

## **"DAMAGED" EMOTIONS: "HEALING" OR HOLINESS?**

### **A Critique of *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, by David Seamands**

The author of *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, David Seamands, is a pastor who has incorporated much modern psychological teaching into his pastoral ministry. Explaining his departure from a purely biblical approach, he 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."

The first of these two groups included persons who had prayed desperately, tried every Christian discipline with no results, and were driven to futility and a loss of confidence in God's power. The second group was characterized by phoniness and repressed feelings covered with platitudes, Scriptures, and theological terms. Seamands states that "God showed me that ordinary ways of ministering would never help some problems." These baffling problems are described throughout the book as "damaged emotions" and "unhealed memories" of past hurts. Even conversion to Christ, the author insists, "is not a shortcut to emotional health." He urges us to be patient, and to not judge, those whose behavior is confusing and contradictory. Adding to the Scripture which says that "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:16), he says that "by their roots you will understand, and not judge them." He insists that he is not lowering the standards of Christianity, but that sometimes the ordinary disciplines are insufficient; one may require special "healing" by the Holy Spirit and the "unlearning of past wrong programming," neither of which is accomplished quickly. He warns against oversimplistic answers built around additional prayer, faith, and Bible study. He also cautions against seeing the devil around every corner. While these two warnings are certainly worthwhile (to a point), we must question his basic position regarding the adequacy of God's Word and related Christian disciplines. We must also look with discernment at his analysis of the basic problems. Are emotions really "damaged," and does such "damage" cause sinful behavior later in life? Are memories "sick" such that they need "healing?" Do we really need to add to Scripture's wisdom to locate causes and propose solutions? Can Seamands' solutions be supported by Scripture, and do they lead to godliness in those who pursue them?

Seamands describes our culture as a "modern Corinth," characterized by sexual immorality as was that ancient population, yet he describes people as "damaged" rather than sinful. This analysis departs from anything that can be found in either of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, and thus is highly suspect. It appears that Seamands has bought many of the presuppositions of modern psychology and taken those assumptions to Scripture, interpreting various passages through the grid of man's psychological "wisdom." What we must do is review his teachings one by one, and then offer a more biblical view of how to help people who are struggling with life.

We must give Seamands credit for his compassion and stated desire to minister effectively to people who are terribly frustrated in their Christian walk. His motives appear noble and loving. There is no intent to minimize the reality of what people suffer in this life, or to deny the reality of human hurt. We live in a sinful world that poses a tremendous challenge to those who follow Christ. Real abuse does exist. It must be faced, and we must respond to it in a manner that glorifies God. Seamands states that because Jesus knew what was in man, we should expect that God's truths and teachings will "contain the most penetrating psychological truths." Indeed, we should expect God's Word to give us **"everything"** that pertains to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). However, we must consider whether the speculations of unregenerate men (Freud, Jung, Adler, Ellis, Maslow, Rogers, Fromm, and the like) contain real psychological *truths*. Do we *dare* to add their teachings to God's pure revelation? Let us be warned by the very Scripture that Seamands uses so cleverly to say that "by their roots you will understand and not judge them:"

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." Matthew 7:15-20

Could it be that one day the "trees" bearing "psychological truth" will be cast into the fire? Could the well-intentioned Christian psychologizers be wolves in sheep's clothing?

## Infirmities

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26, 27

"Damaged emotions" and painful, "repressed" memories fall within what Seamands terms "infirmities," or weaknesses in this passage. He says that "somewhere between our sins, on the one hand, and our sicknesses, on the other, lies an area the Scripture calls 'infirmities.'" The scars created by hurtful memories, he teaches, "are not touched by conversion and sanctifying grace, or by the ordinary benefits of prayer." This is a serious charge which undermines the divine power of Jesus Christ and God's Word. We must look closely at what Seamands is saying, and offer a solid biblical basis for hope.

The Greek word for "infirmity" or "weakness" is *asthenos*, a negative form of the word for strength. It is used in Romans 8:26 (just quoted), as well as in Hebrews 4:15 and elsewhere. Seamands uses this word as support for his theories, saying that:

"Infirmities in themselves are not sins, but they do undermine our resistance to temptation. In the New Testament, infirmities are qualities in human nature which may predispose or incline us to sin, sometimes without any conscious choice on our part."

He also states emphatically that Jesus understands the *feeling* of our weaknesses, as well as the *fact* of our infirmities, because He "was subjected to the inner infirmities which predispose all of us to temptation and sin." Seamands carries this to the point of asserting that Jesus wanted to die (Matthew 26:37-38) and therefore understands the suicidal individual. We need not come to God guiltily or shamefacedly, but with boldness and confidence, because He *feels* with us. According to Seamands:

"To say, as do the ancient creeds, that Christ descended into hell, means that Jesus Christ has entered into every one of the fears, terrors, and anxious feelings that you and I can experience at our lowest moments of rejection, forsakenness, and depression. It means there is not a single feeling that we cannot bring to Him."

Following the same line of reasoning, the author contends that Jesus not only bore our *sins* on the cross, but also our *weaknesses*, which he does not equate with sin. Thus He is not angry with you about your feelings, but rather understands and feels with you.

Let us examine some of the passages used to support these teachings:

"He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.'" Matthew 26:37, 38

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of his reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:7-10

Our Creator surely does understand all of our ways, better than we ourselves understand them. That truth is supported by other Scriptures (Jeremiah 17:10, Psalm 139). His coming in the flesh does give us a wonderful comfort, an evidence of that understanding. However, there are still some problems in the analysis taught by Seamands.

The Greek word *asthenos*, for weakness, is not as limited as Seamands would have us believe. It is sometimes used in a sense that denotes sin (Romans 5:6, Hebrews 4:15 and 7:28). Other times it is used to describe sickness (John 5:5, James 5:14, Acts 28:9, and several other places in the Gospels). It may mean a deficiency in knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:7) or the kind of weakness through which God demonstrates His power (2 Corinthians 12:10, 11:30). There are other minor uses, but the point is that

Seamands has failed to teach the complexity of this word as used in the New Testament. It isn't a separate category of "psychological disease" as he would have us believe, somewhere between sins and sicknesses. The word is not used in that sense, when all relevant passages are considered together. Seamands has taken his concept of "damaged emotions" and pulled out the Greek word for infirmities in an attempt to support his thesis, bending it to fit his preconceived ideas. This is misleading to those who do not have knowledge of the original languages of the Bible.

