

# **LOVE IS A COMMAND**

## **A Critique of *Love is a Choice*, by Drs. Paul Meier and Frank Minirth**

Extremely popular among Christian psychologizers, Paul Meier and Frank Minirth are prolific writers whose books line the shelves of many Christian bookstores and a few secular ones as well. Their writing indicates their acceptance of the gospel, and it must therefore be assumed that they are true brothers in Christ. I write in a spirit of respect for the genuineness of their faith, even though I am compelled to strongly disagree with their psychological orientation.

Minirth and Meier's theories and treatment methods draw heavily on the teachings of Sigmund Freud, an enemy of the gospel. Although never credited by the authors in this particular book, his influence may be felt on nearly every page. Credited very briefly is Carl Jung, another atheist who perverted the message of Christianity. Another disturbing and striking similarity, in addition to Freud and Jung, is that of John Bradshaw, a currently popular psychologist who endorses *Love is a Choice*. These ungodly influences will be explored in further detail in our first section. This is primarily a book about "codependency," a mass lay movement rooted in ideas that are antithetical to Scripture. Minirth and Meier quote Scripture fairly often to support their theories, using highly questionable exegesis. They also fail to give references to document some of the absolute statements that they make as if those statements were scientifically proven fact. They basically ignore the whole scriptural dimension in their analysis of human behavior, and they fail to see the whole dynamic of man's inherently sinful nature. Instead, they see their counselees as fundamentally victims of the sins of others, often working very hard to convince such persons that they are indeed victims of some form of abuse, or that their anger is "legitimate" and "natural." Nowhere do they clearly indicate that counseling goals include conformity to the image of Christ or living in obedience to His commands. There are a couple of places where they note that they would not permit a counselee to continue in adultery while undergoing therapy, but their reasons center on seeing the relationship as an "addictive agent," rather than desiring that the counselee live in accordance with the standards of God.

The book presents psychological theories regarding man's difficulty in relating to God, others, and himself. These unproven, unbiblical theories actually place stumbling blocks in the path of struggling counselees, along with encouraging a focus

on self. Some of their observations regarding *what* people do are real, but their understanding of causes, and their therapeutic solutions, reveal highly unbiblical positions regarding man's relationship to God, perception of self, and how God expects man to relate to others with biblical love. Also strongly endorsed is the 12-step movement, a dangerous, anti-Christian theology that has been critiqued at length elsewhere.

Minirth and Meier do present the basics of the gospel, admitting that "the most effective means for overcoming codependent relationships is to establish a relationship with Christ Himself." Regarding the acceptance of Christ, they state that "when we do, we are free to develop healthy relationships with others because of the relationship we have with Christ." They admit that He provides "enablement to overcome sin and even *addictions*" (emphasis added). This is one of the rare places where the reality of sin is even acknowledged or the word actually used in print. Note how sin is separated from "addictions," as if there were some distinction (there is not), and as if it were somehow more difficult to overcome an "addiction" than to overcome sin in general ("even addictions"). While we must appreciate the fact that the gospel is presented, and recognize that God might, in His sovereign grace, use it to bring salvation to a reader, its placement in "Appendix A," rather than in the body of the book, relegates its truth to something of an afterthought in Minirth and Meier's system. The Bible takes the opposite stance, showing that relationship with Christ is a crucial prerequisite to overcoming sinful behaviors and attitudes.

The focus of this book is neither salvation nor sanctification. This statement summarizes their theme rather well: "'Pursuit of happiness' is not a hollow phrase on a yellowed piece of parchment. It is your birthright! Happiness and love lie within your grasp." While happiness and love do indeed lie within our grasp, neither is a "birthright." We are saved through God's sovereign *grace*, which by definition is unearned. It is a gift, not of ourselves but purely of God. His grace, mercy, and love are amazing, not a "right." God's love has been demonstrated on the cross through Christ, and in Him--**only in Him**--may we grasp any lasting joy and/or love:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that

neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."  
(Galatians 5:22, 23)

God's demonstration of love far surpasses grasping at a temporary, self-serving human definition of "happiness." And as "sheep to be slaughtered" for the cause of Christ, pursuing earthly happiness is simply not at the top of the biblical agenda.

Before moving into the body of the paper, I must express my grave concern and compassion for those who are truly the victims of the sins of others. They are not helped, but rather hurt, by the theories and practices rooted in the counsel of ungodly men like Freud, Jung, and Bradshaw. Jesus Christ offers the way of eternal life, and He shows real victims how to respond to their trials in joy and victory. The psychological orientation holds no such promise, only a deceitful counterfeit that is cleverly marketed and sold within the church of Jesus Christ today. It is no doubt time for another "cleansing of the temple." My plan in this paper, and possibly in a future book, is to present a thoroughly **biblical** view which offers hope for the afflicted. It is my concern for such people that compels me to write.

## **UNEQUALLY YOKED...UNHOLY UNIONS**

In the Old Testament, God issued urgent warnings to His people not to intermarry with the surrounding pagan nations. He knew that such unequal yoking would inevitably lead to the detestable practice of idolatry:

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations--the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you--and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession." (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

"But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your back and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you." (Joshua 23:12, 13)

In the church today, we have the snares and traps of psychology in our midst. We have wedded the Word of God to the counseling theories of pagans. But lest one might think such teachings obsolete after the coming of Christ, the New Testament includes a similar warning that extends beyond the literal marriage of a believer to an unbeliever:

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

Minirth and Meier are among the many Christians who have engaged in wedding God's holy word to the unholy counsel of atheists. In *Psychoheresy I*, Martin and Deidre Bobgan carefully document their

fellowship with Sigmund Freud, an atheist who used Greek mythology to fabricate his ludicrous theories of human behavior. One of Freud's major goals in life was to destroy Christianity. It is indeed strange, and indicative of the spiritual warfare involved, to note the prevalence of Freudian teachings among *Christian* psychologists today. Even in the secular community, Freud has been largely discredited. Yet his theories about the unconscious, denial, anger, repression, transference, and depression have become the fuel that drives the writings of Minirth and Meier. Without Freudian terminology, theories, and methods, Minirth and Meier's writings would be significantly reduced. Very little would remain! Oddly enough, however, they fail to mention the name of Freud even one time in this particular book, and include only scarce references to him elsewhere. To those who are even vaguely familiar with Freud, however, the similarity is transparent. His anti-Christian, unscientific ideas are made palatable by stretching and twisting Scripture to support them, along with equating biblical and psychological terms that are anything but equivalent (the biblical "heart" and the psychological "unconscious," for example). Minirth and Meier's re-interpretation of particular passages will be cited as applicable to illustrate their improper exegesis. *Psychoheresy I* also includes numerous detailed examples in this area, and is highly recommended for further reading.

Another unholy union, noted only briefly, is Carl Jung. Jung followed Freud in the practice of psychoanalysis. While Freud considered religious faith a symptom of "mental illness," Jung considered it a myth to be tolerated because it made people feel better. His theories rival Freud's in absurdity. For example, the "collective unconscious" is a cornerstone of his teachings, as if such a thing could exist. Jung had a strong, direct influence on the beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous. He encouraged their idolatrous "higher power" concept, recognizing a need for "spiritual awakening" yet never professing faith in Jesus Christ. In doing so, he encouraged the "awakening" of the wrong spirits, those "higher powers" that we war against according to Ephesians 6:12. Minirth and Meier indicate that they do not agree with many of Jung's premises, but they fail to elaborate. Instead, they describe him as a "pioneering psychologist," and cite his theories to support the idea that a person cannot develop a meaningful relationship with God until about age thirty. Clearly such a thought has no basis in God's Word. Jesus welcomed children to His side and cautioned self-seeking adults to become as one of them in order to enter His kingdom.

The ungodly theories of both Freud and Jung, particularly Jung, are woven into the fabric of the teachings of John Bradshaw, an extremely popular modern psychologist who has written several books, lectured extensively, and developed a film series. It is fascinating, though most alarming, to be writing this critique concurrent to the publication of *A Way That Seems Right*, an extensive review of Bradshaw. The close similarity between Bradshaw's *Homecoming* and *Love is a Choice* cannot be denied. In fact, Bradshaw is quoted on the cover of *Love is a Choice*:

"This book is an excellent addition to the ongoing literature on recovery from codependence. It is clinically precise and unusually clear in offering concrete help for recovering people. I heartily recommend this book!"

Having critiqued all of Bradshaw's books, an endorsement from him leads me to shudder. He displays an *extreme* focus on abuse as the cause of sinful behavior (although he fails to use the word "sinful"), along with both Freud and Minirth/Meier. Minirth and Meier do acknowledge the reality of sin on a few isolated occasions, but fail to see man's depravity as the *bottom line*. Man sins, and responds sinfully when sinned against, because it is his nature to do so. That's what the Bible says. But Minirth and Meier, Bradshaw, and a host of others claim that man sins *because* he has suffered from the sins of others, particularly parents. The term "narcissism" is defined by Minirth and Meier, and more blatantly by Bradshaw, as a "need," or a "love hunger," rather than a sinful focus on self. Both display an unbiblical view of self, promoting a "right" to happiness in contrast to God's unmerited mercy, teaching counselees techniques of "self-parenting," and encouraging many self-statements and "permissions" given to self. Both see a "loss of self" as fundamental to destructive behaviors, attitudes, and relationships. Bradshaw is blasphemous in his use of the term "I AMness," failing to acknowledge God alone as the great "I AM." Minirth and Meier are more subtle in encouraging a "sense of self," using the statement "I am me." Bradshaw relies heavily on the concept of the "inner child" which he also terms the "true self" or "authentic self." He carries it to the point of outright self-worship. Minirth and Meier refer more subtly to the "lost child within" and "lost childhood." Both teach of an obsession to repeat the original family pain and remain in psychologically defined roles established in that setting. Their teachings on the necessity of grieving and tears are practically identical, though only Minirth and Meier explicitly use the Kubler-Ross "five stages of grief" model as if it were proven, scientific "knowledge." Both speak extensively on the Freudian concept of "denial," and their

teachings on anger and depression mirror each other. Bradshaw concentrates heavily on his unbiblical concept of "toxic shame." While Minirth and Meier do not pick up the same precise terminology, their teachings are strikingly similar, and they note that most counselors believe "addictions" to be "shame-based." Frankly, there are very few areas where Bradshaw and Minirth/Meier do not parallel in their teachings. Bradshaw is more easily recognized for his outright attacks on Christian doctrine (at least sometimes!). Minirth and Meier are brothers in Christ who are highly deceived in their understanding and application of these doctrines.

