impact upon the Christian community during the past thirty years. Whether that impact has been positive, negative or simply neutral is often the topic of hot debate. Evangelicals seem to have been polarized into one of three or four camps:

- Integrationists believe that since all truth is God's truth the integration of scriptural truth with psychological "truth" is no big problem. As long as psychological "truth" does not contradict the Bible it can be trusted. The Narramores as well as Minirth and Meier would be good representatives of this camp. See Bruce Narramore's book, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*.
- Nonintegrationists, on the other hand, believe that it is impossible to integrate God's Word with the psychological views of man. They insist that the Bible and psychology have no common ground. In this camp would be Jay Adams, the Bobgans, and Jim Owen. An excellent book defending this position is Owen's book, *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word*.
- A third view would separate biblical truth from psychological truth and make no attempt to reconcile the two. The idea behind this position is that the Scriptures deal with spiritual and theological issues, while psychology handles mental and psychological problems that are outside the scope of the Bible. If one has a spiritual problem they should turn to the Bible; if one has a problem such as anxiety, guilt, self-acceptance, insecurity, etc. they should turn to psychology.
- Then there are those who would claim to be biblical counselors who simply borrow the best that psychology has to offer without actually integrating it with the Word. Larry Crabb takes this approach which he calls "spoiling the Egyptians" (*Effective Biblical Counseling*, p. 47-56). The

following is what Crabb has spoiled from the Egyptians (secular psychologists) that he feels is necessary to his system. As can readily be seen, Crabb is an integrationist whether he accepts that title or not:

Man is responsible (Glasser) to believe truth which will result in responsible behaviour (Ellis) that will provide him with meaning, hope (Frankl) and love (Fromm) and will serve as a guide (Adler) to effective living with others as a - self and other - accepting person (Harris) who understands himself (Freud) who appropriately expresses himself (Perls), and who knows how to control himself (Skinner) (ibid. p. 56).

As we write this paper, we realize that Christian Psychology has become somewhat of a "sacred cow." As Jim Owens states in *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word*, "The presuppositions and counseling methods of psychology have become so integrated into evangelical thinking at every level that to venture criticism is to invite wrath and censure. The 'discovered' truths practiced by 'Christian' psychology are fast approaching the status once reserved for Scripture." Yet, it is important that we analyze that movement in the light of the Word.

What is Psychology

The word itself means the study of the soul. Minirth and Meier give a broader definition in their *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling*, "Psychology is the scientific study of the behaviour of organism. Basically psychologists try to find out what makes people tick and how their minds work. Psychology might be thought of as the study of how living creatures are able to interact with their environment and each other, and how they cope successfully or unsuccessfully with that environment" (p. 15). In other words, psychology is the study of how people live, why they do what they do and what can be done to help them live better. These subjects, by the way, are addressed rather directly by the Scriptures; yet Christian psychologists minimize this truth. For example Minirth and Meier say, "One would hardly expect to find material related to the field of psychology within the Scriptures, except where they directly

illustrate or discuss a particular aspect of human behaviour" (Ibid., p. 16). So, while the Bible claims to be sufficient to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15, 16) and to provide, through the knowledge of Christ, everything that we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4), Christian psychologists inform us that psychology and Scriptures do not even deal with the same issues. How sad that would be if it were true, especially since modern psychology is barely 100 years old. Were the believers before the era of psychology without resources for dealing with life and its problems? Are we to believe that God neglected to include instructions on handling life's difficulties through the inspired authors of Scripture, instead waited until recently to reveal those instructions to godless men such as Freud, Jung, and Rogers? We find this hard to believe and in direct contradiction to the Bible's claim of sufficiency.

It is very important to understand that when we speak of psychology we are not talking about a cohesive body of belief, but a wide range of opinion and theory, it is estimated that there are today over 250 major psychological philosophies and thousands of systems within these. Of course the many theories are often in conflict. So, when we speak of psychology we have to clarify which system we are talking about. Although there are many psychological systems, the big three are psychoanalysis, behaviourism, and humanism.

The following chart will demonstrate their distinctions in contrast with the Scriptures.

SURVEY OF COUNSELING METHODS

Item	Psychoanalytic	Behaviouristic	Humanist	Biblical Counseling
Other Names	Depth Psychology/Psychic Determinism		Third Force	Nouthetic Counseling
Leader(s)	Freud/Jung/Minirth & Meier	Skinner/Watson/Dobson/Maslow	Rogers/Allport/Malow/Adler/Ellis/Crabb	Adams/Bohgan
Man (Anthropology)	Instinctual animal	Conditioned animal	Basically good	Created by God/image of God
	id – basic instincts	Evolved, dependent, & determined by environment	Potential internal	Original sin @ Fall
	Superego – learned conscience	Experimental determinism	Mature like a flower	To be what God wants him to be
	Ego – reality oriented decision maker			
Problem	Conflict between id and superego	Environmental conditioning	Social Environment hinders realizing of potential	Fallen sinner by choice
	Poor socialization Denial			Has sinned against God
Responsibility	Not man's – but other's	Not man's – but the environment	Not man's – but responsible only to himself	Man's – but with dependence on God
	Victim, not a violator			
Guilt	False	Unnecessary – eliminated by reconditioning	Unnecessary	Real – because of willful choice to disobey God's standard

Treatment (General)	Free id/Side with id	Restructure environment	Help realize potential	Justification by faith
	Ignore superego/find source	Reconditioning by the expert	Reflect – focus on feelings, not facts	Sanctification/Biblical change by Spirit and Word
	Resocialization by the expert	Operant conditioning	Resources in self	Teaching the Word & correct doctrine
	Control ('support" & drugs), no cure		Find answers within oneself with therapist's unconditional acceptance & positive regard	
Treatment of Guilt	Shift blame Label as false	Change standard	Solution within Love yourself	Focus on facts (guilt real) Deal with sin (personal responsibility)
			Become self-actualized	
Counselor	Expert	Technician/Clinician	Mirror (Feeling centered)	Biblicist
Techniques	Role play	Reward/Punishment	Client-centered, nondirective therapy	Training in Godliness through the Word
	Hypnosis to past lives	Aversive controls for behaviour modification	Listening	Transforming by renewing of mind.
	Scream therapy Dream analysis Free association Transactional analysis Ventilation of anger	Glasser reality therapy	T-groups Gestalt est Sensitivity training	Prayer Teaching
Element of Truth	"People do exert significant influence upon one another."	"Environment is of great influence upon man." "There is a need for a disciplined reward/punishment structure"	"Man does have resources that he can tap" (but not apart from the will of God discerned by the Holy spirit.)	The entire Word – all elements of God's Word are truth

As can be seen in the above illustration, the approaches to our problems differ widely depending upon which model you follow. Psychology, which follows the medical model, teaches that "mental" problems are really an illness. They have come upon a person, just as the flu might, and therefore are not the person's fault. Since the person cannot help themselves they need take no responsibility for their actions, and can look for someone or something else to blame. For example, a man with a bad temper can blame his anger on his abusive father. Rooted deep in his "sub conscience" is a resentment and bitterness toward this father (which he may not even recognize) that is now being "acted out" in his own temper tantrums. Unfortunately, the man does not know this. So, he attempts to curb his anger through prayer and Bible reading, but it does no good. What he needs is a psychological expert to uncover the root forces behind his behaviour. When he discovers that he is an angry man because of his father he can blame his problems on dad, and feel better about himself. Once all of this has happened (which could take years) he will begin behaving better, or so the theory goes.

The biblical approach, however, is that our man is responsible for his own actions. While it is true that he may have copied bad behaviour from his father, and while it is true that his past will affect his present, nevertheless, this is no excuse for sinful actions. It is not necessary for this man to understand all that has happened in his past, nor is helpful for him to blameshift. He must take responsibility for his own actions, confess his sins and seek to change according to biblical principles.

It might be useful at this point to mention several other fundamental differences between psychology and Scripture:

- **DIFFERENCE IN FOCUS:** Scripture is God-centered, psychology is man-centered. The Bible teaches that our purpose in life is to glorify God. Therefore, everything else is subjugated to that purpose. Psychology being, man-centered, has as its highest goal the happiness of the individual.