Another disturbing observation is the implication, from Matthew 26:37-38, that Jesus was suicidal in the same sense as a deeply depressed individual. This is a dangerous conclusion to draw from that passage. Human beings are sinful, and it is sinful, as well as self-centered, to contemplate or attempt suicide. We must demonstrate compassion and offer God's hope to persons who are at this level of despair. However, the words of Jesus Christ **do not** equate with sinful man's suicidal impulses. Jesus came to earth for the purpose of *giving His life* for the sins of man. He gave His life voluntarily, out of love, and He had the power to take it up again. That is radically different from the person who is absorbed in his own hurts and wants to escape life by committing suicide. The Lord does understand the heart of such a person, and He is able to help and give hope--but we dare not accuse Jesus of being suicidal!

Another concern is the implication that, due to our inherent qualities of weakness, we might sin "without conscious choice." This type of statement erodes man's responsibility before God for his own sin. Unbelievers are spiritually blinded. However, the Bible clearly states that man is without excuse:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:18-21)

Furthermore, the glorious miracle of redemption is minimized by putting infirmities on a par with sins, and stating that Jesus bore our sins *and* infirmities on the cross. This adds an element

to the gospel that is not stated in Scripture. Jesus died for our sins. Yes, He understands our weaknesses--God sent Christ to die for our sins when we were His enemies and powerless to save ourselves. However, nailing infirmities to the cross tends to obscure the call to repentance that Christ gave so emphatically. One repents for sin and rebellion, not for weaknesses beyond his control. The concept of weakness has a place in our understanding and counsel of others, but that place is not on the cross. Seamands seems more concerned that we bring our *feelings* to the cross for understanding and unconditional acceptance, rather than bringing our sins to the cross to be forgiven. This perspective fails to account for God's holiness, righteousness, and wrath that exist alongside His mercy, compassion, love, and kindness. His mercy can too easily be reduced to tolerance or licentiousness, without the proper regard for His other qualities. Also, some feelings *may* be sinful, a fact that is all too frequently overlooked by psychologizers. There is much sinful, unrighteous anger and fear, for example, and God is deeply concerned with these sins of the heart along with actual sinful acts.

Jesus Christ does understand, and He is able to help us in our inability to gain our own salvation from sin. One must remember, however, that although He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15), He is by no means weak:

"Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the Law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever." (Hebrews 7:26-28)

## **The Glory of Self or the Glory of God?**

Seamands focuses approximately one-fourth of his book (three chapters out of twelve) on what he considers a major problem, or "Satan's deadliest weapon," low self-esteem. He begins by informing us that Satan operates through trickery, subtlety, and deception, which indeed he does. Seamands, however, claims that most of our enemy's weapons are "psychological," rather than spiritual, in nature: fear, doubt, anger, hostility, worry, guilt lingering on after a Christian receives God's forgiveness, and finally, inferiority, inadequacy, low self-esteem or self-worth. Certainly the items on this list (particularly the first few) can

be used for evil purposes. However, the battle we face is *spiritual* in nature, not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:10), when we are truly dealing with Satan and his associates. Meanwhile, fear, doubt, anger, hostility, and such are sinful responses of the human heart which can be corrected through God's Word and the continued practice of righteousness. As for inferiority, inadequacy, low self-esteem or self-worth, we must pause to question Seamands' teaching, found nowhere in Scripture, that such is the content of "Satan's deadliest weapon." Satan is just subtle enough to rejoice in seeing Christians *believe* that this is the real nature of the problem.

Man was created in the image of God, for the purpose of glorifying **Him** (not self) by reflecting **His** (not one's own) glory. Man was not created to seek his own glory or esteem. The apparent longing for self-esteem, applauded in many of today's churches as a genuine "need," is better described as the same lust that motivated the falls of both Satan and man. Not satisfied with merely reflecting God's glory, wanting a position of equal power and knowledge, man exchanged his role as God's image bearer:

"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols." (Jeremiah 2:11)

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." (Romans 1:22, 23)

"They exchanged the truth for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen" (Romans 1:25)

In doing so, man became worthless, just like the idols he chose to worship:

"This is what the Lord says: 'What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.'" (Jeremiah 2:5)

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

Nevertheless, Seamands lists four tragic "results" of "low self esteem." First is the paralyzing of one's potential. The author claims that God is not angry with the failure of man to reach his potential, but rather grieves. A survey is cited wherein over 50% of the Christian women participants listed low self-esteem as the major factor causing their depressions: "These women were battling depression which came chiefly from the downward pull of feelings of low self-worth." However, does such a survey actually *prove* low self-esteem to be the cause of depression? Or do the answers reflect the currently popular teachings in the church regarding self-esteem, whether or not such teachings can be biblically supported? Seamands also cites the parable of the servant who was given one talent, saying that he "was immobilized by fear and feelings of inadequacy." Fear of his master is actually indicated in the text, but "feelings of inadequacy" are not mentioned. Also, note the extreme anger of the master, in contrast to Seamands' contention that God is not angry, only grieved, over man's failure to reach his potential.

Second is the destruction of one's dreams. Here Seamands quotes Scripture which, seen in context, lends no support to what he is teaching. First, Proverbs 29:18 says that "where there is no vision, the people perish," and Seamands equates "vision" with the dreams or goals of the individual. However, the full verse reads, "Where there is no revelation (vision), the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law." The term "vision" or "revelation" has to do with messages or revelation from **God**, designed to keep people within His laws. It has nothing to do with one's own "dreams," which may or may not be in line with God's laws. Next, Seamands relates the story unfolded in Numbers 13 and 14, where the Israelites were to have gone into the Promised Land, Canaan. They compared themselves to the inhabitants of that land and saw themselves as "grasshoppers" by comparison, but according to Seamands, "Caleb had no worm theology. He and Joshua had no grasshopper esteem of themselves. They said, 'Of course the people are big, but don't fear them. The Lord is with us.'" Notice the focus: "**The Lord is with us.**" The focus is not at all on **self-esteem**. Seamands also fails to present the entire story, because the people were severely rebuked for their failure to trust God (**not** their failure to esteem themselves) and were unable to enter Canaan. In fact, they regretted God's decision and were soundly defeated by their enemies when they presumptuously attempted, in their own strength, to enter the land without God's blessing:

"But Moses said, 'Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the Lord is not



with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the Lord, He will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.' Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah." (Numbers 14:41-45)

These final verses of the two chapters do not support, but rather refute, Seamands' self-esteem teachings.

Third is the ruining of one's relationships with others, including God. The author claims that low self-esteem isolates you because once you become critical of the design, you then become critical of the Designer (God). He claims that a healthy self-image is necessary in order to love others. Actually this is **not** the biblical condition for loving others, and a type of "low self-esteem" is imperative in relating to others:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."  
(Philippians 2:3)

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Self-love, self-worth, and self-esteem are not the answer to ruined relationships, but are serious impediments to love of God and others. The challenge is to love **God** with one's whole being, and then to love **others** as much as one already naturally loves self.