We must approach this critique of Minirth/Meier with a realization that their theories are yoked with the teachings of ungodly men. They are adding unscriptural concepts to the teachings of the Bible, and in doing so, they dilute the power of God's Word and deny the transforming power of the cross. God flatly forbids such unholy unions:

"Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar." (Proverbs 30:5, 6)

"'Woe to the rebellious children,' declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not Mine, forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.'" (Isaiah 30:1)

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord. Yet He too is wise and can bring disaster; He does not take back His words. He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers. But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His hand, He who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together." (Isaiah 31:1-3)

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1,2)

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him

the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." (Revelation 22:18, 19)

## WHO AND WHAT ARE WE DEALING WITH?

*Love is a Choice* is subtitled, "Recovery from Codependent Relationships." It is a book about the increasingly well-known syndrome termed "codependency." The authors claim it is a common thread that runs throughout the lives of many persons. In fact, they consider it to be "epidemic" in nature, and say that:

"Although it has been unrecognized for a long time, it has become a disease for today. Codependency is emerging as the problem in part because today's lifestyle, attitudes, and goals magnify codependent tendencies."

Note the word *disease*. Just as AA redefined the sin of drunkenness as the "disease" of alcoholism, so modern psychology has redefined certain sinful relationship patterns as the "disease" of codependency. Parallel to AA, Minirth and Meier claim that codependency is "chronic and progressive," always getting worse, never better, over time. Even more hopeless is the statement that "if you are severely codependent, like the alcoholic you will never be free of your illness." They illustrate their point with an example: "John is still a workaholic, but he's aware of it now and compensates." Adding insult to injury, they tell us that this dreaded "disease" is a "multigenerational dysfunction or dependency," and that it "tugs and pulls at the subconscious." Fortunately, the Bible dispels all such hopelessness and lifetime condemnation to "illness:"

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you **were**. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."  
(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

What characterizes the so-called codependent? A list of ten traits has been reproduced as an appendix to this paper. A key item is the presence of some "addiction," to people, behaviors, or things. The "addictive agent," which is not always easy to



identify, is claimed to undergo a spiral effect in which it develops a self-perpetuating life of its own. Besides a substance abuse or an individualized behavior, the "addictive agent" may include martyrdom, rescuing, or enabling. Apparently, it is the element of relationship that distinguishes the codependent from the ordinary "addict." Following is a description of the "addiction cycle" that Minirth/Meier claim to be a frequent pattern, along with the biblical explanation for what is taking place:

Minirth/Meier

Bible

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|--|--|
| (1) Pain, love, hunger, and low self-esteem. | (1) Person is living to please self, rather than God.  |
| (2) Addictive agent or chosen relationship.  | (2) A particular idol is to worship.   |
| (3) Pain relief, anesthesia.                 | (3) The idol is worshiped.   |
| (4) Consequences, relationship pain.         | (4) The wages of sin is death. God disciplines those He loves.                                       |
| (5) Guilt and shame.                         | (5) Guilt defined by God's standards.  |
| (6) <b>None</b> --reverts back to (1).       | (6) Repentance, godly sorrow, confession to God and others involved, cleansing through Jesus Christ. |

Minirth/Meier claim the codependent is "trapped in a series of vicious cycles," and "hooked on misery," making the same mistakes over and over: "Indeed, the codependent's life inexorably revolves through cycles beyond control." Such "cycles" have to do with "the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside," along with a compulsion to repeat the painful patterns of the family of origin. According to Minirth/Meier, "unresolved issues...doom the emerging adult to recreate, to repeat, the past." The codependent "must unconsciously restage the past in a fruitless attempt to deal with what they are consciously denying." The codependent's supposed reasoning for this "yearning for the familiar, the secure" is that "because I was responsible for that

rotten original family, I must be punished. I deserve pain." Minirth/Meier claim further that:

"People who are powerfully codependent literally blind themselves to the red flags other people would flee from. No, they don't see the warning signs, because they unconsciously choose not to."

Note the dogmatic yet inconsistent use of the words "conscious" and "unconscious." In the previous sentence they talk of an unconscious choice. If it were a choice, it would be conscious. If it were truly unconscious, it would not be a choice. Earlier they talked of a conscious denial in the **unconscious** restaging of the past. This does not square with their teachings through the book of a Freudian-based denial that is rooted in the *unconscious*. All of this is highly confusing and not the least bit helpful, or biblical, in sorting our responsibilities. It should be pointed out that people do develop sinful habit patterns which may remain much the same without some conscious effort, empowered by God, to change those patterns. However, Minirth/Meier are highly speculative in their assumptions about the supposedly unconscious motives behind those repeated behaviors.

The impact of childhood abuse is stressed throughout the book as a primary factor causing codependency. Their definition of "abuse" seems to extend nearly to infinity, including such obvious abuse as incest, battering, and abandonment, along with verbal abuse, "emotional" incest, various forms of passive abuse, negative messages about oneself picked up from parents, and the "unfinished business" of one's parents. All of these abuses contribute to a "love hunger" and a "great emotional vacuum" within oneself, followed by these three responses:

- (1) Concepts of family and adulthood are shaped by childhood. Person is bound to repeat the original family experience that is remembered.
- (2) Childhood experience shapes choices and the way we perceive things.
- (3) These two responses are not altered by logic and rational thought.

This highly deterministic, Freudian viewpoint offers little hope. Minirth/Meier carry it into the area of choosing a mate, condemning the person to a poor choice. In adult relationships, they note a "mutual love hunger" and a "helpless obsession with

another person." They claim the person is plagued by an "unconscious conviction that somehow the codependent is responsible for whatever happens to anyone." Codependency "creates roles that should not be part of our lives," and also "warps those roles essential to us." Minirth/Meier define a great number of roles, several of which are peculiar to the codependent: hero, scapegoat, mascot, lost child, enabler--including placater, martyr, rescuer, persecutor, and victim. Minirth/Meier comment often about how the codependent's "sense of self" is severely restricted, crowded out by another person's identity and problems. The person lacks "boundaries" and a conviction that "I am me." His self-image is thus faulty and unclear. Codependency is a family disorder, with the whole family being "codependent upon alcoholism" or some other "addictive agent."

In addition, the authors claim the codependent to be a "master of denial and repression," particularly in regard to anger: "Every codependent carries an intense burden of anger and nearly all of it is hidden, unsuspected."

The authors comment a couple of times about how our culture's songs, movies, and TV shows promote codependent relationships as love. We can agree that society's portrayal of love is distorted, and that the elements described as "codependency" are certainly not descriptive of biblical love. While popular songs and movies are of increasing concern to Christians, we have always had to recall that we are citizens of heaven, living temporarily as "resident aliens" in a world that is hostile to the gospel and under the heavy influence of the devil:

"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us." (1 Peter 2:11, 12)

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2, 3)

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

This section is intended to basically present the definitions used by Minirth/Meier, so we will have an understanding of their

orientation as we proceed to examine it biblically in greater depth.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE...VICTIM OR SINNER?**

Minirth/Meier base much of their theory in this book on the premise that people are driven to sinful behavior by what they term "love hunger." To illustrate their theory, they use a four-tier "relationship cake." The top layer consists of visible behaviors, such as "compulsions" and "addictions." Under that are other visible symptoms, then difficulties in relationships. Looking back into the person's life, they place abuse by others next to the bottom, and finally, "love hunger" is the bottom line. The following quote is most revealing, and frightening in that it turns something evil upside down into a "need:"

"Narcissism is an inordinate love of self, a life view that is completely self-centered. But some professionals use the concept without that negative connotation to describe that inborn narcissistic, or love hunger, which we all possess."

Minirth and Meier are highly deterministic in their theories about this God-given need to love and be loved:

"It is a legitimate need that must be met from cradle to grave. If children are deprived of love--if that primal need for love is not met--they carry the scars for life."

Parents, they claim, are primarily responsible for filling the "love tank" of a child. However, even if those parents genuinely do love their children, Minirth and Meier warn us that the love tank still may not be filled. The parental love may be restricted by problems like perfectionism.

There are some real challenges to giving a critique of this theory without coming across as harsh and unloving. There is no intent here to minimize the importance of love. God **is** love, and His Word clearly commands that love be demonstrated to others, even to enemies. Love is a vital part of our Christian faith. Withholding love from one's children does not encourage righteous behavior, and it surely does *encourage* sin. Proper love and discipline, as commanded by God, are extremely helpful in teaching children godly attitudes and behaviors. However, Minirth and Meier are nevertheless not in line with scriptural truth. Consider the multigenerational nature of their "love hunger" theories. The child sins because his parents didn't love him, and/or they abused him. Those parents, in turn, were unloved

and/or abused by their own parents. One might theoretically continue this blameshifting all the way back to the very first man and woman ever created. However, doing so reveals the error. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, experienced absolutely no "love hunger" whatsoever. God created them without sin, and they had continual fellowship with Him. They were not abused. They were tempted to doubt God's Word and disobey His commands. It was sinful rebellion, not "love hunger" or any kind of abuse, that led to their disobedience. Minirth and Meier's theory falls apart at this point, appealing though it is. Child abuse and neglect are very real, serious problems that ought to concern the church of Jesus Christ and motivate compassion for the afflicted. However, neither is a defense before the throne of God. The use of the term "narcissism" is indeed disturbing, because this type of theory encourages an excessive love of self and life view that is highly self-centered. Moving up one layer into the "cake," Minirth and Meier place great stress on the role of childhood abuse, claiming that both obvious and more subtle abuses will result in an impoverished love tank. Their definition of abuse stretches the imagination. There is active physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. These actions are clearly sinful and reprehensible in the sight of God. There is no attempt here to minimize the seriousness of that sin or the experience of hurt. Minirth/Meier move on to define various types of passive abuse, which might be unintentional or even unavoidable, but, they claim, "to the child's subconscious, *wherein resides the love tank*, it is abandonment nevertheless" (emphasis added). This category includes adoption, lack of praise, and lack of love between the parents. Minirth/Meier also describe "emotional incest," where the child is called upon to parent his parents. Later they discuss the problem of "unfinished business" on the part of one's parents and its supposed effect on the grown child:

"If I want to operate in God's will, it is essential that I not be working under the handicap or encumbrance of Mom's or Dad's unfinished business."

In this area, they are particularly adamant about the impact on one's choice of a mate, claiming that a person may be "externalizing a battle internalized by Mom or Dad." A final form of abuse is "negative existential messages" picked up from one's parents on subjects such as these: Who am I? Can I trust anyone? What is the nature of life? Who is God? How worthy am I?

Looking into "recovery," Minirth/Meier state that identifying the realities of such childhood abuses is essential. Otherwise, "we cannot learn to choose love." However, their definitions are

so very extensive that no human being is left untouched. Every person is sinful. Every parent is sinful. Minirth/Meier do not use the term "sinful" to describe either the parental abuse or the child's responses. Instead, they rely on Freudian theories of the unconscious to shift blame back almost indefinitely to other generations.

Nevertheless, they do say: "Understand, these forms of abuse do not cause one hundred percent irreversible damage; there is some hope even without treatment." At this point they recount the biblical story of Joseph and his response to the abusive treatment of his brothers. Rather than pointing to this passage as an example to victims of a godly response, they undermine it: "Still, for most people, these things must be dealt with." Psychiatric "treatment" was not available in biblical times, but is a very recent development. Yet God expected godly responses from His people many centuries prior to the dawn of modern psychology. He also promised *everything* we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3, 4). These psychological authors fail to acknowledge the divine power of God, available *without* the addition of psychological theories. If Freud's theories of the "unconscious" and "denial" and "repression" were so necessary to leading a righteous life, God would have revealed them when He gave men His Word.