- **DIFFERENCE IN VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE:** One of the gravest flaws of psychology is its anthropology. Psychology teaches that human nature is basically good, or at least neutral. The only reason that people misbehave, is because of outside forces (such is society or parents) that harm them. This being the case, when a psychologist is counseling a person as behaving inappropriately; they must find the source of the pain and eliminate it. Scripture teaches, however, that people misbehave because they are sinners with a flawed and depraved nature.
- **DIFFERENCE IN VIEW OF VALUES:** The Bible teaches absolutes. There are rights and wrongs in this world. Psychology teaches relativism. I can have my views and you can have yours, but by all means, I must not push my values upon you. The implications for counseling are obvious.
- **DIFFERENCE IN OUR SOURCE FOR ANSWERS:** Psychology teaches that the individual has the answers within themselves. The job of the counselor is to help the counselee discover these answers. The Bible says that the answers are found within Scripture as revealed by God.
- **DIFFERENCES IN METHODOLOGY;** Most forms of psychology teach that the key to personal problems lies somewhere in our past. The Bible always deals with us in the present. As a result, God can command us to stop being angry or anxious immediately, without looking for root causes found in the past.

DOES PSYCHOLOGY WORK?

The real issue is never whether something works, but whether it is biblical. However, the "success" of psychology should at least be addressed. If one were to listen uncritically to both the secular and Christian media, they would be convinced of the

effectiveness of psychology. It is all but exalted as the saviour of modern man, but the studies do not bear this out. A few years ago Bernie Zilbergeld, a well-known unsaved psychologist, wrote a book exposing the ineffectiveness of his field. The book was entitled *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change* (an excerpt can also be found in *Leadership*, Vol. 5 #1 pp. 87-91). The following is a synopsis of his thoughts:

Zilbergeld claimed that there were eight myths of modern psychology. After listing each myth we will summarize his critique of that myth. Keep in mind that the majority of *Leadership's* authors and readers would be supportive of "Christian Psychology."

- There is one best therapy. --Actually about the same result can be expected regardless of which therapy is used.
- Counseling is equally effective for all problems -- In general it works best for the less serious, less persistent difficulties. For instance it does not work well for depression, addictions or schizophrenia.
- Behaviour change is therapy's most common outcome. -- Actually behaviour change is not common, however, the client often feels better simply because he has been listened to, understood, cared for and valued. I.e. the client has received in counseling what they are looking for in a good relationship with people.
- Great changes are the rule. - The evidence is overwhelming that fundamental changes are rare. The typical change is far more modest and very far from the claims that are bandied about. In short, cures in therapy are not common.
- The longer the therapy, the better the results. The fact is that no relationship between results and duration of counseling has been demonstrated. However, it is positive for the counselor's finances.
- Therapy changes are permanent or at least long lasting. - Relapse rates of over fifty percent are

common and in the case of addictions over ninety percent.

- At worst, counseling is harmless. -- One study of encounter groups found that sixteen percent of the participants were worse off as a direct result of being in the group.
- One course of therapy is the rule for most clients. - One of the most consistent and important effects of counseling is a desire for more counseling.

Zilbergeld then draws this conclusion:

The message conveyed in therapy and in the culture at large is that if you experience almost any form of discontent, you should get expert assistance.... This is unfortunate, because many clients are going to be disappointed, for two reasons. First, there is absolutely no evidence that professional therapists have any special knowledge of how to change behaviour, or that they obtain better results - with any type of client or problem - than those with little or no formal training. In other words, most people can probably get the same kind of help from friends, relatives, or others that they get from therapists. Second, as we have seen, people are not all that easy to change; we simply cannot alter our lives in the ways we now think we want to (Ibid., p. 92).

Gary Collins, well-known Christian psychologist who teaches an integrational approach, amazingly agrees. He says that during the past thirty years, literally thousands of research studies have examined the effectiveness of psychology and have demonstrated that what Zilbergeld reports are true (Ibid., p. 93).

A *Time Magazine* article entitled "The Assault on Freud" (Nov. 29, 1993) highlighted, "A spate of new books attacking Freud and his brainchild psychoanalysis for a generous array of errors, duplicities, fudged evidence and scientific howlers" (p. 47). In the article one scholar dealing with the major tenets of

Freudianism said that they, "All are undermined by Freud's failure to prove a causal relationship between the repression and the pathology. That's why the foundation of psychoanalysis is very wobbly" (p. 49). The concluding thought from the article is "What Freud bequeathed was not (despite his arguments to the contrary), nor has yet proved itself to be, a science. Psychoanalysis and all its offshoots may in the final analysis turn out to be no more reliable than phrenology or mesmerism or any of the countless other pseudosciences that once offered unsubstantiated answers or false solace" (p. 51). This is a damaging statement from a liberal secular magazine of *Time's* status for all those claiming that psychology is a science.

Psychology's Influence upon Christianity

In light of the above comments it might seem odd that Christians have taken such an interest in psychology, but they have. *Christianity Today* says, "Right now evangelicals are swimming in psychology like a bird dog in a lake; they hardly seem to realize how much has changed (in Christianity over the last thirty years). They certainly do not feel in danger. But there is danger..." (*Christianity Today*, May 17, 1993*, p. 31). Christianity and psychology both deal with the issue of how to live; yet, they come at it from different angles, draw different conclusions, and basically are not compatible.

So why has psychology had such an influence upon Christianity in the last 30 years? We might suggest several reasons. First, Satan is always busy attempting to undermine the authority of God's Word. The first recorded temptation in the Garden of Eden was to doubt the Word of God (Gen. 3:1), and this has been Satan's focus ever since. Today, virtually every error found in the Christian ranks can be traced back to some form of rejection of the Bible as God's final authority. It may be pragmatism (which adds success to the Bible); mysticism (which adds experience); tradition (which adds the past); legalism (which adds man's rules); or philosophy such as psychology (which adds man's wisdom). The end result is all the same: The Word of God takes a back seat to the

inventions of men.

Secondly, there is very little understanding or desire for biblical truth and theology today. The Bible is not being expounded in many pulpits today. Christian radio saturates the airwaves with talk shows and pop-psychology. Christian magazines aimed at the laymen are full of testimonies but devoid of solid spiritual food, and far too few believers study the Word for themselves. As a result, we are a spiritually starved people who are no longer able to discern truth from error. So, when an appealing error such as psychology rears its head we are all too ready to accept it as being from God.

Thirdly, seemingly good and respected Christian institutions and leaders support a Scripture/psychology blend. Some of our finest Seminaries, Bible schools, and mission organizations promote "Christian psychology." Numerous para church organizations have sprung up with the primary purpose of spreading this error. Is it any wonder that the average believer is confused?

Finally, confusion over the concept of, "All truth is God's truth." This has become the battle cry of those who wish to integrate psychology with Scripture. The idea runs like this: God is the author of all truth, therefore, whenever truth is discovered, we can be sure that it is from God. If mathematical and scientific truth can be discovered apart from the Word of God, why can't psychological truth be found and accepted in the same way. In reply we could make several observations: 1) There is a difference between facts and truth. Two plus two equals four, that is a fact, but it is not truth in the sense in which the Bible uses truth. Note that Jesus claimed to be "truth" (John 14:6). In other words, we must be careful that we define our terms properly. 2) Apart from the verification of God's Word the observations of mankind can never be proven as "true." For example, many medical and scientific "facts" or "truths" will be proven wrong in the future. To place the observations of mankind, in any field, on par with God's truth is a mistake. Infallible truth is found only in the Scriptures. 3) The Bible does

not claim to be a textbook on maths or medicine or science. When it speaks on these issues it is accurate, but these things are not its focus. The Bible does, however, claim to be a textbook on living, the same claim made by psychology. Scriptures declare itself to be able to equip us to live life in such a way as to please God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:3). To imply that the Word of God is inadequate to teach us how to live in this world is to deny its power and sufficiency.

However, even though psychology has made great inroads into Christianity, this does not mean that there is unanimity among Christian psychologists. As a matter of fact there is no such thing as a branch of psychology known as "Christian psychology." Instead, what we find is a variety of ways that various types of secular psychology have been integrated with Christianity. Below we will briefly overview the systems espoused by some of the prominent individuals in the field of Christian psychology:

Overview of the Teachings of Various Christian Psychologists

All of the men mentioned below believe in and promote many good causes and biblical concepts. We do not doubt that these individuals are believers, nor do we attempt to judge their motives. As far as we know, they all love the Lord and desire to minister to His people. Yet, the God who warns us not to judge motives (1 Corinthians 4:3-5), calls us to be discerners of what is being taught in His name (Titus 1:9). The purpose of this section is to draw attention to some areas in which "Christian psychologists" have departed from the teachings of Scripture.