Finally, Seamands lists the sabotage of Christian service as a result of low self-esteem. He mentions such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 to inform us that God doesn't choose "superstars" to serve Him. Indeed He doesn't. He chooses those who have the humility to trust Him and to remember that their sufficiency is in Him, not in self--in other words, those with the supposed plague of "low self-esteem." Yet Seamands laments, "The trouble is that your low self-esteem robs God of marvelous opportunities to show off His power and ability through your weaknesses." God does indeed display His power, but low self-esteem is not what prevents the kind of Christian service that would accomplish that purpose. What Seamands describes as the problem could be better described as the "fear of man," which is a snare (Proverbs 29:25).

As he begins his two chapters on how to "heal" low self-esteem, he uses Proverbs 23:7 ("as he thinks in his heart, so is he") to say that "the way you *look at yourself and feel about yourself*, way down deep in the heart of your personality--so you will be and so you will become. What you see and feel will determine your relationships both with other people and with God." It is important to have an accurate, *biblical* view of oneself in relationship to God, and even more important to know **God** from His Word. Doing so will likely decrease, not increase, self-esteem (note Isaiah's encounter with God's holiness in Isaiah 6). The quoted proverb is taken out of context to support a psychological viewpoint that is foreign to the actual passage:

"Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies; for as he thinks within himself, so he is (or...for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost). 'Eat and drink,' he says to you, but his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments." (Proverbs 23:6-8)

This Scripture is about a stingy man who deceptively encourages you to "eat and drink" at his expense, while inwardly bemoaning the cost. This has nothing to do with developing a high opinion of oneself, but is rather a call to examine the selfish motives of one's heart.

Having assumed that healthy self-image is essential, Seamands lists three essentials to its development: a sense of belongingness, a sense of worth and value, and a sense of being competent. Each of these is opposite to what is required for repentance and salvation. First, one must sense that his sins have alienated him from God; this is opposite to the sense of "belongingness" advocated by Seamands. Second, it is the sense of one's utter unworthiness and inability to save self that leads to repentance and trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Finally, the true believer's competence is solely in God, never in self:

"Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

A sense of one's own competence is likely to lead away from salvation and trust in the Lord.

Seamands notes four sources for a person's image of himself: the outer world, the "inner" world (self), Satan, and God through His Word. (Only the fourth is reliable!) In discussing the "outer world," Seamands uses the term "looking-glass self" coined by psychologist George Herbert Head. The reactions of important people supposedly develop the child's image of himself. Seamands cites 1 Corinthians 13:9-12 and claims that self-image is the subject of that passage:

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Paul's teaching here is in regard to seeing **God** face to face, not self. Here we must ask: When we do in fact see the Lord face to face, and are ushered into eternal glory, will "self-image" be so terribly important anymore? Or will we rather be consumed by the presence of Almighty God, who alone is worthy to be praised, and who is described as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29)?

In discussing the influence of the "outer world," Seamands insists, though not convincingly, that he isn't attempting to place blame, but to gain the insight and understanding that will begin the "healing" process and reconstruction of self-esteem. Nevertheless, he says that:

"In this fallen and imperfect world, all parents are imperfect in their parenting. Most parents I know do the very best they can. Unfortunately, the role models they had weren't so hot either, all the way back to Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel must have seen a lot of conflict and tension: theirs must have been an unhappy home, for one brother to end up killing the other."

Take a close look at the early chapters of Genesis, and nowhere will you find that an "unhappy home" was the cause of Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Even if this analysis could be supported, Seamands would run up against a brick wall in applying similar logic to Adam and Eve. These two had direct fellowship with God Himself, who surely wasn't a poor "role model." They had no one to pass the blame onto, and thus the "unhappy home" scenario crumbles. Low self-esteem, according to Seamands, also

has the unfortunate effect of making it difficult or even impossible to *feel* loved by God. He says that:

"A great many seemingly spiritual struggles are not spiritual at all in their origin. Although they sound and act and feel like God's judgment on a guilty conscience, they actually come from damning and damaging feeling-concepts that cause low self-esteem."

This sort of logic is all too convenient and tempting, refocusing the emphasis from one's own sin (a reality that cannot be denied) to a view of self that is too low. An additional flaw in Seamands' teaching is the unbiblical emphasis on feelings...*feeling* loved by God, *feeling*-concepts that cause low self-esteem. Emotions have a proper place in our lives, but this type of psychological perspective exalts them, making it more important to *feel* loved by God than to be assured of His love by His Word, and suggesting that *feeling*-concepts about oneself are more trustworthy than the truth revealed by Scripture.

The second source of one's self-image, according to Seamands, is the "world within." He does note that we differ from the secular/humanistic/pagan psychologists who claim that human nature is basically good. Instead, he says, "we are victims of a basic tendency toward evil, a proclivity toward the wrong," because Adam and Eve set in motion a chain reaction of imperfect parenting and conditional love, thus making every person "a victim of corporate sinfulness." This is misinterpreted by children, who believe that "you're OK but I'm not OK," and thus the self-image is negatively impacted. There is too much "victim" orientation in what Seamands is saying, although he does acknowledge that we are not merely victims but must receive forgiveness for our wrong responses. It is unfortunate that these wrong (sinful) responses do not receive more comment from Seamands.

A third source of self-image is Satan, who Seamands says uses inferiority and self-belittling to defeat Christians. While this may appear sometimes to be true, it is the excessive focus on *self*, rather than the Lord, that defeats Christians. Such self-focus may take the form of self-belittling or self-exaltation, but in neither case is a higher view of self the biblical solution. Seamands claims that a self-belittling attitude is not true Christian humility, nor is it a part of sanctification/holiness. However, truthfully acknowledging the sinfulness of one's heart is a crucial part of such humility and holiness. The "self-belittling" he discusses is much like the worldly sorrow that leads to death, in contrast to the godly sorrow that leads to

repentance and lasting change in one's life. Worldly sorrow is a condemnation that breeds despair, such as experienced by Judas after the crucifixion, whereas godly sorrow over offending God facilitates changes that are pleasing to Him. Note Peter's repentance and transformation after he denied Christ three times.

Finally, Seamands mentions God and His Word as the fourth and final source of self-image. He quotes Matthew 22:37-40:

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Then he says:

"We do not have two commandments here, but three: to love God, to love yourself, and to love others. I put self second, because Jesus plainly made a proper self-love the basis of a proper love for neighbor."