Another key problem in the authors' understanding of causes is their emphasis on the role of emotions. They say that "a basic human need is to have feelings validated. If they are unacknowledged they go invalidated." This definition of "need" cannot be found anywhere in Scripture. In discussing relationship problems, they claim in one of their examples that "because she's not taking care of her emotional self, nor is he, her love tank is getting no refill at all." This is heavily focused on living to please and care for self, rather than dying to self and living for the Lord as commanded by Scripture. Minirth/Meier also echo Bradshaw's teachings on the role of shame: "A number of counselors now believe that at the core, most addictions are shame-based." Once again, emotions are overplayed, and the reality of sinful rebellion is ignored. Shameful feelings replace biblically defined guilt.

One of the major emotions that Minirth and Meier stress is anger. They define three sources of anger. First is the "lost childhood" or empty "love tank." Second is a lack of completeness, lack of personal identity and/or self-esteem resulting in frustration that expresses itself as anger. Third is the lack of fulfillment by others. Here they claim that in many

marriages "each is trying to draw from the other what is lacking in self." This leads to the feeling of being exploited or violated, and then hostility. In a good marriage, Minirth/Meier say that each person is complete in self and has "discrete boundaries." For them, "love is a choice." Much more will be said about anger in a later section. Minirth and Meier take a position that is highly opposed to Scripture, particularly in their recommendations to ventilate. Meanwhile, their sources of anger all reveal a wrongful focus on self. Completeness does not come from within one's self. It comes from abiding in Jesus Christ. It is an "exchanged" life in which self has died and Christ lives. In a godly marriage, each partner places the other's needs above his own. These three sources of anger are clearly *not* sources of *righteous* anger. Righteous anger is not focused on self, but on what angers God. The Bible warns us about sinful anger:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:19, 20

The Freudian "unconscious," a large black hole that swallows memories, emotions, and motives, is one of the chief cornerstones of Minirth/Meier's theories. They make the following astounding claim:

"It is said that twenty percent of our decisions come from the conscious, reasoning mind. The rest come from deep within. And the depths within the codependent have been skewed like that lightning-struck tree."

This incredible statement is not footnoted or back up by scientific research. The difficulties in even researching and proving such a theory are unfathomable. More importantly, the claim is absurd in view of our clear accountability before God.

This "unconscious" is the foundation for Minirth/Meier's theory of the "repetition compulsion" (a Freudian term), or "homing instinct," wherein the person seeks to reconstruct his past in present life, no matter how painful. Supposedly, the unconscious reasoning goes something like this: "If the original situation can be drummed back into existence, this time around I can fix it. I can cure the pain. I know I can." Minirth/Meier use the term "magical thinking" to describe such thoughts. While people do develop patterns of thought and behavior, such explanations are purely speculative, and the authors fail to

account for the totally new life and new self of the person who is born again:

"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

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Their views, instead, are reminiscent of the determinism and hopelessness of Freud. Note what they say about one of their clients who was abused by her father:

"She still cannot comfortably face the truth. It will be years before she can begin to build solid ties with work and church families. Marriage? Not yet."

This is strongly discouraging, and it surely does not reflect the hope of the gospel. The early Christian churches contained people who were raised in pagan homes under the influence of sinful parents. Yet they were instructed:

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Ephesians 4:1

"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" 1 Peter 1:14, 15

Nowhere is this determinism more striking than where Minirth/Meier discuss the choice of one's spouse. They claim a codependent "radar" is at work in that choice. The individual is doomed according to their theory...without expensive "therapy," of course. They describe a strong, magnetic codependent attraction with incredibly intense feelings--a consuming, "almost worshipful" attitude. "Almost worshipful" indeed. What they describe is a form of idolatry. Therein lies a key to the real seriousness of the problem. God is replaced by someone or something else. That is not a function of the Freudian unconscious, but of the sinful nature of man:



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

Interestingly, the authors cite the apostle Paul as an example of one who overcame the blindness of his rigid, legalistic upbringing and was not bound to his past. Paul was truly set free, but he never entered into psychotherapy in order to obtain that freedom, nor did he spend hours ventilating anger or delving into his past traumas. His words ought to dispel any conceivable similarity between his freedom in Christ and the claims, theories, and methods of psychology:

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."  
(Philippians 3:12-14)

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3-4)

Throughout their writings, Minirth/Meier attempt to sound biblical. They claim to spend significant amounts of time in personal Bible study. In looking at the root causes of sin, a term they rarely use, they cite God's commandments to parents and state that "Scripture affirms that you are the key to their future." Scripture truly does warn parents, and parental responsibilities are no light matter in the eyes of God. However, as in other areas where authority and care is exercised over the life of another person, Scripture teaches a mutual responsibility. The parent is accountable to God for his parenting or the lack of it. The child is accountable to God for his responses. God assures both of His enablement in fulfilling His commands. Child abuse and neglect are not to be minimized or discounted, but victimization is not the bottom line. Man is conceived in a condition of sin, spiritually dead, separated from God. He is by nature rebellious and sinful in his responses. The solution to that problem is not psychological "treatment," but salvation and sanctification. Sin is the real "bottom layer" of the "cake."

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

This book centers largely around the problems of interpersonal relationships, particularly what psychologists term "codependency." The authors take a psychological perspective wherein what is done **to** a person by others becomes the cause of his "dysfunctional" (sinful) behavior. Their solutions revolve largely around altering a person's view of self. This viewpoint opposes Scripture. The Bible teaches that man's sinful nature is rooted in his rebellion against God. Man's relationship with God was broken by his sin, and therein lies the root of his sinful actions and attitudes. The biblical solution is in the restoration of that relationship with God, accomplished solely by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Man's relationship to or view of self cannot solve that root problem. We will review relationships in three separate sections. First, we will examine man's relationship to God and the sufficiency of His Word, comparing the biblical view with the psychological perspective of the authors. Second, we will look at how man views himself, with similar comparisons. Finally, we will see how man relates to others, giving some special consideration to marriage issues and also to counseling relationships.

### **MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD**

The authors include a section entitled "God and sunglasses." They claim that psychological disturbances distort a person's perception of both God and His Word. Truthfully, it is the authors who are wearing sunglasses. They bring to Scripture a multi-colored lens blending the ungodly theories of Freud, Jung, and other promoters of psychology. This places unnecessary stumbling blocks in the path of those who seek the Lord and want to live in a way that pleases Him.

A key error made by Minirth/Meier, along with many other psychologizers, is the claim that those who had "dysfunctional relationships with fathers" are in "grave danger of transferring those feelings about fathers to the father figure of God." Supposedly, they "unconsciously attribute that same human imperfection to God." One of their female clients, for example, "had transferred that ugly side of her relationship with her dad to her relationship with God, just as she had transferred the love-thy-parent aspect." The authors clearly believe that those who had troubled parent-child relationships will "unconsciously try to develop a relationship with Him on that limited or skewed basis." The child in a dysfunctional family goes into a state of emotional shock that denies him a meaningful relationship with

God. Emphasizing and inflating the role of emotions, they state that "emotions affect our spiritual dimension, to the point of reducing our concept of God Himself to codependent terms." The codependent's life is so "twisted," they claim, that "the ultimately trustworthy person, God, is often the last one to be trusted." This psychological orientation supports the authors' endorsement of the 12-step programs. They tell us that the AA founders, seeing that alcoholics were bitter toward God, rebellious, independent, yet childishly dependent on others--got around the bitterness by using the phrase "God as you understand Him." Yet they make this important admission: "That phrasing stops short of meeting core spiritual needs since He is not 'as we understand Him' but as He has revealed Himself." They naively state that "self-help books and programs both secular and religious all acknowledge the healing power of faith in God." This statement is naive because those who refuse to worship the true God will inevitably worship an idol, whether it be self, the god of a false religion, another person, a substance, or even the devil himself. "God as we understood Him" is a dangerously deceptive phrase because it encourages man to create his own desired version of God, and this is idolatry. Minirth/Meier's theories appeal to the logical mind, and they focus on the role of the unconscious to support their claims. Regarding a female incest victim who believed herself to be demon-possessed, they say that "that dramatic love/hate ambivalence buries itself deep. It may erupt in the spiritual dimension." From a human standpoint, it sounds logical that one might transfer perceptions of an earthly father to God. And if it all happens on the unconscious level, how do we disprove these professional sounding theories? First, we must look at the roots of their claims. Sigmund Freud, a confirmed atheist and enemy of the gospel, theorized that man *invented* the whole concept of God based on his experiences with earthly fathers. The source of the theory is therefore highly suspect at best, demonic at worst. Next, we need to question whether Scripture supports the idea. It does not. Nowhere are we told that good experiences with an earthly father is at all a prerequisite for knowing God, nor are we told that bad experiences stand in the way of our personal relationship with Him. God chooses us and reveals Himself to us as He will, and He particularly promises to uphold those who have been forsaken by earthly parents:

"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." (Psalm 27:10)

"But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; You consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless." (Psalm 10:14)

"If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him." (John 14:7)

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them." (John 17:25, 26)

It isn't that man never develops distorted ideas of God. He often does, but that grows out of his inherently sinful nature, not abuses imposed by others. The truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit, our promised Counselor, not psychotherapy. The authors briefly recommend seeking God's advice from Scripture, but this advice is mixed with counsel to read materials on "healing the child within" and becoming your own parent, both ideas that are alien to Scripture. In fact, "self-parenting" minimizes and usurps the critical role of God as Father, and psychological ideas dilute the power of the pure Word of God.

Also disturbing is Minirth/Meier's discussion of becoming "spiritually independent," which means "establishing one's own set of beliefs and mores, which may not reflect the parents." Independence from parents is not the crucial issue, but rather dependence on God and knowledge of His truth. The authors' views are especially disturbing because of their strong reference to occult psychologist Carl Jung, and their implication that one must reach the mid-twenties or early thirties in order to "leave home emotionally" and establish a deep relationship with the Lord. All of this mocks Christ's welcoming of the little children, and His instruction to become as a little child in order to enter God's kingdom. Small children **do** receive the Lord and serve Him, and their faith may or may not be related to experiences with godly parents. Note the unbiblical view of the authors:

"Pioneering psychologist Carl Jung, in discussing the second half of life, claimed that most people cannot begin to deeply know God until they are in their mid-thirties. Although we do not agree with many of Jung's premises, we recognize the spiritual and emotional benefits that accrue from leaving home. Jung asserts they must first leave home and disconnect emotionally and spiritually from their mother and father.

Then they are free to move into a much deeper, richer, spiritual walk with God."

How would Carl Jung have known? He never knew God the Father because he never professed Jesus Christ as Lord, and he considered religious faith to be a form of mythology. *Nothing* in Scripture even hints at the viewpoint just expressed.