Bruce Narramore:

He is basically Rogerian (see chart on p. 3) with some Christian principles. In *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*, Bruce Narramore says: "All truth is God's truth, wherever it is found" (p. 13). "There is no distinctly Christian theory or model or research (of psychology)" (p. 15), "The

church has the responsibility to respond to the claims of psychology by restudying, clarifying, reaffirming, enlarging, or correcting its understanding" (p. 19). Air of this clarifying and correcting will, of course, be in light of newly discovered psychological "truth" outside of the Bible.

With this philosophy in mind we are not surprised to find this statement from Bruce Narramore, "Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-esteem" (*You're Someone Special*, p. 22).

Gary Collins:

In his book, *Can You Trust Psychology?* Collins mentions these thoughts: Psychology is a God-given field of knowledge enabling us to more adequately help people who live in a society permeated with change and complexity unknown in the days of Jesus and Paul (p. 91). "God has allowed us to discover psychological techniques and insights that He has not chosen to reveal in the Bible" (pp. 96, 97). "The Word of God never claims to have all the answers to all of life's problems" (p. 97). One of the problems for which Scripture has no answer is our basic human desire for self-fulfillment and a positive self-image (pp. 144-146). (Of course, Scripture does not give us an answer for this problem because it is not a need that God has placed in our hearts. Rather, it is one of those psychological "truths" that God has chosen apparently to reveal outside of His Word, and that to ungodly men.)

Since Collins clearly supported the integrational position throughout his book, we are surprised to find this statement toward the end: "It is too early to answer decisively if psychology and Christianity can be integrated" (p. 130). This is an amazing answer to Collins' own question, "Can you trust psychology?" In essence, he does not know; yet, uncertainty does not keep him, and other Christian psychologists, from flooding the Christian market with psychological answers to life's problems.

James Dobson:

Dobson teaches many unbiblical and unscientific faddish ideas such as the Freudian theory that our lives are basically set by age six; the right-brain, left-brain myth; the birth-order pop-psychology; and new age mind over matter. His fundamental teaching, however, has to do with self-esteem. His ideas on this subject do not originate in Scripture because they are not found in Scripture, but rather in the humanistic teachings of Adler, Fromm, Maslow and Rogers.

Dobson's beliefs concerning our need for a good self-image can be found in all of his books and on virtually every radio broadcast of "Focus on the family." His famous illustration of Lee Harvey Oswald (Hide or Seek, p. 18) explains his views well. In *Prophets of Psychoheresy* 11| the authors sum it up this way: "Dobson's description of Oswald's life reveals a psychological viewpoint influenced by underlying ideologies of the Freudian unconscious, Adlerian inferiority, and the humanistic belief in the intrinsic goodness of man and the universal victimization of the individual by parents and society. The culprit is society (mainly parents) and the diagnosis is low self-esteem with feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. In fact, those feelings are presented as overwhelming and uncontrollable and thus cause rebellion. Therefore the universal solution to personal problems, rebellion, unhappiness, and hostility presented throughout Dobson's books is raising self-esteem" (pp. 24, 25).

The following quote from *What Wives Wished Their Husbands Knew About Women*, states well Dobson's system, "If I could write a prescription for the women of the world, it would provide each one of them with a healthy dose of self-esteem and personal worth (taken three times a day until the symptoms disappear). I have no doubt that this is their greatest need" (p. 35).

Larry Crabb:

In *Understanding People*, Crabb states, "It is my view that counseling models must demonstrate more than consistency

with Scripture; they must in fact emerge from it" (p. 29). Yet, at the same time he believes in what he calls "spoiling the Egyptians," (see p. 1 of this booklet) i.e. taking the best from secular psychology and combining it with Christianity (something that not even Collins is sure can be done).

But as Martin Bobgan says, "Glasser's responsibility has nothing to do with God or His measure of right and wrong; Ellis equates godlessness with mental health; the hope Fankl gives is not a sure hope because it is man-centered; the love of Fromm is a far cry from the love that Jesus teaches and gives; Adler's guide is self rather than God; Harris' acceptance disregards God's law; Freud hardly understood himself and he repudiated God; Perl's expression focuses on feelings and self; and Skinner's methods of self-control work better with animals than humans.

Why not give credit where credit is due? To the Lord and His Word! Why not look to God's Word concerning responsibility, truth, meaning, hope, love, guidance for effective living, understanding oneself, expression and self-control instead of rummaging around in the broken cisterns of the opinions of unredeemed men" (Prophets of Psychoheresy 1, p. 134)?

Freud and Adler play a major role in the way Crabb views man. Freud taught that we each are controlled by a reservoir of drives and impulses that he called the unconscious. This is the basic theme of *Inside Out*, as Crabb instructs us to enter the dark regions of the soul to find light (p. 32). While in the dark cave of the soul, we are to explore the imperfection of key relationships until we experience deep disappointment (p. 107). This self-induced confusion and disappointment supposedly leads to an awareness of our sin of self-protection to love (p. 196).

Adler, on the other hand, taught that behaviour is directed to the goal of overcoming inferiority and thereby gaining a sense of worthwhileness in both relationships and tasks in life. It is

from Adler that Crabb develops his theory that our behaviour is motivated by needs for worthwhileness (deep longings) through security (relationships) and significance (impact) (see Bobgan, p. 132).

But as biblical counselor Wendell Miller says, "Light is not found in the dark regions of our souls but in Jesus (John 14:6) and His Word (Psalm 1 19:130). Christian growth is not achieved by self-awareness but instead, it is a work of God (Philippians 1:6, 2:13) in which the believer obediently does 'of His good pleasure.' "

Minirth & Meier

In the writings and broadcast ministries of these men, as with the Christian psychologists mentioned above, ***much of their teachings do not emerge from Scripture but can be traced to secular psychologists.*** If you would like to be a Freudian with a biblical facade, Minirth and Maier would be a good choice.

Note the following views, **not found in Scripture but found in Freud, that are taught by these men:**

1. Depression is anger.
2. The existence of the unconscious mind (in *Happiness Is a Choice* they equated "heart" in Jeremiah 17:9 with "unconscious," no lexicon would agree).
3. In *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling* (p. 298) they said, "One can see in Paul's writings to early Christians some of the ideas later developed by Sigmund Freud (id, superego, ego)."
4. At least partially believe in Oedipus Complex (see *Happiness* pp. 80-97).
5. Believe in dream analysis (in *Happiness*, pp. 1 14, 1 15 they say, "In our dreams all of our current unconscious conflicts are symbolized. Every dream has symbolic meaning. Dreams are usually unconscious wish fulfillments in symbolic form").
6. Believe in unconscious defense mechanism.
7. Teach that 85% of adult behaviour patterns are set by

their sixth birthday.

8. Often recommend insight therapy (in the *Psychotherapy Handbook* it says, "the history of insight psychotherapy can be traced to Freud").

In addition to the source of their information, Minirth and Meier often make statements that they claim to be fact that do not even have a basis in research. For example, in *Happiness* they say, "Holding grudges depletes certain brain chemicals and therefore results in depression. Forgiveness restores those chemicals." The first statement is unproven and the second is unheard of in research. Another is that homosexuality is a result of an absent father, while lesbianism is a result usually of an absent or hostile mother and, by Freudian necessity, before the age of six (see Bobgan, p. 303).

THE BIBLICAL ALTERNATIVE

It should be obvious by this point that we believe that secular psychology and biblical Christianity are totally incompatible. At the same time we want to clearly state that we are not against counseling that is in alignment with the Scriptures. The Bible is full of instruction concerning counseling, advising, admonishing, warning, rebuking, etc. (see Romans 15:14. Psalm 1; the book of Proverbs for example). However, we find that counseling is not to be left to the professionals but is simply part of the life of the body of Christ. We do not doubt that some have greater gifts, experience, and knowledge in this area than others, but tremendous counsel can be given by any believer that knows their Bible. It might be helpful to point out some of the characteristics of true biblical counseling:

- Biblical counseling teaches that truth **emerges** from the Bible. Integrationists claim that they do not contradict the Bible, but we do not believe that is enough. Instead, all truth concerning "life and godliness" must emerge from the Word.
- Biblical counseling teaches that our standard for thinking and behaving is found in the Scriptures.