No, He didn't. In fact, it is incredible that Seamands would claim *three* commandments in a passage where Christ emphatically stated that there were *two*, and indicated that the *second* was like the first. This is the verse most frequently cited to support self-love doctrines, and rather remarkably so in view of our Lord's clear words that only *two* commandments were intended. (Perhaps it is the *only* verse that can be twisted to fit the self-love theories, while other clear passages warning *against* love of self are ignored.) Nevertheless, the author goes on to say, with Matthew 5:43-48 as a basic, that Jesus:

"...was authoritatively restating the principle of the eternal triangle--love for God, for ourselves, and for other people. This basic law of God is written into the nature of the entire universe. It operates in every cell. The person who has proper self-esteem is healthier in every way than the person with low self-esteem."

Where is such an "eternal triangle" ever taught in Scripture? How can he support the theory that this is written into every cell of the universe? (Honestly, this sounds dangerously close to the pantheistic theology of Hinduism.) The verses in Matthew 5:43-48 speak of loving one's enemies, something that goes directly against the grain of human nature. The Lord teaches that even the pagans are good to those who are good to them, but the *Christian*

must demonstrate love even to his enemies, patterning himself after his Heavenly Father. This is anything but a basis for increasing love of self.

At one point, Seamands quotes an acquaintance who had mistakenly paraphrased God's command as "love your neighbor but hate yourself." We can agree that this is a distortion of our Lord's words. He didn't command self-hate. However, He did emphatically command self-denial and a willingness to lose oneself for **His** sake. The point is not hatred of self, but **love** for **God**.

Seamands claims that *many* Scriptures suggest the importance of high self-esteem. It takes much creativity, however, to squeeze such suggestions from the Bible. One of the passages noted is Ephesians 5:28-29. Seamands claims that Paul was using self-love as the basis for a husband's love for his wife. Here is what the text actually says:

"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church."

This Scripture doesn't promote self-love. Like Matthew 22:37-40, it *assumes* it. (This passage also is rooted in the "one flesh" relationship of husband and wife.) Human beings hardly need detailed lessons on how to do something (love self) that is an inherent part of their nature from birth. Instruction and practice is needed in order to do what is **not** natural, such as loving God with one's whole being and loving others as much as one already naturally loves self. Ephesians 5:29 is one verse that ought to silence the self-love doctrines, not be called up to support them.

Yet another passage Seamands uses is Romans 12:3, in which Paul instructs us:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Seamands says that:

"Sober judgment neither overestimates nor underestimates. It is Satan who confuses and blinds us at this point, as he accuses, 'Look out, now; you're feeling proud.'"

Note, however, that the instruction says only not to think more *highly* of yourself than you ought to. Not a word about thinking too *lowly* of yourself! Seamands has managed to twist the very texts that refute self-love in order to support presuppositions that he has borrowed from pagan psychologists.

The person plagued with low self-esteem, according to Seamands, is very self-centered, constantly seeking assurance, and possibly a doormat, but not necessarily selfish. (The distinction is anything but clear!) This describes extreme self-focus, something that is corrected not by higher self-esteem, but rather by esteeming Jesus Christ and laying down one's life for **Him**.

Seamands urges that you "take your self-estimate from God." If you really do compare yourself to His holy and righteous standards, you won't be thrilled, and your self-esteem won't be enhanced, but you will marvel at His love, mercy, and longsuffering. Seamands says you have no right to despise or belittle someone (yourself) whom God loves so deeply, has honored so highly, values so highly, has provided for so fully, has planned for so carefully, and in whom God delights. However, God's love, provision, and planning ought to direct us to glorify, praise, exalt, and honor **Him...not self**. Seamands has turned the Scriptures upside down, leading us down a pathway of deception.

### **Perfectionist...or Made Perfect in Christ?**

Much of Seamands' book is based on his analysis of what is commonly called "perfectionism." He lists the following as "evidence" for "damaged" emotions and a "perfectionist complex"...fears, supersensitivity, sexual problems, a deep sense of unworthiness, anxiety, inadequacy, inferiority. When the "perfectionist" becomes a Christian, he claims, believing is a great risk, faith is hard, decisions tear the person up, witnessing is difficult, surrendering to God is "almost a trauma," and discipline is difficult. The person climbs on a treadmill of performance, achievement, and striving because he doesn't *feel* God's grace. According to Seamands, "the good news of the Gospel has not penetrated down into his damaged inner self, which also needs to be evangelized." Apparently, the power of Jesus Christ is not enough...if we believe this author. This is a most serious charge, and it demands an answer.

Examining the Word of God carefully, Seamands' claim about the "perfectionist" Christian convert are unfounded. The faith to believe the gospel is a gift based on God's sovereign grace:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Decisions may not come easily to many of us, but for the person who is truly saved, God's Word is a sufficient basis:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires."  
(2 Peter 1:3, 4)

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."  
(Psalm 119:105)

Witnessing is impeded by the fear of man, which is a snare. Godly boldness is available to believers who sincerely pray for it:

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness." (Acts 4:29)

Surrendering to God is a "trauma" for the unregenerate, and even believers do at times fall prey to the temptation to usurp God's authority. The problem is not "perfectionism," but the naturally deceitful, sinful heart of man. To state otherwise, as this author does, obscures the real problem of sin.

Of course, discipline is difficult:

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

This fact, however, does not distinguish the "perfectionist" from other sinners.

It is disturbing to note the focus on *feeling* God's grace, rather than believing on the basis of His Word. Emotions are a real part of the inner man, but were never meant to be exalted in this manner. Yet Seamands claims that:



"The realization of grace cannot be maintained in some people without an inner healing of the past. God's care cannot be felt without a deep, inner reprogramming of all the bad conditioning that has been put into them by parents and family and teachers and preachers and the church."

Notice here the tremendous shifting of blame onto several major sources of influence. While parents, teachers, and pastors have important responsibilities before God for those under their care, their sinful actions do not negate the power of God at the time of salvation. *Nothing in Scripture* indicates that a "healing of the past" must occur prior to the new Christian's sanctification, and the viewpoint proclaimed by Seamands greatly undermines the power of the Word itself in enabling Christian growth.

Another serious concern is Seamands' teaching that the "perfectionist" transfers his "perfectionism" to his relationship with God. He says that "perfectionism produces a distorted picture of God with feelings of doubt, rebellion, and anger against a God you can never please." The correct name for such a distorted picture of God is *idolatry*. It should also be noted here that rebellion, doubt, and anger at God are all sinful attitudes of the heart requiring repentance and confession as sin. This should be good news, because God promises to be faithful in forgiving and cleansing His children from sin (1 John 1:9).