One of the most serious and distressing aspects of the authors' psychological views is their belief that psychological therapy is a prerequisite to salvation:

"The codependency *must* be dealt with before that person with unmet emotional needs can hope to grasp the reality of God and the gospel. Until the deep problems are resolved, anything God says to that person is subject to gross misinterpretation."

"So often with well-versed Christians whose love tanks are running near empty, finding God becomes not a quest but a hopeless struggle. Deep down inside, beyond reach of gentle reason, such persons feel bad about themselves emotionally. When feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness run so deep; when these persons emotionally see God the Father as unloving, unforgiving, or unattainable; they can read the message of hope in the New Testament until their eyes cross, and still they come out with a fundamental sense of condemnation. Over and over we see them put themselves into a relationship with God in which they feel they must win His approval through legalism, perfectionism, self-sacrifice, self-abuse--whatever mechanism they feel will best prove to God their worthiness, even as they doubt that worthiness in their own hearts."

This denies the power of God in bringing about salvation. It denies the power of the Word to discern the thoughts and motives of the heart. It denies the power of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, in teaching us all of God's truth. The second paragraph describes a striving in the flesh, a doctrinal error similar to what Paul encountered and corrected in the Galatian church. There are no such psychological hurdles outlined in Scripture ("codependency") which must be tackled before being saved. This kind of theory is extremely dangerous and destructive. It hinders the work of evangelism and places illusory stumbling blocks in the path of potential believers. One must soberly consider the evil mastermind behind such clever deception being advanced by *Christian* psychologists. In the midst

of such deceptive teachings, we can only thank God for His sovereignty in saving those He intends to bring into His kingdom. Notice how Minirth/Meier's Freudian theories differ from the clear word of God:

"For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will." (Ephesians 1:4, 5)

"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)

One must wonder how the authors would explain the glorious conversions and spread of the gospel in the early church, centuries before the birth of modern psychotherapy and its entrance into the church!

The Word of God claims absolute sufficiency in equipping man to serve God and be rightly related to Him:

"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 in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:3, 4)

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Psychologists, however, come to Scripture with a distorted psychological view, and as in the case of salvation, they believe their methods of therapy are necessary to a proper understanding of God's Word. These authors state the following:

"As therapists and psychologists we do not presume to tell anyone how the Bible ought to be interpreted. Scripture is God's love letter to each of us individually. How it speaks and what it says is a very private matter between that person and God. What we emphasize--what we work toward--is that each person may have the chance to fairly and objectively

hear God's words, unfiltered by codependent bonds and preconceptions.

It is always intriguing from a psychological point of view how two readers can study the same passage of Scripture and, depending upon each person's emotional predisposition, walk away with radically different senses of what it means. Such unconscious winnowing is normal. The deep recesses of each person's mind sifts incoming information. But the sifting process in the mind of a person from a dysfunctional family--a person whose love tank is impoverished, a person in whom great hidden anger seethes--has been skewed and truncated."

"In the clinic we frequently serve Christians who are extremely knowledgeable regarding Scripture. Counseling sessions become marathon theology discussions with rapid-fire exchange of proof-texts and verses."

The authors claim that they "do not presume to tell anyone how the Bible ought to be interpreted." This is misleading, because they do exactly that throughout their writings, interpreting Scripture through their Freudian theories. They also err in stating that what the Bible says is an individual matter. God's Word is eternal and unchanging, not a matter of private interpretation. It is just such private interpretations that drive the formation of cults and other heresies. The Word teaches that its truth is spiritually discerned, and God has promised his Holy Spirit as our Counselor in matters of understanding His Word:

"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:12-16)

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:16, 17)

The overall messages contained in this book about God and His Word are highly confusing. For example, they do note the absence of Bible study in their comments about a woman suffering from "work addiction," but they fail to stress the importance of this omission. They tell us that we need "new messages about God," and they note His role as Father, but they combine these suggestions with teachings about being one's own parent and a heavy focus on self. They indicate that we must "say goodbye to the myth that human resources are adequate" and "arrive at the place where no other human being can be God" in our lives. However, they point to psychotherapy, based solely on human resources and inadequate human wisdom, to successfully come to such a place. In setting up prerequisites to salvation and interpretation of Scripture, they place unnecessary blocks in the Christian's pathway to God, and they exalt man's "wisdom" above God's truth. These authors come to Scripture with the "sunglasses" of Freudian theory, which darken their understanding and dilute the purity of God's Word. What we must do is view their psychological theories through the pure lens of Scripture. God has no need of Freud's atheistic, mythological theories to teach His children His truth!

### **SELF...THE SOLUTION--OR THE *PROBLEM*?**

The view of self promoted in this book reflects the current emphasis on self-love, self-care, self-worth, self-parenting, and other self hyphenated words ad nauseum. It is a view that opposes Scripture.

In defining "codependency," the authors focus on the person's lack of completeness, lack of personal identity, lack of self-esteem, and a severely restricted sense of self, having been crowded out by the identity and problems of another person. They echo John Bradshaw's blasphemous "I AMness" in their emphasis on personal boundaries, or "I am me." In discussing the dynamics of personal relationships, they claim that each person must be complete and secure within, not looking to outside relationships to clarify identity. They even claim that the *Christian's* self, completeness, and value all exist within.

Much of this may sound reasonable on the surface. Scripture does warn us not to trust in the flesh or to place another person in the role of God. However, the Christian's identity is wholly in Christ, having died to self and taken on His nature (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3). The Christian is identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. He is also a functioning member of



the body of Christ, which is the church. Scripture stresses the wholeness and interdependency of that body:

"But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:24b-27)

The apostle Paul might have been told by modern psychologists that he lacked "personal boundaries:"

"So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."  
(Acts 20:31)

"Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:29)

Modern psychology encourages self-contained individuals, though some may loudly protest to the contrary. Psychological theories miss the biblical truth that man is naturally predisposed to loving and caring for self, regardless of other-centered, so-called "codependent" appearances. Minirth/Meier discuss the fact that infants are completely egocentric, and they admit that "God assumed love of self when He said, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'" They also admit that "even when the child sees that the world spreads out far beyond its knowledge, the self-focus remains." These admissions are correct but are ignored in the overall psychological message of the book, which promotes selfish ambitions, cultivation of positive messages to self, and general love of self.

The authors' concept of guilt is not faithful to Scripture, but more closely resembles Freud's psychologizing of guilt. The Bible defines guilt in terms of real disobedience to God's commandments, not bad feelings toward the self. Minirth/Meier acknowledge that "you don't have to argue the validity of original sin to find genuine guilt in even a small child." Their brief lip service to biblical truth only confuses the issue, because their writing promotes a Freudian, psychological view of guilt. They stress "false guilt," which they define as anger turned inward toward the self. This is also their explanation for depression. They fail to recognize true guilt as a major factor in depressions, and they never discuss the sinful self-focused basis

for much human anger. Instead, they claim that the "codependent, lacking a good self-image, is too often willing to accept a big unhealthy dose of blame for just about anything." They also discuss the "self-made guilt trip" and tell us that incest victims feel responsible for the abuse. While it is true that real victims may engage in self-condemnation, psychologists encourage a continuing victim mentality rather than helping the person see his own sin from God's perspective.

One of the major therapeutic techniques promoted by this book is that of "seeing yourself in a new light," or giving yourself new "I" messages. The authors recommend the "free association" psychoanalytic technique to uncover the messages of how you feel about yourself. They call these "existential messages." Following are some of the negative messages they claim are carried by those from "dysfunctional" families:

I am unloved, and unlovable, even in the eyes of God.  
I am responsible for everyone else's hurt and pain.  
I am not worthy, but must earn salvation and grace, in the family and with God.  
I must work to deserve inclusion in the family of man and of God.  
I do not deserve success.

It would be helpful to compare these supposedly negative messages with related verses of Scripture:

God does love us, but not because of some inherent quality of being lovable:

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."  
(Romans 5:8)

Scripture teaches us that we do indeed have a responsibility for the way in which we treat others. At times we truly **are** responsible before God for having inflicted hurt and pain on others.

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29)

Being unworthy, and having to earn salvation (or grace), are not equivalent. If we were *worthy* of God's demonstration of love, it would *not* be called 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)

God has chosen us in Christ; inclusion in God's family is a matter of sovereign election, not deserving **or** earning on our part.

"For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will."  
(Ephesians 1:4, 5)

The Bible never tells us that we *deserve* success in worldly terms. Many verses could be cited to show that we are not to seek worldly success for its own sake, and that every good gift we are given has come from God. God's command is to set aside and deny self, becoming a servant in His kingdom. Whenever we do enjoy success, the glory is to be given to God.

"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.'" (Matthew 20:25-28)

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17)

"But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." (1 Timothy 6:8)

The authors, however, persist in claiming that we have "rights" and must learn to think well of ourselves. They say that "as a former codependent you're simply not accustomed to thinking

positively about yourself." Here are some of the messages about self, and "rights," that the authors recommend:

"I have permission to live."  
"I have a right to life."  
I have a "right to some degree of happiness," after "trying to keep everyone else happy."  
"I deserve to have some of that healthy intimacy if I find it."  
"I can own my sexuality."  
"I can own my anger and grief."  
"My feelings are legitimate and it's okay to have them."  
"Some devoted Christians have to give themselves permission to be comfortably successful."

This list is reminiscent of similar lists developed by John Bradshaw, though slightly less blatant. Because they claim that "the conscious level is not where we make decisions," they suggest asking God in conversational prayer to "plant new messages." Psalm 18, 57, and 139 are suggested in such planting of new self messages. Group support is also recommended.

The three Psalms noted do not exalt self or suggest new "I" messages. Each contains instead new "GOD" messages that praise and exalt Him. Even the verses that state "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" stress the work of **God**, not the supposed rights of man:

"I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies." (Psalm 18:3)

"The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!" (Psalm 18:46)

"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth." (Psalm 57:5 and 11)

"I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My name was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."  
(Psalm 139:14-16)

Psalm 139 focuses on God's superior knowledge of the inner man, and concludes with a prayerful attitude of asking Him to search the heart for ways that are not pleasing to Him:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23, 24)

While Minirth/Meier say to "get reacquainted with your **self**; your **self** is now in the driver's seat--an uncomfortable place to be, at first" (emphasis added), the Psalms instead turn our eyes toward the **Lord** and unquestionably place only **Him** in the "driver's seat," declaring His praises.

In contrast to their advice to see oneself in a more positive light, they caution against the "sinful tendency to use defense mechanisms to fool ourselves," indicating that a blindness to self, or self-deception, is a continuing problem for the so-called "codependent." This is much closer to the Bible, which teaches that the heart of man is "deceitful and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). The difference, however, is that the authors place self-deception on the Freudian unconscious level, whereas Scripture recognizes a conscious responsibility for deceitfulness. The psychological viewpoint of this book warns against unconscious self-deception while encouraging the person to see himself in a highly biased positive manner--merely another form of deception. We would do well to consider the experience of Isaiah, who saw himself honestly before a holy God:

"'Woe is me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'" (Isaiah 6:5)

Scripture instructs us to examine our hearts honestly before God, asking Him to search for wicked ways (Psalm 139;23, 24). We are warned against what Minirth/Meier so heartily recommend--thinking too highly of ourselves. Their psychological message is both conflicting and deceptive.