- Biblical counseling uses the principles found in the Word of God coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in thinking and behaviour.
- Biblical counseling teaches that the primary purpose of people is to glorify God with their lives. The goal of biblical counseling is not primarily to remove the trial, but to be God's kind of person, i.e. to help us become conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28, 29).
- Biblical counseling has the same goal as biblical preaching and teaching: to glorify God, evangelize the lost, and disciple believers.

HOW WE CHANGE AND GROW

The need for change and growth: The characteristics of spiritual immaturity are found in such passages as Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians. 3:5, 8, 9 and 2 Timothy 3:2-7. God tells us in these and other Scriptures that we should expect people not living God's way to be unstable and easily deceived, guilty, selfish, divisive people who love wrong things, gossips, lack self-control, angry at life, liars and deceivers, etc. However, to live this way will result in a host of what many call today emotional and psychological problems. If people are enslaved to such sins why should it surprise us that they feel unloved, paranoid, anxious, burnt-out, hatred, depressed, nervous and so forth.

The problems that people face today are real, and the psychological world often recognizes this fact. However, based on a faulty anthropology, psychologists will never discover the true source of people's problems. Therefore, they cannot offer genuine, lasting help. If you recall, psychology teaches that man is basically good or at least neutral. In addition, it teaches that people have the answer to their problems deep within themselves and it is the psychologist's job to help them discover those answers. Also, most psychologists believe that there is only one real value, and that is that there exists **no values**. Therefore, psychologists do not press upon their patients any values or objective truths. It is easy to discern then, that the foundation stones of all modern psychology

contradict the Scriptures which teach that:

- Mankind is lost, morally depraved, basically evil sinners who neither desire nor seek life or righteousness (Ephesians 2).
- Our hearts (intellect, emotion, will) are distorted and corrupt. The only answers deep within us are those that will deceive and disappoint us (Jeremiah 17:9).
- God has given us eternal, objective values in Scripture that are to rule and govern our lives. To reject these values not only results in eternal consequences, but in the types of problems for which people are seeking therapy.

If we are to handle the problems that we face in a way that pleases God, we must grow spiritually (2 Peter 1:5-8., James 1:2-5) through obedience to the Word of God, (Colossians 3:16., Acts 20:32., 2 Timothy 3:16,17) as we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives (Galatians 5:16, 22-25). (Also see Hebrews 5:12-14.)

FAULTY VIEWS OF SANCTIFICATION

The confusion caused by secular psychology aside, another major problem for the Christian is a wrong doctrine of growth. The classic example is Wesleyan Perfectionism, originating with John Wesley and taught by many branches of Christianity.

Wesley taught that the sin nature may be eradicated at a crisis experience with the result that we can reach sinless perfection in this life. At that point through an all-surrendering act of faith, we will cease our struggles with sin, with living for God, etc. In the 1800's Charles Finney and the Keswick movement's "Let go and let God," as well as the Methodist preachers, would popularize this view of Christian growth. However, the *New Testament does not teach any form of instant maturity*. We are sure that the Apostle Paul would be very surprised to discover that entire sanctification (or anything close to it) was possible in this life in light of his testimony in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

Unfortunately, many who would reject this Wesleyan doctrine have been greatly influenced by it. Christians everywhere are looking for an experience that will make the Christian life easy or bring them to perfection. In the Fundamentalist and evangelical circles we call this a "rededication" or "total commitment" with the implication that once-and-for-all we can turn our lives over to God and never waver again. Yet, Jesus tells us that there is a constant choice (Luke 9:23), and Paul says we will always be in a battle (Ephesians 6:10-18). **Many of us do not want to do the hard work necessary for growth**; we would rather be given supernatural power in the form of an instantaneous endowment that would immediately change us. We find ourselves doing the same thing when it comes to decision-making. How much easier it would be to do what we "feel the Spirit" wants us to do, rather than endure the hard work of Bible study and the application of scriptural principles.

If we are to deal with the problems and opportunities of life God's way, we must change and grow. In order to change and grow, we must understand that the Bible does not teach instant maturity. It does not teach that there is a "second blessing" whereby we become holy or spiritual. So what does the Bible say about change and growth?

The New Testament teaches that there are five parts to biblical sanctification:

1. The **activity of the Godhead**. The Father (John 15:1-2); the Son (John 15:4, 5); the Spirit (11 Corinthians 3:18). Systems that ignore God, may produce outward change, but not spiritual maturity. Self-help groups such as AA are an example.
2. The **activity of man**. There are no commands in Scripture addressed to the Holy Spirit in regards to our spiritual growth, but notice this sampling of commands given to the believer: 2 Corinthians 7: 1; Ephesians 4: 1; 4:22-24; 1 Timothy 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1

Corinthians 9:24-27.

3. The **Word of God**. Change in our behaviour or feelings must begin in our thinking. Therefore it is imperative that our minds be renewed (Romans 12:1, 2; Ephesians 4:23). This renewal can only take place through the Word of God (Hebrews 5:11-14). A true renewal in our thinking will lead to changed behaviour and feelings (Philippians 4:8, 9; Ephesians 4:22-24). Any systems that leave out the Word of God leave us at the mercy of our own hearts (Jeremiah 17:9) which will lead us astray (Proverbs 14:12).
4. **Time** - it is a gradual process. Many long for instant change, but growth takes time (Hebrews 5:1 1-14).
5. **Effort** is required by the believer. This balances the activity of God on our behalf. That God is actively involved in our growth is true, but that the believer must be actively involved is just as true. This balance is perfectly taught in Philippians 2:12, 13. Other passages include: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - "race," "self-control" and "buffet"; Ephesians 6:10-12 - "be strong," "put on," "struggle," "take up" and "stand firm;" and 2 Timothy 4:6,7 - "fight" and "course." (Adapted from *The Doctrine of Spiritual Growth* by William W. Goode.)

A good study would be of the first eleven verses of 2 Peter. In verses 1-4, we find the activity of the Godhead granting us everything we need for salvation and godly living. God's activity is followed by teaching concerning the appropriation of God's gifts by the believer (verses 5-7). That this is possible only through the knowledge of Christ as found in the Word is emphasized in verse three. However, growth will take time, and Peter teaches this truth in verse eight when he speaks of Christian qualities increasing. Still, all of this requires effort, and so we are told to be "diligent" (verses 5, 10) about our growth towards maturity.

THE GROWTH PROCESS

The New Testament teaches that there are several basic things that a believer must understand in order to grow in

godliness. We must first **understand that we are a new creature in Christ** (Ephesians 2:1-6; Romans 6:11). Next, we must **understand the nature of temptation**. Temptation comes from the world, the flesh and the devil (James 1:13-15; 1 John 2:15, 16; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:13,14). A believer can, however, overcome temptation by God's strength (Matthew 4:2-11; 1 Corinthians 10:13), through the proper use of God's Word (Matthew 4:2-11; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We must then **understand that God's purpose for our lives is to glorify and please Him as He works to conform us into the image of Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 8:28,29). When we understand this, it will enable us to set proper priorities. Last of all, we must **comprehend that God expects obedience**. This obedience is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16; John 15:7, 8; Philippians 4:13), as we **present our bodies to God for His will to be done** (Romans 12:1, 2) Romans 6:12, 13) and **learn the "put-off put-on, renewal of your mind" principle**, as found in Ephesians 4:22-24.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF-IMAGE

Few would disagree with the following statement: How people think of themselves will to a large degree determine how they will think of others, how they will think of God, how they will obtain and maintain all their relationships, and how they will make decisions. There is no area of life that will not be directly or indirectly affected by the way we view ourselves. However, there are two vastly different views on the subject of self-image:

THE UNBIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF-IMAGE, SELF-WORTH, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-LOVE

The basic teaching in pop-psychology today is that people in general have a low self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, self-love, etc. They do not think that they are very good, they do not love themselves, they do not accept themselves the way they are, they lack self-confidence, etc. People behave poorly because they view themselves in this manner. If people could improve their self-image, then they would feel better about themselves and perform better in life. Everyone, of course, has a bad self-image, there are however, varying degrees. Also, since people do not want others to know how badly they perceive themselves, they tend to cover up their poor self-image with different methods: some with shyness — so that people will not catch on to how bad they really are. Others may show-off trying to prove that they are really okay.