Seamands lists six basic "symptoms" for the "disease of perfectionism," which he claims is "common among church people." First is the "tyranny of the oughts" which results in "never being good enough." The problem here is that the Bible is filled with many commands from God which no one can meet with absolute perfection. That does not, however, mean that "oughts" can or should be eliminated. Instead, one's focus in seeking holiness must be the honoring of **God**, not a self-centered desire to appear perfect to others or self.

Second is "self-deprecation," wherein the person is never pleased with himself. Self-esteem has already been explored in depth. The Christian's focus should be on pleasing **God**, not self:

"And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves for Him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Third is anxiety, combined with guilt and condemnation. This anxiety is actually sinful, because God commands otherwise:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6, 7)

Guilt is a reality which dare not be reduced to a feeling. The important issue is to determine guilt correctly, according to God's standards, and respond to it biblically.

Fourth "symptom" is legalism, with a rigid emphasis on externals. This supposedly characterizes the "perfectionist," who is sensitive to the opinions of others, unable to accept himself, and unsure of God's approval. Grace seems too good to be true. Seamands mentions the warning of Galatians that we not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage, and also the Colossians, who he says "insisted on 'self-abasement' and deliberate low self-esteem":

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

"Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions."  
(Colossians 2:18)

Furthermore, Seamands states that "immature and sensitive believers can become neurotic perfectionists" who, ironically, will critically judge and blame those whose approval they so desperately seek. Their treatment of others is rigid and lacking in love.

A very real problem is described here, and it is one that Paul dealt with extensively in his letter to the Galatians. The problem is an attempt to be justified before God by one's own works, rather than the righteousness of Christ. This is not "low self-esteem," and neither is the critical blaming/judging noted as characteristic of the "perfectionist." Rather it is the essence of pride, depending on **self** instead of trusting in Christ for salvation. Note the phrase "his unspiritual mind *puffs him up*" in the Colossians verse. Seamands does rightly note that "perfectionism" is a counterfeit for Christian perfection, producing "spiritual Pharisees." The problem with the Pharisees, however, was their extremely high view of themselves and

dependence on their own rigid conformity to the law. They sought to please themselves, not the Lord or others. They conformed only to their own man-made standards, not to God's law of love.

Fifth, "perfectionism" breeds anger and deep resentment against "oughts," other Christians, the Christian faith, and God--or rather "a caricature of a god who is never satisfied." Once again, we are encountering a sinful heart attitude. Some caution is in order here, in that God is not "satisfied" with our performance, but rather offers His mercy through the sacrifice of Christ. He is holy, just, and righteous, as well as kind, merciful, and loving. Too often, psychologizers set aside God's righteousness and wrath in favor of a one-sided view that acknowledges only His mercy.

Finally, because anger is considered a terrible sin, it is pushed down and leads to the sixth "symptom," which is "denial." This fuzzy term "denial" would require great discussion, but it is rooted in the Freudian "unconscious" rather than in the Bible. Biblically, man's heart is deceitful and wicked, often denying personal responsibility for sin. The anger described by Seamands **is** an unrighteous anger, but the solution for that is in Christ and His forgiveness.

Looking into the root causes of "perfectionism," Seamands states that "most of us developed our concept/feelings about our Heavenly Father from our earthly mothers and fathers, and these feelings become so intertwined and confused." This is a popularly accepted teaching, but it is rooted in the ungodly speculations of Freud (an atheist), not in Scripture. No such view is ever taught in the Bible, and the opposite is often true. Consider, for example, King Josiah. He took the throne of Judah at the age of eight, following the murder of his father Amon, who was an evil king (2 Kings 21:19-23:30). Yet Josiah became a godly king who instituted reforms, tearing down the pagan idolatry formerly practiced by God's people. He honored his Heavenly Father, despite his earthly father's practices.

Typical of many who have embraced psychology without examining it biblically, Seamands lists "unpleasable parents," characterized by "conditional approval," and unjust, unpredictable home situations, as responsible for the development of "perfectionism" and "damaged emotions." Certainly parental abuse cannot be defended, and difficult home situations are not an encouragement in learning how to live a godly life. However, one's relationship with God is not determined by these factors. God is able to sovereignly intervene, bring a person to salvation,

and establish a relationship regardless of early life experiences. He reveals Himself in His Word and in the life of Jesus Christ.

As he moves into describing solutions, Seamands says that:

"The healing of perfectionism does not begin with some initial experience of grace in salvation or sanctification, and then move into a life lived by effort and perfect performance."

There is much truth in this statement, as noted in the book of Galatians. However, the person who is truly saved will begin to evidence good works that glorify God. One must beware of a "do nothing," passive Christian life in which no major life changes take place following the initial conversion experience.

Seamands says that there is no "quick cure" for "perfectionism." Rather it is a long process of "healing" in which God is pleased with you at every step. God does look at the attitude of one's heart, the desire to grow in godliness, and sanctification is an ongoing process involving disciplined training in righteousness. However, medical terms, such as "healing," "cure," and "disease," are not appropriate. We are dealing with attitudes and behaviors defined by Scripture as sin. "Perfectionism" is not a "disease" to be "cured." Seamands says that no "healing" will occur until rage is acknowledged, confronted, and resolved, no matter how much the person reads Scripture, prays, or leaves the situation with God. This view undermines the power of God's Word, but note that he has left out the *practice* of biblical teachings. Mere reading, of course, is inadequate (James 1:22-25), as is a passive surrender to God that is not followed by obedience to His commands. As for rage, Seamands fails to note that this is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20), calling for confession and repentance. His whole viewpoint is distorted by the medical model that he has borrowed from psychology.

Regarding the role of others, Seamands cites James 5:16 and says that:

"James implied that in many cases the reprogramming, renewing, and healing process comes about only as we share with and pray for one another."

In context, this verse refers to confession of sin where it is a factor in physical illness. It does not mean that one must attempt to get relief, or "heal" memories, by "confession" to others. Such practices, centered more on the sins of *others* than

on one's own sin, lead too easily to gossip and/or slander. Others may have a role, however, in giving godly counsel/admonition so that the person may learn to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

Finally, Seamands does point to the cross as the final solution for "perfectionism." Indeed it is, but the author minimizes its real significance, the forgiveness of our **sins**, by stating that "in the cross God demonstrated His total identification with us in our *undeserved suffering*, as well as in our deserved punishment" (emphasis added). He was touched with the *feeling* of our infirmities, and Seamands says that therefore, we can express all of our hurt, humiliation, anger, and resentment to Him...including our resentment against *Him*. He also says that a hidden anger at injustice emerges in the "perfectionist," who seeks to correct all the wrongs in the world. There are serious theological problems here. Christ did not deserve to suffer, but rather than "identify with our undeserved suffering," He took upon Himself *the suffering that we do deserve*. Also, it is dangerous and unbiblical to suggest that we ought to freely express anger toward God, who is absolutely holy, just, and righteous in all of his sovereign ways (Proverbs 19:3, Isaiah 45:9). We can certainly come to Him honestly to confess our sinful actions and attitudes. Indeed we must. Our attitude, however, must be one of humble submission, not a ventilation of wrath toward Him.