Another area of grave concern is the authors' teachings about self-parenting and taking care of self before others. A lengthy section of the book addresses "reparenting," using another person, self, and finally God. Each of these is to "nurture, affirm, and guide." Minirth/Meier claim that "growing up in a dysfunctional family, you already learned how to be your own negative parent. You criticize yourself, belittle and boss yourself." They go on

to discuss the "parent within" addressing the "child within." There is an assumption in all of this, completely unsupported by Scripture, that man can be divided into parent/child or adult/child or parent/adult/child. However, the Bible consistently views us as whole persons before God. He is our Father, and we are forever His children. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, a product of being under God's control. Self-parenting is never even hinted at in Scripture. There is a proper place for teaching, counseling, admonishing, rebuking, and being under the biblical authority of pastors and elders in the church. This is the closest we might come to Minirth/Meier's "reparenting" by others. However, we must reject their overall concept here, which places trust in the flesh ahead of trust in God. They put another person first (as a "reparent"), then self, and lastly God.

Taking care of self first is a dangerous idea that accompanies the parenting of self. The authors indicate that this will concern Christians, because selfishness is a sin. However, they claim that the "codependent" exhibits a compulsion in denial of self, interpreting God's commands as "do not help self; help only others" or "deny even the sensible, ordinary needs of self" or "love your neighbor instead of yourself" or "do anything for your neighbor whether it's necessary or in their best interests or not." Great importance is attached to learning how to ask for what you want. Even if you don't achieve your specific goal, "it is the boundaries that are important, your view of yourself."

The quotes above are indeed distortions of the biblical command to deny self and take up the cross of Christ. However, the authors only briefly touch on the biblical truth about what is wrong, and they only point right back to self in suggesting solutions. As Christians, bought with the precious blood of Christ, our lives are truly not our own. We belong to God, and we live to serve and please Him, not self. The so-called "codependent," who "loves neighbor instead of self" or "denies even the sensible, ordinary needs of self," is not other-centered at all. He is self-centered in a manipulative, deceptive manner. It is the motives of the heart that must be examined. The Bible does instruct us to glorify God with our bodies, so there is a minimum amount of self-care that is appropriate because it honors Him. We are not instructed to cater to every demand of others, but to do what is obedient and honoring to God, and for the ultimate good of others. The solution to the poorly defined problems of "codependency" is *not* turning back to self, or caring for self ahead of others, but becoming rightly related to God and seeking to live a life that pleases Him. That will lead sometimes

to praise, other times to persecution, from others. The life that pleases God also works for the good and the salvation of others.

The authors make some mention of motives in their section on "professional rescuers," but still fail to see the issues or solutions biblically. Those in the helping professions, they claim, are either called by God or driven by codependency. The latter may be "patching up that little lost child within," recreating the family of origin to make everything right, and attempting to fill his own love tank, yet actually draining it all the more. They say that "being noble and selfless, the rescuer need not consider himself or herself." Their analysis is that "unmet needs--denial, pain--in short, the personal things that are unpleasant to deal with--get buried." Apparently, they see psychotherapy as the only solution:

"Unless the person deals with the underlying codependency problems, unless the wounds are opened and cleaned and healed, he or she is doomed to a recurring sense of failure."

All of this is a description of living to please *self*, not God, not others. Note carefully the wisdom of the Bible concerning motives:

"All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord." (Proverbs 16:2)

The tendency of man is to see himself as innocent, yet God looks within the heart and discerns the true motives. These authors encourage the stance of innocence and point to an excessive self-concern as the answer to a self-focus that has been turned upside down to appear as concern for others. Even their view of forgiveness, a cornerstone of Christianity, is founded on selfish motivation and given last place in their process of "recovery." Their focus is repeatedly selfish and introspective as they attempt to help people change, and the motivation they suggest is equally selfish: "You can pursue and seize happiness." They insist on verbalization of the whole story of one's childhood, something that can too easily lead to gossip and slander, along with ignoring the biblical perspective:

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:7, 8)

One of the many case histories they cite concerns a man whose wife engages in habitual drunkenness. While appearing to seek help for her, he repeatedly ensures that she never receives that help. Eventually, his angry motives are disclosed--his hatred of her, his feeling better about *himself* as he watches her suffer. All of this describes a view of self that is too *high*, not too low. Yet still the authors claim that the answer lies in esteeming self more highly and accepting self unconditionally. They support this conclusion by citing the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, who had been married several times and was living with a man who was not her husband. Paraphrasing Him, they say His message to her was, "I know your story, and I accept you anyway." For codependents, "that is an intensely supportive insight," they claim. This psychological analysis fails to see the real purpose of this passage. Jesus showed the woman that He was the promised Messiah, and He offered living water to *cleanse her of her sin*. The "unconditional acceptance" view of psychologists plays down the necessity and purpose of the cross. If we were truly acceptable without conditions, God would never have needed to take the form of a man and die an agonizing death in place of those who would receive Him as Savior. Recalling Isaiah's experience before God's throne, it is wise to bear in mind that standing naked before the holiness of God brings repentance and then cleansing from sin, not unconditional acceptance in our sinful condition.

This section on self has become lengthy, because it is here that psychologists go so far astray of the gospel. The Bible teaches us clearly how to set aside self and live as a servant of God and others:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."  
(Philippians 2:3-11)



## LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Personal relationships are a key issue addressed by *Love is a Choice*. Scripture also stresses our ability to relate to others-- in a manner that honors God:

"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself, but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'" (Romans 15:1-3)

The authors place much of their emphasis on the marital relationship, along with covering relationships in counseling and general principles of relating to others. They discuss the importance of groups, particularly in their therapy, and they also give significant space to the vital matter of forgiveness. Each one of these areas requires some discussion and critique.

**Marriage.** It was indicated earlier that Minirth/Meier hold a highly deterministic view of one's choice of a spouse. They claim a "codependent radar" seeks and attracts a similarly "codependent" person, in order to recreate the original family pain. They indicate a "mutual love hunger" and "helpless obsession with the other person." Such an attitude is "almost worshipful." Aside from therapy, they see little hope of the "codependent" choosing a "healthy" mate. This unfortunate analysis fails to recognize that *any* choice of *any* mate will carry some difficulties, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). And nowhere do they mention the Lord's command to marry only another believer, or the special problems that arise when one spouse is converted while the other is not.

An entire book might be written comparing psychological theory with the Bible in the area of marriage. For this critique, we will cover three areas. Two of these are covered thoroughly in the Bible under the same titles, submission and separation. Examining Minirth/Meier's counsel in contrast with Scripture will show their preference for psychological theory over biblical directives. The third area is their theories about each person's need to "leave home," which might be compared to the Bible's "leave and cleave" admonition.

**Submission** in marriage has been the subject of much debate in modern times. Minirth/Meier claim that "denominational interpretation and tradition bind the women to an unholy union of fear and pain." The Christian wife, they say, often takes refuge in "denial." This is what the Bible says to the wife:

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Ephesians 5:22-24)

"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." (1 Peter 3:1-2)

It is true that these Scriptures were never intended to perpetuate a husband's sinful abuse of his wife. The passage in Ephesians (verse 29) moves right along to give clear instructions to the husbands to "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." The verses in 1 Peter outline the purpose of submission to an unbelieving husband--to win him to Christ. Biblical marriage counseling would speak to each respective spouse about his/her God-given responsibilities. However, having only the wife to work with, different problems arise. Minirth/Meier's psychological position could easily downgrade genuine attempts to honor God by remaining in a difficult situation and responding in a godly manner. Submission does not equate with absolute, unquestioning obedience, nor does it imply that one must willfully assist another in practicing a sinful lifestyle. Godly submission places the interests of the other person ahead of self. The submissive wife would not buy liquor for a drunken husband out of fear, but would respond to his behavior in a gentle, loving, Christ-like manner. She would look beyond the mere alleviation of her own pain and fear. This is admittedly not easy and requires the power of God. Also overlooked by psychological analysis is the God-given role of the church. Proper involvement of church elders and pastors, including the exercise of church discipline, can bring the situation to a biblical conclusion. That might mean restoration of the marriage and its partners through godly counsel, or though unfortunate, a divorce obtained on biblical grounds. This is an extensive subject, but Minirth/Meier tend toward psychological values and psychological counsel given outside the authority of the church, neither of which leads to biblical solutions.

Closely related is another "hot topic," and that is **separation**. Minirth/Meier admit this is a big problem, that when their counselees "are Christians who eschew divorce for reasons of faith, the picture turns murky in a hurry." They say that "understandably, our counsel must be carefully tailored to each individual situation; rote steps or standardized actions won't serve here." Unfortunately, their writing leaves the unwritten implication that biblical standards regarding separation can and should be bent to fit the situation. There seems to be a slight contempt for those who would honor God by remaining true to their marriage vows in the midst of difficult or even abusive times. Referring to 1 Corinthians 7:10, the authors claim that Paul left the door open for extreme cases, where the wife might say, "You must undergo treatment before I will return." Also recommended is temporary cessation of sexual involvement during therapy. If a spouse is being victimized, they counsel that person to leave immediately, and they ask both partners in therapy to suspend victimization, which they define as blaming, accusing, or punishing, regardless of who is right or wrong. Here are pertinent Scriptures on the issues:

"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."  
(1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

The cessation of sexual involvement is clearly *unbiblical*, other than for the express purpose of prayer for a brief time (prayer, *not therapy!*). The verses that speak to separation ("if she does") are not leaving room for extreme cases, as Minirth/Meier teach, but rather command that wife to be reconciled to her husband or remain unmarried. Minirth/Meier's position neglects the "one flesh" teachings of Scripture. Also, their definition of victimization is rather extensive considering the context of discussing marital separation. While each spouse must be

counseled biblically to demonstrate love and not blame, accuse, or punish the other, it is dangerous to use this expanded definition in counseling the "victim" to leave. Basically, what the authors fail to consider is the importance of obedience to God's standards--in remaining with a spouse in spite of difficulties, in putting the interests of the other before self, or in "suspending victimization" because it is pleasing to God. This is a serious, important, and very involved topic that cannot be covered fully in a couple of paragraphs. However, the point is to recognize that Minirth/Meier are more committed to principles of psychological counseling than to studying and obeying the Word of God in these vital matters of marriage counseling. We should also note their practice of individually counseling marital partners, in cases of "major codependency problems," a practice that allows too much room for gossip and not enough room for solving problems together in a way that pleases God. (For an excellent, comprehensive, **biblical** discussion of marital issues, see these books by Jay Adams: *Christian Living in the Home* and *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*.)