In order to get a feel for what is actually being taught, let's look at what some of today's self-image proponents, both in secular and Christian circles, are saying:

"If I could write a prescription for the women of the world, I would provide each of them with a healthy dose of self-esteem and personal worth. ...I have no

doubt that this is their greatest need" (James Dobson, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women*, p35).

"Feeling good about ourselves may in fact, be the cornerstone of our total well being" (Barnett, Baruch and Rivers, "The Secret of Self Esteem," *The Ladies Home Journal*, Feb. 1984, p54).

"Mothers who choose to obtain abortions do so because of too little self-esteem, not too much" (Philip A. Captain, *Eight Stages of Christian Growth*).

"Lack of self-esteem can actually extinguish the desire to go on living" (James Dobson, *High or Seek*, p80).

"Once a person believes he is an 'unworthy sinner' it is doubtful if he can honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Christ" (Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem*, p98).

"Depression always has a loss of self-esteem in the foreground. ...Be slow to direct a depressed person to the Scriptures. . . no preaching. I would recommend a recess from church if there is preaching done in the church" (Jeff Boer, "Is Self-Esteem Proper for a Christian?" *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol 5, #4, p78).

"Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for for self-love and self-esteem" (Bruce Narramore, *You're Someone Special*, p22).

"Self-love is the prerequisite and the criterion for our conduct towards our neighbour. ...Without self-love there can be no love for others. ...You cannot love your

neighbour, you cannot love God unless you first love yourself" (Walter Trobisch, *Love Yourself*, p11).

"Actually, our ability to love God and to love our neighbour is limited by our ability to love ourselves. We cannot love God more than we love our neighbour and we cannot love our neighbour more than we love ourselves" (Captain, *Eight Stages of Christian Growth*, p157).

"Low self-esteem can lead to depression and other emotional and physical illness, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and even suicide" (Shirley Sherrif, *Contact*, Vol. II #1; Jan. 1991).

"You have to think that you are somebody if you want to maintain good mental health" (Arthur Rounder, *You Can Learn To Like Yourself*, p3).

"Self-esteem or pride in being a human being is the single greatest need facing the human race today" (Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem*, p19).

"People have one basic personal need which requires two kinds of impute for its satisfaction. The most basic need is a sense of personal worth, and acceptance of oneself as a whole, real person" (Lawrence Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling*, p80).

According to the self-image proponents: sexual promiscuity, suicide, crime, abortion, depression, poor mental health, stress, unhappiness, lack of success in life, the inability to love God and to accept His free gift of salvation, the inability to love others, and the inability to love self, are all the results of a poor self-image or low self-esteem.

What is the cure then for all of these problems? According to the self-image advocates, it is to build a good self-image (and a strong sense of self-worth) into the lives of all people. If what

they are saying is true, then we as Christians had better jump on the self-image bandwagon. As a matter of fact, if people are unable to love God and others because of a poor self-image, then building self-esteem in our children, our spouses, our unsaved friends, ourselves and the entire world should become a primary goal of the church.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF-IMAGE, SELF-WORTH, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-LOVE

The power of the human mind to deceive itself seems infinite. We need to pray Psalm 139:23,24: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way*" **often!** One study of two-hundred criminals revealed that not one of those criminals believed he was evil. Each criminal thought of himself as basically a good person even when planning a crime (*The Washington Star*, Aug. 15, 1976).

One of the Bible's major aims is to correct man's high view of himself; yet, it is now interpreted by Christian leaders to intend just the opposite. How can creatures who are constantly told (in the Word of God) that they think too highly of themselves, be convinced that their problem is in fact low self-esteem? Left to our own observations and imaginations such a thing is possible (Jer. 17:9,10: "*The heart is more deceitful than all else. . .*"), but the Bible does not cater to our self-deception, it seeks to correct it.

C.S. Lewis, writing before the self-esteem fad took off, made this interesting observation, "The child who is patted on the back for doing a lesson well, the woman whose beauty is praised by her lover, the saved soul to whom Christ says, 'well done,' is pleased and ought to be. For here the pleasure lies not in what you are but in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted (and rightly wanted) to please. The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, 'I have pleased him; all is well,' to thinking, 'what a fine person I must be to

have done it." If Lewis were to write such words today, would they be well received? I doubt it!

What do the Scriptures have to say about how we view ourselves?

Jesus taught the virtue of humility (Luke 18:14), and the importance of self-denial, rather than self-love (Matt. 16:24). The Epistles are in hearty agreement with the words of Jesus (cp. 1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 7:24; 12:3; and Phil. 2:3-8). As a matter of fact, nowhere in the Bible are we warned not to think more lowly of ourselves than we ought. Yet, there should be many such Scriptures if our problem is lack of self-esteem. There are, however, five and a half pages in the Nave's Topical Bible on the subject of pride, including Prov. 16:5,18 and 19. In addition, there are three pages on self-denial. There are no references to self-image or any word meaning the same. Only in 2 Tim. 3:2 does the concept of self-love appear, and there it is a vice (see below). ***Clearly, the Bible does not present self-esteem as man's great problem. In fact, the opposite of self-esteem, pride, is certainly stated to be a problem.***

In the New Testament, neither John the Baptist (Lk. 3:16) nor the prodigal son (Lk. 15:21) were corrected when they declared themselves unworthy. Yet Norman Wright says, "Worthiness is a feeling of 'I am good.'" If this is true, then what do we do with Jesus' statement, **'there is none good but one, that is God.'**

Note the Old Testament examples of Gideon (Jud. 6:15); Isaiah (Isa. 6:5); Amos (Amos 7:14); Job (Job 42:6); and Moses (Exod. 3:11; 4:10-13). Each of these men was used of God when they recognized the Lord's greatness and their own smallness. 2 Cor. 12:9,10 also teaches us that we find God's strength only when we recognize our own weakness.

2 Tim. 3:16,17 and 2 Pet. 1:3 explains that God's Word is sufficient to equip us to be godly people, and that everything concerning life and godliness is found in His Word. This being

the case, we must ask the question: **"Why is there no mention of self-esteem in all of the Scriptures?"**

The answer to that question surely lies in the fact that *our relationship with God is not based on our righteousness or our worth to Him, but upon His grace* (Titus 3:4-7). Rather, *we are sinners who can do nothing to impress or please God* (Rom. 3:23; 5:6-8).

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF-IMAGE AND BIBLICAL IMAGE:

GOD IN HIS WORD:

- 1) Love God & others (Mt. 22:37)
- 2) Build up others (Heb. 10:24,25)
- 3) None righteous (Rom. 3:23)
- 4) Heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9)
- 5) Put others first (Phip. 2:1-4)
- 6) Be humble (Rom. 12:3)
- 7) We are sinners (Rom. 3:10,11)
- 8) Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
- 9) Deny yourself (Mt. 16:24-26)
- 10) Put confidence in God (Phip. 4:13)

SELF-IMAGE ADVOCATES SAY:

- 1) Love yourself
- 2) Build your self-esteem
- 3) You are good
- 4) Believe in yourself
- 5) Put yourself first
- 6) Think highly of yourself
- 7) You are of great value
- 8) Do what you want to do
- 9) Find yourself
- 10) Have self-confidence

SOME FALSEHOODS ANSWERED

We must love ourselves

Self-image advocates claim that Scripture commands us to love ourselves. The main verse they use to support this claim is Matthew 22:39b which says, *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."* Based on a faulty interpretation of this passage many teachers - of the self-image theory - see this as a clear Biblical command for us to love ourselves. However, nowhere in this passage (Matth. 22:36-40) is there a command from the Lord for us to love ourselves. As a matter of fact, there is no place anywhere in Scripture where we are told to love ourselves. Instead, it is always assumed that we already love ourselves (note "as yourself" in the passage in study). Nevertheless, we are told that what Jesus meant to say, is that we have to learn to love ourselves first, before we can love

others. In other words, there are really three commandments given here (even though Jesus said that there are "two"). We are commanded to love God and our neighbour; then, Jesus concludes by saying, "*On these **two** commandments depend the whole Law. . .*" If Jesus says that there are two commandments here how dare we claim that there are three!