The "perfectionist," Seamands claims, is unable to please self, others, or God. The scope needs to be narrowed here, to pleasing **God only**. The "perfectionist complex" is not some "newfangled discovery by psychologists," but has been recognized by pastors since long before the term "psychology" became popular. In one sense, he is correct. Human nature has not changed since the fall. Man is still sinful and exhibits the same sinful patterns. What has changed, however, is the explanations, the definitions, and ultimately the solutions. Seamands has moved from biblical truth to the distorted perceptions offered by godless atheists who invent psychological explanations for what they cannot deny about man's sin. This is a dangerous path!

### **"Super Self?"**

The dangers of this book are particular glaring when Seamands says that "perhaps the most terrible consequence of perfectionism is alienation from the true self." He attempts to sound biblical in saying that "the perfectionist needs to learn to be his true self in Christ." This "true self," he claims, has been denied and

squelched. Emerging in its place is a pseudo-self which transfers over into the Christian life. When the person becomes a Christian:

"Forgiveness, loving acceptance and God's grace penetrate some outer layers of his unreal self, bringing a new spirit of honesty to his life. But if the distortion is serious and the emotions are badly damaged, a deeper kind of healing is needed."

Seamands uses the term "super you" to describe the "false idealized image you think you have to be in order to be loved and accepted." This pseudo-self is characterized as follows:

- \* Never admits to certain kinds of feelings (the author claims that feelings have no moral value).
- \* Sees Jesus as stoic, passive, and having His emotions under tight control.
- \* Considers anger bad.

The major focus is on anger, which Seamands notes correctly is not sinful per se. He mentions that Christians have a semantic trick of using the term "righteous indignation," rather than distinguishing between right and wrong uses of anger. The problem here is not semantics, however, but the motive for that anger as well as its expression. Much human anger is motivated by sinful, selfish motives, rather than the honor of God. Seamands goes on to distinguish anger and resentment. That distinction might be helpful if he held a biblical view of anger. However, he quotes Ephesians 4:26 ("be angry and do not sin") and declares it to be a *command* to get angry. His analysis fails to take into account much other Scripture, including verses that follow almost immediately after the so-called "command" to get angry:

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31, 32)

The emphasis in verse 26 is on *not sinning*, rather than a command to get angry. The Greek "be angry" is in the imperative tense, as he notes correctly, but so is "do not sin." Also, there truly is a righteous anger that is modeled after *God's* anger. Man's wrath does not bring about the righteousness of God (James 1:19, 20).

Righteous anger, and expression without sin, is a more accurate exegesis of this verse than what Seamands offers.

Another characteristic of "super you" is the belief that there should never be conflict between Christians. Seamands notes that such conflict is a reality, which it is. He cites Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone," and notes that the problems may very well be with the other person. He says that "Real You faces real differences, real conflicts, and loves and cares enough to confront persons in a spirit of love." This last observation is a good one, but one must also remember God's strong commands to Christians to be reconciled with one another (Matthew 5:23-24) and His clear instructions on how to do so (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5).

One other correct evaluation should be noted, and that is Seamands' teaching that the Christian should maintain joy as opposed to "happiness," which is based on happenings. The "super you" believes that one must always be happy, and this is not the case. However, God says you are to "consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2), knowing that He is at work in your life.

In summary, Seamands says that:

"Super You is an illusion of your imagination, an idol. I'm not sure that God even sees Super You. You can be yourself in Jesus, and you need not compare yourself to anyone else. He wants to heal *you* and change *you* in order that Real You can grow up to be the person He intended you to be" (emphasis his).

There is truth in the statement about idolatry, but contrary to Seamands' claim, God *does* see it (Ezekiel 14:1-11). Idolatry is extremely serious. Seamands' conclusions are unbiblical, because what God wants is to transform you into a *new self*, conformed to the image of Christ. Searching for a "true self" assumes that there is inherent good in man hidden beneath the "false self," but that is wrong (Romans 7:18). This is what God says about the matter:

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."  
(Colossians 3:9, 10)

## **Depression - Psychological Myths and Biblical Truths**

Depression is another central theme to Seamands' book. He says that many believe depression to be a sign of sin, but this viewpoint "does not stand the test of Scripture, the facts of Christian experience, or the truths about psychology." (The term "truths about psychology" is dubious, since the subject matter consists of the speculations of unbelievers, almost always contrary to biblical truth.) While he does acknowledge that sin **may** be the cause of depression, he states that this isn't the type he is addressing:

"Sin may lead to depression, but all depression does not come from sin. The roots of depression often run deep and are very complicated, as complicated as many of the childhood hurts and scars that people carry into adulthood."

Thus, he sees depression as primarily the result of the sins of *others*. It may even be an emotional letdown that follows success, and therefore not necessarily a sign of spiritual failure. Seamands claims that many Christians, by viewing depression as the result of sin, add guilt on top of it and double their problems.

Several biblical persons are cited as evidence for Seamands' view, including David (Psalms), Elijah, Jonah, and Jesus. Not even one of these truly supports his position.

Elijah's depression is discussed in 1 Kings 19. He complains bitterly to the Lord following a threat by Jezebel, and attempts to tell God that he is the only one left who is faithful. God gives him the opportunity to revise his answer (which he fails to do), then declares that He has reserved *seven thousand* who have not turned to Baal. Elijah's depression, and his response to the Lord's questioning, reveal a sinful distrust and a high view of self. Though a prophet used mightily of God, he exhibited an unrighteous attitude in this instance.

David indeed expressed serious depression in many of the Psalms. However, some of this is clearly related to his sins of adultery and murder. Other times, it represents his weariness in fleeing from his enemies. However, this godly man interweaves



expressions of depression with regular praise and thanksgiving to God.

The prophet Jonah expressed suicidal depression following his successful preaching in Ninevah, but great caution is in order when examining these accounts. The Lord rebuked Jonah and showed him that his anger was unrighteous. Jonah rebelled against God's desire to demonstrate His mercy to the people of Ninevah. He wants them to receive their just punishment. This is a sinful attitude and does not support Seamands' teachings about depression.