Before moving on to discuss other types of relationships, we must note the authors' stress on "leaving home and saying goodbye." They believe this is particularly difficult for the "codependent," who may be either enmeshed or estranged, hung up on some element of the process of leaving home. Buried anger is considered a key factor, a "powerful bond of high energy emotion." In their counseling techniques, Minirth/Meier recommend talking to your parents, placing an empty chair in front of you and talking to it "as if" your parents were there, or going to a graveyard to undergo some similar exercise. They also suggest writing two different letters to parents, the first draft not to be mailed: "The very act of casting this draft unleashes memories and emotions important to the client's recovery." This is claimed to be a "marvelous catharsis of soul and spirit." The second letter is one that could be, but may or may not be, actually sent. The authors state that "we never ever ask clients to dishonor our parents," but these exercises can hardly be claimed to honor anyone. All are focused strictly on self, self, and more self, and are rooted in Freudian theories of "ventilation." Biblical reconciliation focuses on restoring people and restoring relationships, not ventilating feelings for the sake of relief. Much more could be said, and the issue of ventilation will arise again when we review the authors' teachings about emotions. For now, we need only note that "leaving home" bears a very rough similarity (the key word being "rough") to the Bible's command to "leave and cleave." Scripture never stresses such psychological exercises in order to "leave" one's parents, but gives emphasis to

one's growing relationship with the Lord and responsibilities to spouse and children. In fact, other than the command to "leave and cleave," little is said about the leaving. Where Scripture is silent or words are scarce, it is not an invitation for psychologists to fill in the blanks. Scripture does anticipate a continuing love and honor demonstrated toward parents, but a change in the authority structure. Emotions are not a key focus. The psychologists' energies are wrongly directed.

**Counseling Relationships.** In this area, righteous anger ought to be ignited by the authors' *highly unbiblical* position. Their comments are based on the theory that "codependents" recreate the original family pain with available people in later life. Pastors, they claim, are particularly vulnerable. Undermining the authority of pastors and the sufficiency of Scripture, they say the pastor must "understand the mechanics of codependency" and have "excellent personal boundaries," **but** "unfortunately, few pastors are trained to recognize and deal with codependency." This exalts psychological training over theological knowledge, and assumes that Scripture is inadequate to deal with "codependency." They also claim that "the helping professions tend to attract people with unresolved codependency issues of their own." While people do sometimes help others out of impure motives, the real issue is not "codependency" as psychology defines it, and the solution is not in psychological expertise, but in examining one's heart before God according to His Word. Scripture far surpasses psychotherapy, with its ungodly roots, in discerning the motives of the heart and also in promoting changes that are pleasing to God:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

As if undermining the pastor were not enough, the authors promote an unbiblical "professional" relationship, saying that "early on, psychotherapists recognized how powerful these dynamics could be. The client had a blank wall to look at." While some changes have been made, the counseling relationship in psychotherapy is still opposed to love:

"Psychologists today usually enter into a more personal relationship with the client but that relationship is guarded; appointments are limited to regular hours in controlled settings, for example. In contrast, the pastor

doesn't enjoy that safety. Parishioners' needs arise at all hours in all situations, multiplying the possibility of problems."

In direct opposition to "guarded," unloving, uncommitted, uninvolved relationships is the example of Paul, who would have been horrified at the practice of modern psychotherapy:

"Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:31b)

"Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:28, 29)

Would modern psychologists dare label him "codependent," or accuse him of multiplying the problems of the early church members because he didn't "set boundaries" or maintain a "professional" relationship with regulated office hours and unavailability outside that limited setting? The whole thrust of Scripture loathes the modern day therapist/"patient" relationship, with its artificial boundaries, its excessive fee structures (another vital topic), and its psychological values invented by the minds of those who would destroy the gospel. Biblical counseling demands a genuine relationship built on love, a *real* relationship, a commitment, and a deep level of involvement. It does not "multiply the possibility of problems" because it is properly focused on the Word of God and the counselee's maturing relationship with Him as Father and Counselor.

**Forgiveness.** Christians will agree that forgiveness is a cornerstone of their faith. Psychologists acknowledge its importance but distort the doctrine. These authors overplay the role of emotions in forgiveness, minimizing obedience to Christ as a proper reason for granting it. At the same time, logic is downgraded and so is the mind. The word "heart" is used as an equivalent to emotions, whereas the Bible uses "heart" to refer to the entire inner man--emotions, mind, thoughts, will, desires, motives. Along with other psychologists, Minirth/Meier contrast the "heart" with the "head" or intellect. Their overall view of forgiveness is highly self-centered in purpose, including the ever popular, yet unscriptural, recommendation to forgive self. The major discussion of forgiveness in this book comes as the final step in the grief process, which is in itself an unbiblical concept, one that will be reviewed in greater detail in a later section.

Minirth/Meier say that "only in the last few hundred years, since the French Revolution, have reasoning and logic come to dominate the mindset of mainstream Western civilizations." A simple observation of psychology's popularity ought to prove this statement false, at least in recent years. Emotions have been exalted to an idolatrous place of prominence, even in the church. Yet the authors still claim that "we are taught to carefully avoid the messages of the heart and espouse only the messages of the head." Noting again the misuse of the term "heart" as contrasted with "head," the Bible places great significance on the renewing of one's mind as a Christian:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)

"...to be made new in the attitude of your minds"  
(Ephesians 4:23...see verses 22-24, quoted earlier)

Ignoring these verses, Minirth/Meier use Christ's commandment to become as a little child, asking "how heavily does logic weigh in a little child's thoughts?" Very little, but this is an improper exegesis of that passage. Our Lord's purpose here was to rebuke those who wanted to exalt themselves in His kingdom, and to instruct them to assume the humility of a little child, trusting, obeying, and depending humbly on God rather than on themselves. His words had nothing to do with attaching more importance to emotions than to the mind:

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3, 4)

Nevertheless, Minirth/Meier stress "emotional integrity" in forgiveness, attacking what they call "emotional dishonesty" and claiming that "Christians may insist on serving the spiritual dimension to the exclusion of the physical and emotional," being "dishonest, untrue to who and what they are." In their system, obedience to God, in spite of feelings to the contrary, is not considered righteous or necessary. They say that "God made us an integrated whole and therefore expects us to act from that whole." We truly are whole persons before God, in contradiction to the psychological splitting of man (parent/child, adult/child, or soul/spirit), but that does not in any way indicate that feelings

are to dictate our actions. God's commands are never contingent on our ability to "feel like it."

The authors also say that their patients "often have difficulty suspending their logical desire for retribution so they can forgive." The Bible speaks clearly to this difficulty:

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:14-21)

Only a rare person would be emotionally inclined to want to feed his enemy. God only commands that we forsake the seeking of our own revenge, not that we "feel like it."

Minirth/Meier's placement of forgiveness at the very end of the grief process is another indication of their improper understanding of this doctrine. The Bible shows forgiveness to be a promise to remember another's sin no more, as God has promised to remember no more the sins of those who receive Christ. Feelings are not required to make and keep such a promise, which is an act of the will. In fact, the keeping of that promise is what will in time soften any remaining bitterness, as one refuses to dwell on the past in his own thoughts, speech, or actions. God commands forgiveness modeled after His own demonstration of love through Christ, and a remembrance of the magnitude of His grace:

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."  
(Colossians 3:13)

See Matthew 18:23-35, the story of the king who forgave a huge debt owed by his servant...but the servant subsequently refused to forgive a very minor debt owed to him by another. Note the final verse:



"This is how My Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

**Relationships...Bond or Bound?** Looking at some general principles of interpersonal relationships that are discussed in the book, we encounter a mixed bag. Descriptions of the "codependent" relationship do indeed give a picture of sinful patterns that need to be changed. At the same time, the authors promote psychologically determined values, rather than true biblical love, as they move toward solutions.

The "codependent" relationship is said to be characterized by a cycle that moves from pain, inadequacy, and self-doubt to instability, suffocation, and a series of blow-ups. It is marked by a driven, intense bonding wherein the slightest move in one person causes an immediate reaction in the other. The relationship might be called the "lifeblood" of one or the other, who is afraid of fading away without the other. There is a fearful possessiveness and jealousy, along with a strong fear of abandonment and need to control. Too much focus is placed on this one relationship, which is tightly bound. One reacts, up and down, depending on the other person's life, rather than acting on his own (the "stock market" syndrome). The two people are much too closely bound, and the authors claim there is *always* intense anger at this "enmeshment" and excessive dependence. In this melodramatic relationship, love is a demand rather than a choice, and the same harmful patterns are repeated over and over.

Certainly this is not a picture of biblical love. We must agree that the type of relationship just described is not honoring to God, nor does it encourage the Christian growth of either person. However, the authors fail to discern the problems in biblical terms. What we really see here is a form of idolatry, a trusting in the flesh rather than in the Lord:

"This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.'" (Jeremiah 17:5-6)

"Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."  
(Jeremiah 10:5)

We can also discern a fear of man, and the jealousy that opposes biblical love:

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." (Proverbs 29:25)

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Another sinful pattern here is man's tendency to take control. While the authors claim we must have "confidence within" as a basis for self-esteem, rather than relying on other people, the Bible teaches an entirely different view of our basis for confidence:

"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."  
(2 Corinthians 3:4-5)

In discussing what *should* take place in relationships, we find again a somewhat mixed bag. This is apparent, for example, in their discussion of "reparenting," which begins with another person who "will become a bridge parent until you develop the parent within you and develop a firmer relationship with God." First of all, "the parent within" is not a scriptural concept at all. Secondly, one's relationship with God, as Father, is to come *first*, not last as in these recommendations. Minirth/Meier encourage the "reparent" to be nonjudgmental, gently confront, maintain daily contact, be a healthy third party in "codependent" relationships, and be a nonprofessional counselor, sounding board, listener, friend. All of this, they claim, will give the love tank a boost but not fill it completely. Also, the "reparent" is to reaffirm your "new decisions about yourself." Friendship, good listening, and gentle confrontation are all important. However, being "nonjudgmental" defies biblical commands to gently confront and restore those caught in sin (Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5). Daily contact may or may not be appropriate in discipling someone in his faith. The "new decisions about yourself" affirmation is not biblical. Instead, one must help another to see himself according to God's Word and standards, not those of self. The Bible gives guidance on how to properly counsel and affirm others:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29)

In their discussion of "enmeshment," or the "stock market syndrome" noted earlier, they fail to acknowledge some proper biblical commands about responding to the lives of others:

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15)

The authors consistently recommend establishing "boundaries" between persons. Their idea of a proper relationship is when "two people stand close together with enough space between them to comfortably make room for God." The whole idea of "boundaries," logical and appealing though it may be, presents problems when viewed from a biblical perspective. The issue has been critiqued in more depth in another paper, one that dealt with the 12-step program. The Bible speaks of husband and wife as "one flesh," and stresses the unity of believers, along with the Scripture just quoted that teaches us to "rejoice with those who rejoice" and "weep with those who weep." There is a depth of involvement in the New Testament that is shunned by modern psychology. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly deals with His people as a *whole*. The psychological concept of boundaries and separation of persons is one which promotes the inherently sinful, selfish nature of man. While it is true that the "enmeshment" or excessive dependence described by the authors is not a picture of biblical love, the answer does not lie in separating people in the manner they advise, nor in developing "self-contained" persons who do not need one another. People do need to consider their motives in helping others and follow biblical guidelines that will truly restore those they desire to help. The "codependent" movement condemns "rescuing" or "enabling" behaviors, and while it is wrong to become an accomplice to another person's sin, it is equally wrong to withdraw and focus on putting oneself first. The authors tell us that "martyrdom" is often seen wrongly in the church as a strength: "The fiction is often perpetuated in the counseling chambers of the church and elsewhere." Sacrifice on behalf of the Lord and others **is** a strength, and more genuine sacrifice is

needed in our self-centered world. These authors, along with other psychologists, fail to distinguish between sacrifice that is made in accordance with God's commands, and sacrifice that isn't really sacrifice at all but rather a performance that hides selfish motivations. They say, "how often does the codependent, with low self-esteem to start with, get suckered into helping someone, or bailing someone out?" Helping others, in "codependent" theology, has become a sin. There are times when it may be wrong to "bail someone out," because that person must experience the consequences of his sin in order to come to repentance. However, the issue to address is what will be in the best interests of that other person, not what best serves self.