Ephesians 5:28,29 is another passage used by the teachers of the self-image philosophy to promote self-love. We are told that we must first learn to love ourselves before we can love our spouse, but the passage clearly states that there has never been a person who did not love himself. *Our problem has never been lack of self-love, but too much concern for self.* There is, however, one time in Scripture where self-love is mentioned: 2 Tim. 3:2. There we find the love of self at the top of a list of sins that will characterize the last days. It is interesting to note, as well, that the Greek word used for love in this verse (phileo) speaks of emotional love as opposed to self-sacrificing love (agapao) in the other passages. **In other words, the only verse in the New Testament that speaks of us loving ourselves emotionally (feeling good about ourselves, etc.) is a warning that this is a sin to avoid.**

We are Worthy of God's Love

William Kirwin in *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling* (p107) says, "It is as if Christ has said, you are of such worth to me that I am going to die; even experience Hell so that you might be adopted as My brothers and sisters." Donna Faster wrote, "Of course the greatest demonstration of a person's worth to God was shown in giving us His Son (*Building a Child's Self-Esteem*, p6). **Wrong!!** The sending of God's Son is not a demonstration of our worth, but the greatest demonstration of the love, grace, mercy and kindness of our God. The truth is that God saves us not because He sees anything of value in us, but despite the fact that there is nothing in us worthy of saving (Rom. 5:6-10; Tit. 3:4-7; Eph. 2:4-9). Such a statement wounds our pride, but it is true nevertheless.

The self-worth advocates destroy the concept of grace. **The very definition of grace is God giving us what we do not deserve.** If we are worthy of His salvation then eternal life is not a gift of grace but a reward based on our value, or good works. This is a concept totally refuted in Scripture (Eph. 2:8,9). For a person to come to Christ, they must first recognize their need for salvation. Teaching them that they are worthy in the eyes of God is to do them a terribly cruel and unbiblical injustice. The more we view ourselves Biblically the more precious the love, grace and mercy of our God becomes. *If we consider ourselves worthy of any of God's blessings we have grossly cheapened His free gift of love and grace. We are not worthy... we are mercied!*

Satan Loves It When We Think Badly of Ourselves

Self-image teachers would like us to believe that we must have a good self-image or else the devil has a strong foothold in our life. They believe that a poor self-image will keep us from recognizing our worth to God and therefore we won't accept His gift of salvation. In truth Satan doesn't care what we think about ourselves as long as we are *preoccupied with SELF*. If he can keep us wrapped up with self he can keep us from being occupied with God and others as we are instructed in Scripture (Phil. 2:3-8).

Man's problem has always been pride. From the beginning man wanted to be like God (Gen. 3:5). The devil, himself, is the author of sinful pride (Isa. 14:13,14). This kind of attitude and high opinion of himself not only got Satan kicked out of heaven and damned to eternal punishment, but it also became his favourite tool to keep from trusting in God.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF

Jay Adams in *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image* says, "While there is no concern evidenced in the

Bible about having too little self-esteem, and therefore no directions for enhancing self-esteem, God does indicate that He wants us to evaluate ourselves - so far as it is possible to do so - accurately" (p113). In Romans 12:3 Paul is instructing his readers how to evaluate themselves concerning the different gifts that God has given to them. In doing so, he provides the principle that we should use to evaluate ourselves concerning every area of our lives. In that passage, "sound judgement" means (and demands) that a reasoned judgement, based on evidence, be made. Note that Paul's warning is against thinking too highly of ourselves. He says nothing about being careful not to think too lowly of ourselves, since this is never a problem discussed in Scripture.

When we evaluate ourselves according to sound judgement what do we find? As believers we will find that God has reached down to us totally by grace to save unworthy sinners, making us a very child of God! We have been accepted by God (cp Rev. 3:4), not because we deserved it but because of God's love. We also now know, by the Scriptures, that God has uniquely equipped us to serve and minister for Him in this world and in His church. Our value is not based upon a comparison of ourselves with others (as a matter of fact that is forbidden, 2 Cor. 10:12), but upon the position that we have in Christ and the gifts with which He has equipped us to live for Him.

As Christians, are we supposed to think badly about ourselves? Not at all! The Scriptural position is that we are to focus on God and others, not ourselves (Matt. 22:36-40; Phil. 2:3-8). Any preoccupation with self (either in thinking too highly or too lowly), is an unbiblical response to God's Word. Scripture starts from the position that we already love ourselves and commands us to love others equally. As a matter of fact, we are to put the interest of others before our own (Philippians. 2:3,4).

RESEARCH

Most would assume that since both the secular and Christian segments of our society have jumped on the self-image train, apparently the scientific research has revealed that low self-esteem is rampant and the need to build a good self-image is paramount. Such is not the case. As a matter of fact, most research has shown that both children and adults in our society actually esteem themselves too highly. In addition, there appears to be no correlation between self-image and behaviour. The following are some such examples:

- The findings of the College Board (through surveys taken from millions of high school seniors who take its tests) found that seventy percent rated themselves above average; two percent as below average. Sixty percent viewed themselves as above average in "athletic ability;" only six percent said they were below average. In "ability to get along with others," zero percent rated themselves in the top ten percent and twenty-five percent saw themselves in the top one percent (*The Inflated Self*, pp. 23,24).
- In one study, ninety-four percent of college faculty members think themselves better than their average colleague ("A New Look at Pride," in *Your Better Self*, p90).
- In a recent issue of *Psychological Review*, a journal published by the American Psychological Association, an article was written with the subtitle: "The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem." The authors stated, after studying numerous serious empirical studies, "In our view, the benefits of favourable self-opinions accrue primarily to the self, and they are if anything a burden and potential problem to everyone else." (Reported in *Fortune*, April 29, 1996, pp. 211-212). *Newsweek* claimed that although more than ten thousand scientific studies of self-esteem have been conducted, the experts cannot even agree on what it is (*Newsweek*, Feb. 17, 1992, "Hey, I'm Terrific," pp48-51).

- Perhaps the most comprehensive study of its kind was that which was done by the California State Task Force on Self-Esteem. *U.S. News and World Report* (April 2, 1990), says concerning this study, "The Bush era turns out to be a perfect time for self-esteem programmes. They cost almost nothing. They offer the light of sunny California optimism at a time of great pessimism. They are simple — easily grasped, easily spread. And in public-school systems torn by competing pressure groups, they have no natural enemies. They have only one flaw: They are a terrible idea. First of all, despite the firsthand reports of many teachers, there is almost no research evidence that these programmes work. The book *Social Importance of Self-Esteem*, which is basically all the research turned up by the California task force, says frankly, 'One of the disappointing aspects of every chapter in this volume. . . is how low the associations between self-esteem and its consequences are in research up to date.' In fact those correlations are as close to zero as you can get in the social sciences."

The fact is that the self-image movement is neither Biblical nor scientific. It is a fad that will eventually pass away after doing incredible damage in our society and unfortunately in all too many churches. ***By God's grace and the truth of His Word,*** believers need not be taken in by Satan's lies. ***We can choose to live by the infallible, never changing Word of God!***

CODEPENDENCY, A BIBLICAL VIEW

Codependency is one of the "hot topics," at the moment in modern-day psychology. Until recent years the word (and even the concept) was virtually unknown; now everyone seems to be a codependent. The goals of this section are to define codependency, look at what psychologists tell us causes it, examine its supposed effects on people and find out how to cure it. Finally, we will examine all of this in the light of Scripture.

A DEFINITION OF CODEPENDENCY

"Originally, codependency was used to describe a person whose life was affected as a result of being involved with someone who was chemically dependent" (Martin Bobgan, *Twelve Steps To Destruction*, p15). Today, however, definitions vary so greatly that it is often difficult to be certain what is being talked about. For example:

- "A codependent person is one who has let another person's behaviour affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behaviour" (Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*, p31).
- "Codependency can be defined as an addiction to people, behaviours, or things. Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control inferior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside. To the codependent, control, or the lack of it, is central to every aspect of life. When it comes to people, the codependent has become so elaborately enmeshed in the other person that the sense of self— personal identity — is severely restricted, crowded out by that other person's identity and problems" (*Love is a Choice* by Hemfelt, Minirth, & Meier, p11).
- "Codependency is the condition when your love tanks are running on empty" (Ibid p38).