In a previous section, we discussed Jesus' sorrow on the eve of his crucifixion; "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38). It is absurd to equate this statement with the suicidal depression of sinful human beings. Christ is taking on the enormous burden of dying for the sins of man, not expressing a self-centered desire to escape life's problems. He is *giving* His life out of love, then taking it up again. This is in no way similar to human depression.

One of the passages that Seamands quotes to substantiate his view is from Psalm 42:3, "my tears have been my food." However, the full context reveals David's thirsting for God and his hope in the face of severe trials:

"As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving, among the festive throng. Why are you downcast, o my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." (Psalm 42:1-5)

To summarize here, the biblical characters examined by Seamands do not lend support to his theories. This does not mean that *all* depression results from sin, but we must be careful about attributing depression to the sins of others and failing to stress the necessity of a righteous response. One area where Seamands is truthful is in reviewing the possibility of physiological factors. He warns that "there are Christians who consistently neglect the physical area of their lives and then wonder why they are depressed." This is quite true, but doing so is clearly sin:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)

Having been bought at a price, Christians are required to honor God with their bodies, which belong to God.

Several responses are noted by Seamands which eventually lead to depression. Each of these has elements of sin which he fails to acknowledge. First is indecision, double-mindedness, and the sense of being powerless or trapped; decisions are postponed. This sinful response is described in Scripture:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (James 1:5-8)

"Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (James 4:8)

Second is anger...Seamands claims that "depression is frozen rage" and that if you have consistent depression, then you have unresolved anger. Anger *may* be a factor in depression, and if so, it must be handled biblically. It is probably unrighteous anger. However, depression as "frozen rage" is basically a Freudian invention, unsupported by Scripture. Jonah exhibited a depression intertwined with anger, but as discussed earlier, his response was a sinful one; he sinfully questioned the sovereign actions of God.

A third causative response is a disproportionate sense of justice/injustice. Seamands sees forgiveness, particularly of parents and family members, as the answer. Forgiveness is vital, but Seamands goes far astray of Scripture in counseling you to "forgive yourself" and to "forgive God." These are improper applications of forgiveness. Seamands does state that some people need to "forgive God, not because He has ever done anything wrong, but because they have held Him responsible." This turns forgiveness upside down! Such a person needs to *ask* for forgiveness *from* God for questioning His sovereign working in their lives, not attempt to "forgive God!"

Seamands fails to provide adequate support for a depression that is not rooted in sin. Some depression truly may not result entirely from one's own sin, but even then, it is difficult for sinful persons to handle their emotions without falling into sin. Godly counsel here is crucial. To his credit, Seamands does offer some basically excellent recommendations for responding to depression:

- \* Avoid isolation and withdrawal from others.
- \* Seek help from others.
- \* Sing and make music.
- \* Praise and thank God. (This is particularly important!)
- \* Study God's Word. Seamands lists numerous Psalms, but other passages should be studied as well, and put into practice.
- \* Rest confidently in the presence of God's Spirit.

Near the end of his discussion in this area, Seamands cites an example of a man suffering from depression. A significant statement made by this individual summarizes very well the wisdom of God for overcoming depression: "Then I remembered to give thanks and to praise God, though I felt no spirit of praise and thanksgiving." **Yes!** The Christian's focus must be on living for God in praise and thanksgiving, not on his unreliable feelings.

## **Personality Perplexities**

In discussing depression, Seamands places great stress on one's personality, or natural temperament. He claims that one's new birth in Christ does not do away with old differences or change the person's basic temperament. Some people, he says, are more naturally nervous, apprehensive, introspective, frightened, or sensitive. Thus, certain people are more prone to depression. He even notes Paul and Timothy as being particularly oversensitive and easily touched, citing the following passages:

"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."  
(1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

"For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within." (2 Corinthians 7:5)

Note here Paul's attitude is designed to exalt God and minimize any focus on himself. This has nothing to do with "personality" or "temperament" as defined by psychologizers. Seamands, however, calls personality the "natural" as compared with the spiritual life, or "supernatural." He says that the two are connected and operate through the same "personality equipment." Satan, he teaches, attempts to turn "temperamental" depression into spiritual depression.

None of this reconciles with the scriptural perspective that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. Some of the "personality traits" that Seamands lists are actually sinful attitudes to be overcome. The new birth in Christ does make radical changes in what is commonly termed "personality," as the new Christian becomes more like the Savior, putting off the "old self" and putting on the "new self," created to be like Him (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Referencing Psalm 51:6, Seamands states that "having truth in the inward parts means you no longer resist who you are. You stop fighting your temperament as an enemy and begin to accept it as a gift from God." Such self-acceptance is claimed to be the first step in living above depression. However, look more closely at the entire Psalm 51, for example:

"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are proved right when You speak and justified when You judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place." (Psalm 51:3-6)

The background for this Psalm is David's adultery/murder and subsequent repentance. The truth that God desires in David's heart is His Word, not an acceptance of his basic temperament. We must be reminded that our basic natures are sinful from the time of birth, that in our flesh no good thing dwells (Psalm 51:5, Romans 7:18). The first step in living above depression is to turn one's focus away from pleasing self, discovering self, and all other selfisms, instead desiring to live a life that pleases God and builds His kingdom. God desires change that brings you

into conformity with the image of His Son, not any kind of acceptance of the "old self" apart from Christ.

## **Forgiveness - Who and Why**

Many Christian psychologizers place emphasis on the issue of forgiveness in their discussions of what it takes to be "healed." The emphasis is good, but the conclusions are almost always erroneous. This book is no exception. The whole matter of forgiveness has been discussed at length elsewhere (*From Forgiven to Forgiving*, by Jay Adams, and my critique, "Forgiving *WHO?*"), so only some brief comments will be made here. It is disturbing to see the selfish motives set forth as the basis for forgiveness, and it is even more alarming to note the counsel to "forgive yourself," or worse, to "forgive God."