Along the same lines, Minirth/Meier state that the "codependent" must learn not to take responsibility for the feelings of another person. To some degree this is correct, because people have the ability to respond according to their own will and sinful nature. Some responses may be sinful. However, this analysis fails to take into account the reality that in some cases that sinful reaction may have been provoked or encouraged by our own sin. In those instances, it is necessary to confess such sin and seek the other person's forgiveness. Even if the response is wrong, one ought to bear in mind Scriptures such as the following, and make every biblical attempt to be reconciled and to restore the other person:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."  
(Matthew 5:23-24)

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."  
(Galatians 6:1-2)

The title of this book is revealing of its basically selfish, unbiblical position: *Love is a Choice*. The authors claim that love must be a choice rather than a demand. Selfishly demanding love is sinful, and there is no intent here to encourage such an attitude, nor to suggest that we must cater to the whims of others without regard for their welfare. However, love is not a "choice." Love is a **command** given by God, and those who are truly His children have no "choice" as to whether they will love:

"We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us the command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."  
(1 John 4:19-21)

## **ADDICTION...OR IDOLATRY?**

"Addiction" is a fundamental issue in this book. "Codependency" in itself is claimed to be an "addiction," and one of the ten traits listed in Appendix 1 is the existence of some "compulsion" or "addiction" in the life of the "codependent." The authors clearly support the use of 12-step programs, although that is not the major emphasis of this particular writing. They indicate that their 10-step "recovery" program is not intended to replace AA, but rather to "touch upon those steps and recast the principles behind them." One of their recommendations for beginning "recovery" is to acknowledge addictions and compulsions, along with "lost childhood issues," without passing judgment or assigning "right" or "wrong." During therapy, their counselees must "go into at least a temporary abstinence from the addictive agent or behavior," in spite of the "deals" that many wish to make with their therapists.

This particular topic is an important one that cannot be addressed fully in this critique. However, a review of the book *Toxic Faith*, by Steve Arterburn, does devote significant space to seeing "addictions" in biblical terms. Also, I refer the reader to Martin and Deidre Bobgan's book, *12 Steps to Destruction*. Basically, the "disease model" of addictions is in error and directly opposed to Scripture. The specific behaviors identified as "addiction" are all areas defined by the Bible as sin, beginning with drunkenness--the sin to be recast as "disease." Applying the "sickness" concept leads to psychological "treatment" and a destruction of responsibility. Properly terming behaviors as sin leads to the Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the only path to freedom from sin:

"But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness."  
(Romans 8:10)

Notice here that sin is a form of slavery, a bondage. The strength of that bondage seems to lend support to the concept of "powerlessness" promoted by the 12-step programs and psychology. However, Scripture draws a distinct line between the unbeliever,

who has **no** power over sin but is rather enslaved by it, and the Christian, who has been set free and can "do all things through Christ who strengthens" (Philippians 4:13). Seeing the problem as sin brings clarity to the issue and sends the Christian running to Jesus Christ. The false "disease" concept deceives him into believing he has no power and must therefore undergo extensive, expensive psychological "treatment" for an "illness" which actually does not exist as such.

To be slightly more specific, "addictions" are actually a form of idolatry, and idolatry is fundamental to all sin. It is a trusting in something or someone other than the Lord--self, other people, man's wisdom, a substance, or a behavior. These authors do their clients a disservice by asking them to acknowledge "addictions" *without* passing judgment, because that totally sidesteps the whole issue of sin and the need for repentance. Even their insistence on a "temporary abstinence from the addictive agent or behavior" (temporary??) is without any reference to the commandments and standards of God. The 12-step program is riddled with theological errors and deceptions too numerous to discuss in this short space, but again, I refer readers to other critiques and the Bobgan book mentioned earlier.

Minirth/Meier do make this interesting statement:

"Addictions and boundaries simply do not yield to pure will, not even so sturdy a will as yours. You must have God's enablement in this."

There is some truth here in that unaided human efforts are indeed inadequate, but God's power is fully sufficient. Unfortunately, the truth stated here is diluted by the unbiblical "disease" position that is expressed throughout the book. We must reject that position and embrace the scriptural truth that "addiction" is in reality an enslavement to sin, and a trusting in the idols of one's own heart.

## **MATTERS OF THE...HEART?**

Almost every critique of psychological theory must include a section on the emphasis given to the role of emotions in our lives and behavior. The title to this section is designed to stress the fact that in discussing emotions, we are *not* dealing with matters of the "heart," as that term is used biblically. Psychologists, however, nearly always use the term "heart" to refer to emotions, as contrasted with the "head" or intellect. These authors are no exception. As indicated earlier, the Bible uses "heart" to refer

to the entire inner man, including thoughts, motives, desires, emotions--the whole nonphysical aspect of man. In Scripture, the heart is contrasted with the "outward appearance" (1 Samuel 16:7) and with the "lips" (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8-9). Only God is able to fully discern the heart, and He uses His Word as a two-edged sword to penetrate deeply into the inner man (Jeremiah 17:10, Hebrews 4:12).

Typical of most psychologists, these authors place great stress on the role of emotions. They speak frequently of the "denial" of these emotions. We will discuss this "denial" and show why the concept is opposed to Scripture. Anger in particular is of prime importance to Minirth/Meier, who take a highly unscriptural position in their counsel to ventilate. Also significant is their discussion of the grief process model developed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, which they claim is now "common knowledge among psychologists." They warn their counselees that "it's important to know you are going to feel worse preparatory to feeling better." While some painful emotions might also be experienced in biblical counseling as sin is confessed and forsaken, this psychological process differs in its stress on reliving and re-experiencing of past painful memories.

Minirth/Meier's position on emotions cannot be supported biblically, as we will see in more detail. They are overly concerned with ventilation, validation, and expression of emotion. Psychology is intent on self-expression and "feeling good," stressing these as values to be placed above obedience to God's Word. Nowhere does Scripture place such a high premium on feelings. Ventilation of anger, for example, is a sin, not a virtue to be sought in "therapy." There is much to be discussed in the area of emotions. It is here that psychology wanders so very far from the truth of God's Word, and in doing so, people are hurt rather than helped.

**Denial.** "Denial" is a concept central to this book, and to much psychological theory and practice. In its definition, Minirth/Meier's friendship with Freud is transparent, because it was Freud who first invented and expounded on this idea. (See Martin and Deidre Bobgan's book, *Psychoheresy I*, pp. 288-9.)

There is an ordinary meaning to the word "denial" which we must distinguish from this psychologically defined concept. When we see "deny" or "denial" used in the Bible, we are faced with this ordinary usage and not Freudian terminology. Ordinarily, denial has a conscious element to it. The Bible speaks of deliberate, conscious denial of the truth (James 3:14, for

example). We also encounter teachings about the denial of self to serve Christ (Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, Mark 8:34). Several Scriptures warn us not to deny justice to the poor and innocent (Exodus 23:6, Isaiah 5:23, Lamentations 3:35). These proper uses of the word must not be confused with the psychological distortion.

Earlier we learned that the authors see the codependent as a "master of denial and repression," unable to see things as they really are. They say that denial "is the most powerful and harmful attitude you will ever fight within yourself." It is used, they claim, to deny that some substance or other agent is being misused, to deny the gravity of consequences, and to deny that a particular agent is "addictive." In relationship to their four-tier "relationship cake," it is "fixing up the top layer so that it looks good," a "mere cosmetic adjustment" which "doesn't help the deeper problems." Denial is particularly significant as related to anger and behaviors that grow out of that anger: "The person does not consciously feel anger or admit it. The unconscious action provides an outlet for the spate of anger, the pressure release." This "unconscious anger," the authors say, is the basic cause of depression--"anger turned inward" or "secondary shock syndrome." Denial figures importantly into their six-stage grief process, which begins with a state of "shock" or "denial." The codependent is in a "chronic state of emotional shock," and in the first four of the six stages of grief, nearly every response is designed to break through denial.

In this writing and elsewhere, Minirth/Meier use Jeremiah 17:9 as a scriptural foundation for their teachings about denial, which "breeds in the dark recesses of the heart, that heart 'deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,' as Jeremiah said in his prophecy." Much later, discussing decision making, they say "you cannot trust your head," since most decisions are beyond reason, but "you cannot trust your heart, for there the ghosts reside." (They do not mention trusting in the Lord or in the direction provided by His Word, which is far superior to either the "head" or the "heart" as that word is misused here.) There are serious problems here in the use of "heart," which they apparently equate with the Freudian "unconscious." Though they do not spell out clear definitions for their readers, this equation can be readily inferred from their numerous references to "denial" and "unconscious" throughout the book. Unfortunately for them, the biblical definition of heart involves *conscious* activities, in contrast to the Freudian *unconscious*, which is a bottomless pit that theoretically swallows memories and emotions, along with personal responsibility for sin. The Bible does not mention this



"unconscious" that psychologists claim controls so much of our conscious behavior and attitudes, and according to these authors, 80% of our decisions. Since the "unconscious" is neither biblical nor scientific, we must reject the many teachings about denial that rise from an assumption of its existence and control over our lives.