- "Codependency is a pattern of painful dependency on compulsive behaviours and on approval from others in an attempt to find safety, self-worth, and identity" (definition used at the first national conference on codependency in 1989, Bobgan, p17).

Confused? Even Melody Beattie, the acknowledged spokeswoman for codependency admits, "There are almost as many definitions of codependency as there are experiences that represent it. In desperation (or perhaps enlightenment), some therapists have proclaimed, 'Codependency's anything, and everyone is a codependent'" (*Codependent No More*, p29). Not only are the experts uncertain about what this disorder is, they are also not sure who has it. Minirth and Meier tell us that roughly one hundred million Americans suffer from codependency; and therefore, we are embattled by an epidemic of staggering degree (*Love Is A Choice*, p14). It has been estimated by yet another source, that eighty-five percent of the codependency market is female. The reason for this is that mainly the traditional feminine traits and behaviours, such as nurturing, mothering and developing intimate relationships, are often considered symptoms of codependency. Women, who have chosen to be caretakers and nurturers, rather than put their own feelings and desires above others, are labeled codependent — in need of psychological help. While we would acknowledge that these traits can be carried too far by some, we are greatly concerned when we are told that virtually the whole adult population (especially women), is suffering from this "disease." Could it be that the psychologists are confusing codependence with unselfish acts of love? Is the goal of the anti-codependent proponents to turn us into a race of people who serve and love self more than others? If so, they are in contradiction with Phil. 2:3,4.

THE CAUSE OF CODEPENDENCY

What causes a person to become codependent and what are the effects of this "illness" on the life of the codependent? Minirth and Meier claim the causes of codependency are:

"unmet emotional needs, lost childhood, and the compulsion to fix the dysfunctional family" (Ibid. p15). While these causes are interrelated, we will nevertheless take them one at a time:

Unmet Emotional Needs: The theory is that we each have a reservoir for love (or love tank) inside us. If our love tank has not been filled by the "significant others" in our lives, we will not have our emotional needs met; we will therefore become a codependent (see Ibid. p33ff). This theory is especially true of children.

Lost Childhood: Children lose their childhood through abuse usually by parents or parental figures. Active abuse, such as incest, physical abuse or even excessive anger on a parent's part is the most recognized form of abuse — abuse that we must not deny or minimize. However, we are told of more subtle forms of abuse that apparently leave similar scars on a child's life. Minirth and Meier inform us of the following forms of abuse, often not recognized: one parent who is preoccupied and unavailable to a child emotionally, a child who is not constantly praised, lack of touching and hugging in the family, parents not being at peace (with one another) sexually, parents who demand "too much," parents depending too much on their children, a parent who is too rigid, etc. (Ibid. pp52-62).

We would mention two things at this point: Note the terrible pressure the codependency view places upon parents. At what point do we cross over from being emotionally available, to overindulging our children? When are we being too rigid, rather than firm? How do we know if we are expecting too much from our children, or not enough? What a horrible position to be in, knowing that the answers to these questions are relative, yet knowing that failure on our part will "scar" our children for life. The Biblical view would be that parents do have a responsibility to their children, but that they are not responsible for the choices their children make. Likewise, instead of blaming our parents for the mistakes they made while raising us, we must take responsibility for our own actions.

By the codependent definition of abuse, virtually all children in the past have been abused and should have developed into codependents. How could parents of ten or more children always have been emotionally available to them? How were parents able to fill their children's love tanks when they worked sixty-plus hours per week, and often their children held full-time jobs as well? Even more importantly, if codependency has been our problem all of these years, why didn't God give us instructions on how to deal with it? Are we to believe that God allowed all of His people until the 1980s to be unequipped to deal with this grave problem? Are we to believe, as well, that God has not chosen to deal with codependency in His Word, but has revealed this problem and its solution, mostly to ungodly men and women such as Freud, Maslow and Beattie?

The compulsion to fix the dysfunctional family:

Minirth and Meier tell us, "We all possess a primal need to recreate the familiar, the original family situation, even if the familiar, the situation, is destructive and painful" (Ibid. p65). Why would anyone want to recreate a painful situation? Why, because we are compelled by our unconscious minds that actually control (we are told) eighty percent of our decisions (apparently without our conscious knowledge) (Ibid. p. 65). But why would we unconsciously choose to put ourselves through such pain? Consider the following three reasons given by followers of codependency:

* We believe that if the original situation can be drummed back into existence, this time around we can fix it. We can cure the pain. We know we can! The codependent possesses a powerful need to go back and fix what was wrong, he must cure the original pain.

* We believe that we were responsible for the rotten original family; therefore, we must be punished — we deserve pain. Codependents may actually be hooked on misery.

* We believe that there is that yearning for the familiar and the secure. Even if the past was painful, at least it was home.

John Bradshaw, popular author and TV codependent guru, lays the blame on the Biblical teaching that everyone is born in a condition of sin. He contends that such teaching produces a "shame-based" personality destined to become an addict. He says, "Many religious denominations teach a concept of man as wretched and stained with original sin. . .With original sin you're beat before you start" (*Healing the Shame that Binds You*, p64).

Actually, the various "experts" come up with various (and often contradictory) reasons why they believe people become codependent. Why so many options? Perhaps this quote from the University of California's "Wellness Letter" explains the problem well, "The literature of codependency is based on assertions, generalizations, and anecdotes. . .To start without the slightest shred of scientific evidence and casually label large groups as diseased may be helpful to a few, but it is potentially harmful and exploitative as well. If as the best sellers claim, 'all society is an addict' and ninety-six percent of us are codependents, that leaves precious few of us outside the rehab centers — but at that point the claims become ludicrous at best" (Oct., 1990 p7, quoted in Bobgan, p33).

There is neither scientific of biblical evidence to support the claims of those who teach the theories of codependency, but why should truth get in the way of a good thing?

THE EFFECTS OF CODEPENDENCY

We are being told that it is very difficult to discern whether the behaviour of a codependent was caused by his "illness," or the "illness" was caused by his behaviour. At any rate, Melody Beattie groups the problems of codependent people around the following categories: caretaking, low self-worth, repression, obsession, controlling, denial, dependency, poor

communication, weak boundaries, lack of trust, anger, sex problems, miscellaneous and progressive (*Codependent No More*, p. 37-45). **After reading her lists, you realize that few, if any, can totally escape the codependent label.**

Minirth and Meier blame addictions and compulsions on codependency. Even more importantly, they claim that a codependent is unable to obey God: "The Christian's foremost privilege and responsibility is to hear and respond to God. The codependent can neither hear clearly nor respond adequately. It's that simple" (p. 171). How cruel God must be, to demand obedience from people who cannot obey because of their emotional illnesses (caused usually by harsh parents), then punish them because of their disobedience. ***Either the apostles of codependency are right, or God (in His Word) is — we cannot have it both ways!***

THE CURE

In order to recover from codependency, codependents must enter a Twelve-Step programme specifically designed for them: Codependence Anonymous, which is almost identical to Alcoholics Anonymous — with only minor changes in the steps (see our paper on the Twelve-Step recovery programmes). Another option is to enter a clinic such as Minirth and Meier's and go through their similar programme.

As a summation, the adherents of codependency would say, "Codependents carry distorted messages about their own sense of worth and such messages originate in dysfunctional families. Those messages must be erased through regressive therapy and replaced with positive, self-enhancing messages" (Bobgan, p46). (It might be helpful to read our chapter on Self Image).

The Scriptures teach a very different method of change and growth. This method is outlined in places such as Eph. 4:22-24, where we are told to put off the old self, put on the new self, and be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Specific

application of this principle will depend upon the problem that we face.

The psychological world (including Christian psychologists) errs, because it has a faulty anthropology (view of man) based upon human wisdom, rather than upon the Word of God. Psychologists believe that people behave poorly, and develop emotional and psychological problems because their love tanks are empty. If they can get their "significant others," or even God, to fill up their "love tanks," their problems will be resolved. ***The end result is everyone living for themselves.*** The Bible says, however, that we behave poorly because we are totally depraved, having been born with a sin nature. As a result, we react sinfully to our problems. The solution offered by God is to live Biblically. Progressive sanctification is our goal as we live our lives to please God. The codependency movement is quickly turning Biblical living into a vice. Those who choose to put Christ and others before their own needs are being told that they are sick and in need of therapy. Is it any wonder that their world is confused?