Much of Seamands' discussion centers on the parable of the ungrateful servant, found in Matthew 18:23-25. This is indeed a key New Testament teaching on the matter of our responsibility to extend forgiveness to others. Seamands points out that the servant requested only mercy, or extra time to pay. He didn't request a full cancellation of the debt. That observation is correct. However, he goes on to claim that the servant misunderstood his master and didn't realize that he had been fully forgiven. In his pride, he believed he could repay the entire debt if only he could collect the debts owed to him by others. Thus, Seamands concludes that the servant's attempt to collect a minor debt was motivated by his false belief that he still owed the enormous debt to the king. This sense of misunderstanding is neither stated nor implied anywhere in the actual text. (Check it out!) Seamands brings a psychological perspective to Scripture and draws conclusions that are contrary to the purpose of this passage. Our Lord stressed the enormity of our salvation achieved through His crucifixion, and our subsequent responsibility to forgive others. This teaching would be destroyed by Seamands' presuppositions; a person could hardly be blamed for failing to forgive others, if he merely misunderstood that his own sins were completely forgiven. The actual text shows very harsh results to the ungrateful servant, and warns us of a similar fate if we fail to demonstrate gratitude to God in our relationships with others. Seamands undermines the truth of this parable, and equates his own interpretation of it with the unforgiving "perfectionist" who fails to recognize God's forgiveness and is thus plagued with guilt and resentment.

Self-forgiveness is a recurrent theme in this book. Scripture never teaches such a practice, as forgiveness is modeled after God's example and undertaken for the sake of the *other person* who has sinned. Seamands cites the example of Joseph encountering the brothers who had once sold him into slavery, and quotes his words to them:

"But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." (Genesis 50:19, 20)

According to Seamands, Joseph is motivated by a concern that his brothers will have a hard time forgiving themselves. His words, supposedly, were intended to help them do so. Joseph didn't attempt to collect the debt from them, although he was in a position to have done so. However, nothing in the text supports Seamands' conclusions. Joseph recognizes God's sovereign engineering of his life's circumstances. His brothers have acknowledged their sin against him and demonstrated fruits of repentance (verse 18): "We are your slaves." Joseph rightly extends mercy, just as God responds mercifully to people who come to Him in a similar spirit of humility. The brothers were not having trouble "forgiving themselves," but were exhibiting the godly sorrow that leads to repentance and restoration.

There is some wisdom in all of Seamands' discussion, in that he suggests three questions to ask yourself to determine whether you need to forgive someone:

- \* Are you resentful toward someone?
- \* Do you take responsibility for your own faults/failures, or pass the buck?
- \* Do you react against someone who reminds you of someone else?

These are good questions, but along with suggesting a need to forgive, they also may bring to light areas where you must *ask* forgiveness from God or others.

Forgiveness is crucial to both salvation and sanctification. It is unfortunate that Christian authors distort it with suggestions to forgive self, forgive God, and to forgive others with selfish motives. God commands that you forgive others as He

has forgiven you, out of gratitude for the mercy you could never earn or deserve (Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13).

### **Comfort as You Have Been Comforted**

One of the more hopeful aspects of this book is Seamands' discussion of how the restored person is able to offer help and comfort to others. He says that God is able to take our infirmities and turn them from a curse into instruments for His service. He quotes Romans 8:18-28, which indeed puts our present sufferings into the proper eternal perspective:

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."  
(Romans 8:18)

Paul also spoke of offering hope to others:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4)

Seamands does a good job of discussing a couple of the Greek words related to this subject. One is *parakletos*, translated as comforter or counselor. It means one who comes alongside. Another is the word *synantilambanotai*, translated "help" in Romans 8:26. In terms of etymology (which may or may not represent current usage), its meaning is "to take hold of together with us on the other side." It is in the indicative mood here, representing a fact, the middle voice (the Holy Spirit performs the action), and the present tense (continuous, habitual action). These observations are helpful in understanding the role of the Holy Spirit, as well as our roles in the lives of others. Seamands mentions the good news that God loves us, Christ bore our sins and weaknesses, and the Holy Spirit offers His continuous, enabling presence--not because we are already good, but so that we can live godly lives. He also discusses the attitude we must take in ministering to another, not as a "client" or a "case," but as another human being. He recommends letting that person in on your struggles. This is a most refreshing change from the standard "professional" relationship that is highly guarded, artificial, and maintained by the payment of fees.

Although Seamands' basic attitude in extending help to others is a good one, some of what he says in this area is questionable.

This is particularly true in the area of God's sovereignty. He states that we have in this world only God's permissive, conditional will, not His perfect and intentional will. Not all things that happen to us are God's intentional will: "God is not the Author of all events, but He is the Master of all events." Furthermore, he says, God doesn't *need* our sins, failures, and weaknesses in order to work out His designs, but these are all He has to work with. If we were to trace our hurts, they would be traced to someone's sin. Infirmities and "damaged" emotions are passed along through imperfect genes, parenting, and performance. He notes that Romans 8:28 is often misquoted out of context, as "all things work together for good," rather than indicating that **God** is working all things together for good.

God's sovereignty is one of the most crucial concepts for any Christian, but it is especially critical for those who have been grievously sinned against and are wondering *why* they were hurt and floundering in their responses. It isn't satisfactory to claim, as Seamands does, that God is *not* the author of these events, or to imply that He was not or is not in control of every circumstance. It is beyond the scope of this short critique to fully explore the scriptural basis for God's sovereignty, but it does exist. God is in absolute control, and He has eternal purposes in allowing evil. When He created man, He *knew in advance* of man's sin. He demonstrates His power, love, and mercy by restoring and sustaining individuals who face severe trials. It is far more comforting to recognize God's sovereign control and eternal purpose during tough times, rather than to view Him as limited and unable to intervene. While we may not fully know His purposes, we can trust that He knows what He is doing, that He indeed "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).

As God allows or even ordains your suffering, one of His purposes is to enable you to become a testimony to others of His power, and to offer the kind of comfort and help that you have received. Some of this writing may seem harsh in its focus on facing one's own sin, and focusing away from the hurts imposed by others. However, what I strongly recommend is taking the time to counsel and disciple those who are struggling, and to do so on the basis of **God's Word**, not the speculations of unbelievers. Seamands, along with a host of others, has taken the precious truths of Scripture and muddied them by adding the ideas of pagans. This is a grave disservice to persons who are already having severe difficulties with life. It is my hope to prepare an entire volume on the issue of responding to abuse suffered in childhood. This is one of several papers written to assist in the



research that is required to cover the territory adequately. God has given us "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) through our knowledge of Jesus Christ. His revelation is sufficient, and it offers a glorious hope and comfort that infinitely surpasses the counterfeits of man's wisdom. Don't be deceived into believing that you need something "more" than what God Himself has given in His Word. You may need godly counsel from a pastor or another mature believer, but what you *do not need* is to entangle God's wisdom with the teachings of ungodly men like Freud, Jung, Ellis, Adler, Maslow, and the like. The power of Jesus Christ really, truly is **enough!**

© **1993, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.**  
**[www.christiandiscernment.com](http://www.christiandiscernment.com)**