The authors indicate that denial must be countered with truth, and they list several specific statements of "denial" that need to be broken. Most of these are indeed indicative of sinful attitudes toward one's own life and the lives of others. What they fail to mention is that it is our *sinful* nature that accounts for our seeing things in a biased manner, and that it is *God's truth* that penetrates deeply into the heart, the inner man, to discern thoughts and motives:

"For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

One of their statements of "denial" is that "whatever befalls me, it must be God's will." They cite Naaman bathing in Jordan (to be healed of leprosy) and Joshua marching around Jericho, as support for their belief that this statement is untrue. However, in doing so they fail to acknowledge that in each of these cases it was obedience to God that lay behind the actions. More serious is a failure here to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God as expressed in countless Scriptures. While there is some tension between the free will God has given to man, and His ultimate sovereignty, it is significant in counseling to recognize God's divine control of circumstances and His purposes in allowing and engineering them for our good. While this may not directly pertain to "denial," it is important enough to mention as a key counseling issue that is denied (no pun intended) by psychologists, who tend to exalt man and his ability to master his own destiny.

"Denial" is *not* a biblical concept, nor is the Freudian "unconscious." Furthermore, it is improper to judge the motives of another person's heart, and that is exactly what psychologists do when they so quickly accuse their clients of "being in denial." However, we must understand the manner in which psychologists use such terms, in order to properly critique their theories and outline biblical alternatives.

**Anger and Depression.** Throughout this and other books, Minirth/Meier are emphatic about the important role of anger, particularly "buried" anger, in the lives of those who are "codependent" and/or depressed. Their position can very easily be identified as one which defies scriptural teachings.

In their counseling, the authors claim that one must "dig down to the anger within and force it to the surface." Acknowledging that this is very painful, they say that "it can be even more debilitating than the anger itself if, once you've forced your anger to the surface, you do not deal with it in an effective and timely way." Many of their counselees, they say, find it difficult to "give themselves permission to voice anger" and have been masking it to make others comfortable and happy (as if putting others ahead of self were wrong!). In case you are a person who has learned to follow biblical teachings on the correct handling of anger, and therefore do not follow the psychological prescription to ventilate it, they say this: "We do suggest that if you are a person who never gets angry, you are actually a person who suppresses anger."

Their therapy? The psychiatric clinic bearing their name has a room with mats, punching bags, boxing gloves, pillows, and whiffle bats, all designed for the purpose of ventilating anger in what one might consider a "safe" environment (as if sinful behavior could ever be "safe"). This physical expression of anger is claimed to work for many of their clients, but "others have simply sat there and worried themselves into a state of anger"--in direct disobedience to the Bible:

"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)

Quoting the familiar passage from Ephesians 4, "be angry and do not sin," they paraphrase it to mean, "Come to an awareness of anger, before it becomes sin." They claim they are not "creating anger" but rather "flushing it out" or healing an "emotional pus wound." Apparently it hasn't occurred to them that such free expression of sinful anger might be somewhat like pouring gasoline on a raging fire. (For an exhaustive discussion of the phrase above from Ephesians 4:26, a paper is offered by Discernment Publications.)

Also central to their theories and therapies is the belief that depression is "anger turned inward," even though they briefly admit that anger is not the *only* source of depression. They say that "when anger goes underground, the resultant deep depression or numbness can last a lifetime. Healing is nearly impossible under those conditions." (Whatever happened to the power of God to cleanse and set free from the bondage of sin??)

There is absolutely **no** teaching in Scripture that even *suggests* or hints at ventilation as a proper solution for anger. The phrase from Ephesians originates from the Psalms:

"In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent." Psalm 4:4

This passage, which is being directly *quoted* in Ephesians 4:26, is the very antithesis of ventilation, and consistent with other Scriptures on the subject. Here is the Ephesians passage in its proper context:

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin.' Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."  
(Ephesians 4:25-28)

The focus here is clearly on *not sinning* and *not allowing the devil to gain a foothold*, which he might easily do when the fires of anger are fueled through ventilation. Also notice carefully the verses that follow:

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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 4:29-32)

We are taught to be rid of anger, replacing it with kindness and compassion, forgiving those who have offended us because of the great debt God has forgiven us. Verse 28, which might not appear

to be related to anger, teaches that along with putting off sin, one must put on good deeds. As anger is put off, kindness is put on.

Additional verses from Proverbs ought to make the matter abundantly clear:

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)

"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32)

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." (Proverbs 25:28)

"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." (Proverbs 29:11)

"An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins." (Proverbs 29:22)

"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared." (Proverbs 22:24, 25)

"For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife." (Proverbs 30:33)

Stirring up anger produces *strife*, not a spiritual cleansing! It is incredible that Christian counselors would place such strong emphasis on a methodology that is so very clearly opposed to Scripture.

In regard to depression, the Bible addresses this topic in a depth not found elsewhere. It is wise to consider organic causes and consult a qualified medical doctor. However, where no such causes exist, one must look to spiritual issues. Looking at depression biblically, it can often be related to unconfessed sin, or sinful responses to life circumstances. One such sinful response could be sinful, self-focused anger and a sinful desire to take one's own vengeance. Another might be failure to fulfill one's God-given responsibilities in the midst of some difficult situation. We cannot cover the topic of depression in its entirety, but this suggests that "anger turned inward" is not a biblical concept, nor is it adequate to explain all or even most

depression. An excellent, thorough, biblical discussion of anger, depression, fear, and worry may be found in the *Self-Confrontation Manual* published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation in Rancho Mirage, California. Following is a biblical example of depression brought on by unconfessed sin:

"My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart." (Psalm 38:5-8, written by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband)

Both anger and depression have been critiqued at greater length by Martin and Deidre Bobgan in *Psychoheresy I*. Not only does the Bible contradict Minirth/Meier's methods, but science has failed to prove that any benefits accrue to the person who ventilates his anger. *Psychoheresy I* is highly recommended for a more complete discussion of Minirth/Meier's unbiblical position on both anger and depression.

Finally, the Bible warns us strongly and clearly about the anger of man:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." (James 1:19-21)

**Grief.** The authors assume that the grief process model developed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross is common "knowledge," with its five stages: shock/denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance/resolution. They insert one additional stage prior to resolution, and that is sadness, which they distinguish from depression because it comes and goes. This theory, and it truly is a *theory*, not a set of facts, is important to their "recovery" program because of the various "losses" they claim must be "grieved." These losses include the "details of loss in lost childhood," "losses incurred because of addictions, compulsions, and obsessions, past and present," the "loss of the pain you lived with for so long," and "secondary losses." Minirth/Meier claim that "as you analyze your losses," you are "almost certainly minimizing them."

We cannot agree with Minirth/Meier in assuming the five-steps or six-steps model of grief. This theory was developed by an unbeliever, who could not possibly have considered the most significant factor in the grief of a Christian, faith in Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life. That eternal perspective makes all the difference in the world, particularly when grieving the death of a loved one, and it was grief over another person's death that formed the background for the original development of the Kubler-Ross model. Consider the biblical viewpoint on grief:

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

The believer does not grieve as do those who have no hope, whether over death or any other loss. Consider again Paul's exclamations in Philippians 3, quoted earlier, where he considers the loss of all things as "rubbish" compared to "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He pressed on, straining toward what was ahead, forgetting what lay behind. What a contrast to the psychological model of grief! There is no comparison. The models developed by Kubler-Ross, and expanded by Minirth/Meier, clearly must be rejected as an invention by and for unbelievers alone.

**True Matters of the Heart.** Godly, biblical counsel involves an examination of the inner man--his thoughts, his motives, his desires--in accordance with the standards God has revealed in His Word. It is only the Lord, using His Word, who is able to penetrate deeply enough to bring about the kind of transformation that is pleasing to Him. This is not an uncovering of emotions, or memories, as the psychologists advocate. It is bringing the whole inner man into the light of God's Word and presence. Isaiah experienced this just prior to receiving God's call to preach and prophesy. He was humbled, brought to a repentance that is foreign to psychological counseling, and then cleansed by the mighty power of God. This is the kind of change we must seek if our counsel is to please and glorify God.

## **CONCLUSION**

This has been a lengthy and difficult critique. It is lengthy because there is so very, very much to examine, and such an abundance of error in many areas. It is difficult, because it is never joyful to uncover errors in the teachings of a brother in Christ. My desire is to do so in a spirit of gentleness, love,

and sincere concern for those who follow such erroneous teachings to the detriment of their walk with Christ.

The authors conclude their book by telling us that "the truth shall set you free," as Jesus taught--free to choose, and "one of those choices is love." Here is exactly what our Lord said in context:

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' They answered him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?' Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.'"

(John 8:31-38)

It is not the "truth" of one's "dysfunctional" family, or the "truth" of one's buried anger, that brings freedom. It is the **truth** of the gospel. Jesus Christ **is** that Truth. The freedom He promises is not "relief" from uncomfortable emotions, although His joy and peace are included as a wonderful benefit of living for Him (fruit of the Spirit). It is, rather, a freedom from the power and eternal consequences of sin. Christ's message is more powerful, more lasting, than the substitute offered by psychology. Free from enslavement to sin, we are enabled to obey His **command** to love:

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18)

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how

we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (1 John 3:14-16)

Love is not a "choice" as the authors propose. It is, first, an undeserved gift given by the mercy and grace of our Creator, our Father. And then, for those who know Him, it is His **command** to be like Him, demonstrating Christlike love to every person, whether friend or enemy, who God sovereignly brings into our lives.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **The Ten Traits of a Codependent**

Quoted from page 28 of *Love is a Choice*.

1. The codependent is driven by one or more compulsions.
2. The codependent is bound and often tormented by the way things were in the dysfunctional family of origin.
3. The codependent's self-esteem (and, frequently, maturity) is very low.
4. A codependent is certain his or her happiness hinges on others.
5. Conversely, a codependent feels inordinately responsible for others.
6. The codependent's relationship with a spouse or Significant Other Person (SOP) is marred by a damaging, unstable lack of balance between dependence and independence.
7. The codependent is a master of denial and repression.
8. The codependent worries about things he or she can't change and may well try to change them.
9. A codependent's life is punctuated by extremes.
10. A codependent is constantly looking for the something that is missing or lacking in life.

## **Appendix 2**

### **The Ten Stages of the Recovery Process**

Quoted from page 194 of *Love is a Choice*.

1. **Exploration and discovery:** You will explore your past and present to discover the truth about you.
2. **Relationship history/inventory:** You'll examine and perhaps reset your personal boundaries.
3. **Addiction control:** You'll get a handle on your addictions and compulsions and take the first steps toward mastering them.
4. **Leaving home and saying goodbye:** You'll say the goodbyes appropriate to healing. You may think you did that years ago. Probably you didn't.
5. **Grieving your loss:** Grieving is both the bottom of the curve, the very pits of your emotions and feelings, and also the start upward. It's almost like your dentist hanging up his drill. You know he's not done yet, but the worst is over.
6. **New self-perceptions:** You will gain fresh perceptions about yourself and make new decisions. What an eye-opener this stage is!
7. **New experiences:** You will build a fountain of new experiences to bolster the decisions you've just made.
8. **Reparenting:** You will rebuild your past in a sense, and also the present and future, as you become involved in what we call reparenting.
9. **Relationship accountability:** You will establish accountability for your new and refreshed personal relationships.
10. **Maintenance:** You will embark on a maintenance program that will keep you on the track for the remainder of your life.