INNER HEALING AND VISUALIZATION

One of the increasingly popular methods of dealing with problems today is Inner Healing (also known as Healing of memories, or Healing for damaged emotions) through the use of visualization. Some of the better known practitioners of this methodology have been: Agnes Sanford, Ruth Carter, Dennis & Rita Bennett, and among Protestant non-charismatics, David Seamands. Seamands' books, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* and *Healing of Memories*, are perhaps the standard texts on the subject. These books come highly recommended by Gary Collins, James Dobson and the Narramore Christian Foundation, among others. The books are published by Victor Books (a division of Scripture Press) and have sold over six hundred thousand copies since 1981. Throughout this paper we will examine the teachings and techniques of Inner Healing in the light of Scripture.

THE BELIEFS OF INNER HEALING

Background:

There are many surface variations between teachers, but the basic structure of all Inner Healing approaches is a Freudian view of human nature which teaches that all of our problems find their root in our early childhood, and that those early painful experiences have been repressed into our subconscious mind. In addition, at least in Christian circles, a Jesus who loves unconditionally is imagined into our past in order to heal our childhood wounds. The Inner Healing movement among Christians, springs from the view that neither God's Word nor Christ's power, as taught in the Bible, is sufficient to meet the needs of people with deeply damaged emotions stemming from childhood. Seamands says, "Early in my pastoral experience, I discovered that I was failing to help two groups of people through the regular ministries of the church. Their problems were not being solved by the preaching of the Word, commitment to Christ, the filling of the

Spirit, prayer, or the Sacraments. . . . During this time of discovery, God showed me that the ordinary ways of ministering would never help some problems. And He began to enable me to open up my own heart to personal self-discovery, and to new depths of healing love through my marriage, my children, and intimate friends" (*Healing for Damaged Emotions*, p. 7).

How amazing to discover that God has revealed to David Seamands what He never revealed to the Apostle Paul!

How utterly unbelievable it is to think that God waited until 1966 to let us know that His Word, prayer and the Holy Spirit were unable to solve many of the real problems in our lives — that we must instead turn to Freud and his disciples for answers. *Whenever man takes it upon himself to add his insights to the Word of God, error will be the inevitable result.* At the foundation of all heresy is the belief that the Scriptures are insufficient and can be improved upon by the wisdom and/or revelation of man.

TEACHINGS CONCERNING HUMAN NATURE:

Inner Healers teach that our problems are caused by sins against us. People are fundamentally victims: hurt, wounded, needy, deprived — that we are all sinners is only of secondary importance. The "heart" is a passive storehouse of repressed hurts, unmet needs and yearnings for love. (We should comment at this point that Biblically the "heart" represents the inner person: our intellect, emotions and will). Long forgotten memories and experiences of childhood (even experiences in the womb; *Healing of Memories*, pp16-19) cause personality and behavioural problems. Such problems call for "healing." In other words, it is because we are victims that we behave poorly. We sin because we suffer; we do evil because evil has been done to us. The only way that we will be able to stop making poor and destructive choices (i.e. stop reacting sinfully) is to eliminate the pain and suffering of the past (adapted from a seminar by David Powlson).

TEACHINGS CONCERNING CHRIST

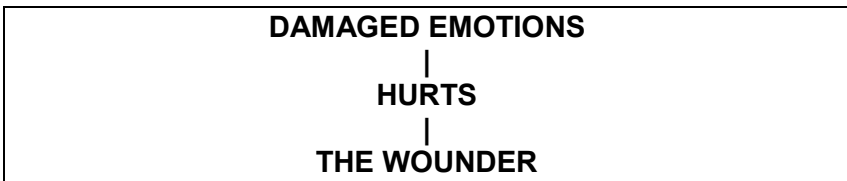
The Christ of Inner Healing is a loving, non-judgmental, unconditionally accepting healer, who will heal our wounds and comfort our pains. **Biblically**, on the other hand, **Jesus is the Saviour of mankind. He died in our place in order to deliver us from the penalty, power and presence of sin.**

THE TECHNIQUES OF INNER HEALING

Exploration of the past —

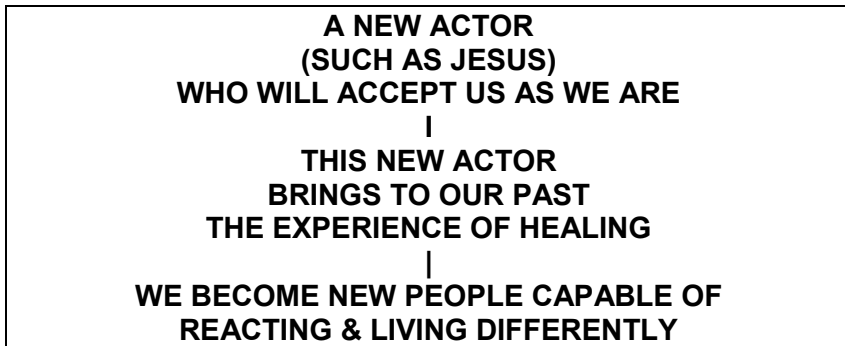
Our past experiences are explored in an effort to identify feelings of disappointment and rejection that are supposedly causing our problems in the present (even simple things such as accidents, illnesses, or delays may trigger these feelings, see *Healing of Memories*, pp. 81-84). Until these wounds are uncovered, no inner healing is possible.

In this diagnostic phase, damaged emotions are first of all identified. Next to be uncovered are the hurts that have caused those damaged emotions. Of course, hurts must have been caused by people; so, eventually the search leads to those who have wounded us. David Powlson gives this helpful diagram



Visualization —

"Through a process of guided imagination, the all-accepting Jesus is imagined back into the memory of traumatic past events. Intensive prayer is offered for the Holy Spirit to be a mystical revealer of problem areas and then a Healer" (Powlson). Secular Inner Healers would substitute another important figure, in place of Jesus, as the all-accepting healer. For example, a psychology student might imagine Carl Rogers; a history buff might call up Abe Lincoln; a Buddhist would visualize Buddha. The individual playing the part of the healer is not important; after all, this is taking place in our imagination, not in reality. What is important to Inner Healing is that you believe in the healing power of the person whom you are calling back into your past. It matters very little whether this healer is Jesus or Donald Trump, just as long as you have faith in this person. Another diagram by Powlson shows the process:



(It is worthy of attention to note how much impact the teachings of Inner Healing have had on the life and ministry of David and Karen Mains of Chapel of the Air. See, in particular, Karen's book, *Lonely No More*.)

THE BIBLICAL ALTERNATIVE TO INNER HEALING:

Inner Healing has created a Jesus who will meet the needs that we think must be met by going into our past and healing our wounds. The Jesus of Inner Healing is a non confrontational, unconditionally accepting Jesus, who receives us to Himself without regard to our sins. By contrast, the Bible teaches that "The real Jesus (not a fantasy Jesus) meets real people (not inner children of memory) in the present (not the past). He deals with the behavioural and personality problems of people by sanctification" (Powlson).

The true gospel message is that God saves people even though they are yet sinners (Romans 5:1-11). However, He does not simply leave them in their sins, but rather, forgives their sins and imputes to them the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4). By grace He brings them into the family of God and starts the process of transforming them into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28, 29).

Inner Healers believe that suffering causes us to behave poorly; the **Scriptures**, on the other hand, **teach that suffering reveals our character** (Romans 5:3,4) **and is used of God to mature us in Christ** (James 1:2-4).

The **Biblical** process of solving personality and behavioural problems is quite different from the methods of Inner Healing. It begins with God's Word revealing our hearts (James 1:21-25; Hebrews 4:12). At that point we can then go to the real Christ for grace, mercy and help (Hebrews 4:13-16). Then as the real Holy Spirit ministers in our lives **through the Word of God, we will grow** in abundant life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) and become adequate for every good work (2Timothy 3:16,17)! The teachings of the Inner Healing movement are sadly out of line with Scripture.