

"RECOVERY" OR THE BIBLE OR...CRABB'S "THIRD" WAY?

A Critique of *Finding God*, by Larry Crabb

Following the tragic death of his brother in a plane crash, Larry Crabb writes of his desperate search to know God more deeply. Many readers believe that he has moved significantly away from his commitment, expressed in earlier writings, to the integration of psychology with Scripture. This paper will critically examine the ideas expressed in *Finding God*, first to see whether they are consistent with Scripture, and secondly to consider whether Crabb's psychological position has fundamentally changed. We will see that Crabb remains basically unchanged in his flawed psychological teachings, although he has become more subtle in his use of psychology.

Certainly, it is not wrong for the Christian to seek the presence of the Lord and to know Him more deeply. However, Crabb's focus is on a subjective *experience* of knowing God. Contrary to the biblical emphasis, he downplays the need for obedience. In Scripture, the believer is exhorted to respond to trials in trust and obedience. As he progresses in sanctification, he increasingly *glorifies* God. God reveals Himself as *He* determines to do so. Thus the Christian is to concentrate his efforts on bringing glory to God, knowing that God will indeed reveal Himself more fully. As he grows in knowledge and is increasingly conformed to the image of Christ, his relationship with the Lord will deepen. Crabb has turned this biblical order upside down.

Crabb's Critique of the Recovery Movement

Throughout *Finding God*, the reader encounters numerous statements wherein Crabb is seemingly critical of the current "recovery" movement that races through the church like a raging fire. He seems aware of the serious weaknesses in "Christian" counseling, its methods and goals. It is only fair, as we begin, to clearly recognize the anti-recovery comments sprinkled throughout the book. For these comments, we can commend Crabb. At the same time, do not be deceived. Crabb lapses back into the introspective methodologies that he appears to have forsaken.

In the introduction, Crabb notes that "recovery from pain is absorbing an increasing share of the church's energy," as "feeling better has become more important to us than finding God" (p. 17-18). He correctly points out how this turns our focus upside down:

"We have rearranged things so that God is now worthy of honor because He has honored us." (p. 18)

Crabb even notes that we are *immoral* when the pursuit of God takes a lower priority than solving our own problems (p. 38). Several key comments summarize the situation accurately, pointing out how the modern self-focus departs radically from historic Christian faith:

"The historic church taught that the chief end of people is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; the modern church too often teaches that the chief end of God is to gratify people." (p. 46) "Modern thinking encourages us to find ourselves, to heal our shame, and to pursue self-fulfillment." (p. 59)

"The cultural obsession with self is reflected in the recovery movement." (p. 89) "Even the church has bought into the language of recovery. Rather than blushing over our commitment to the god of self, we parade it as an extension of the gospel: 'If God loves us, how can we do less than love ourselves? We honor God when we increase our self-esteem.'" (p. 90)

"I must surrender my fascination with myself to a more worthy preoccupation with the character and purposes of God. I am not the point. He is. I exist for Him. He does not exist for me." (p. 40)

Crabb recognizes, at many points, the fallacy of self-absorption, and the innate human tendency to be selfish. He acknowledges the error of treating personal discomfort, rather than sin, as "the evil from which we need to be saved" (p. 36), saying that "Christ offers hope, not relief, in the middle of suffering" (p. 36). (Christ does offer relief in a spiritual sense, even when circumstances do not change; see Matthew 11:28.) He calls the indulgence of the modern church "the gospel of personal gratification" (p. 51), which indeed it is. He rightly states that "we Christians cannot talk about loving God until we come to grips with our raging passion for ourselves" (p. 46). God's grace, he correctly observes, "becomes a license for 'Christianized' self-absorption" (p. 49). He raises piercing questions are raised for the psychologized Christian:

"Which offends you more--your ongoing pain, or your ongoing sin?" (p. 205)

"Has your search for healing made the cross into an affirmation of your value more than an atonement for your sins?" (p. 205)

The preoccupation with childhood wounds is an area of major concern in modern "Christian" counseling. Crabb rightly admits the shortcomings in this approach, even in his own counseling practice:

"Exploring my motives more thoroughly or rummaging through my past to dredge up connections between childhood hurts and present struggles provokes more frustration than hope. This self-examination may help me to know *myself* better, but I want to know *God*. My countless hours providing therapy for hundreds of people suggests that a focus on increased knowledge of self rarely leads to richer knowledge of God."
(p. 72)

Despite this admission, however, certain erroneous assumptions are embedded in this quote. We *do not* really know ourselves better by means of Freudian archaeological digs into the past and into the "unconscious." Crabb assumes that such knowledge is not only possible, but desirable. In addition, he contradicts himself elsewhere in his book when he says:

"Part of our job then, if we are to find God, is to look honestly at those disturbing realities about ourselves and life--realities that could destroy all our joy unless God gives us hope." (p. 54)

Crabb not only believes it is possible to know *self* better by looking within; he also teaches that we can find *God* in this manner! Thus he hasn't really abandoned the recovery movement as radically as it might appear at first glance!

Yet Crabb acknowledges that "we need to see ourselves as more sinful than wounded" (p. 59). He sees how sin has been radically redefined by the basic teachings of "recovery:"

"Recovery experts teach that shame--the illegitimate message from dysfunctional families that we are bad--is the core 'sin' corrupting our efforts to live responsibly and love well." (p. 99)

Don't forget, however, that Crabb continues to endorse psychological techniques that involve digging up past experiences

in such "dysfunctional families." Also, his own view of sin is more concerned with thoughts than with actual behavior; he warns continually against "outward conformity." Sin does include thoughts and emotions as well as behavior, but it is just as erroneous to eliminate behavioral definitions as it is to ignore sins of the heart.

Crabb admits that when the biblical doctrine of sin is mutilated, the fundamental message of the gospel is likewise mutilated:

"Counseling too often identifies those bad feelings, encourages us to get in touch with them and to understand how they came to be, and then highlights the love of Jesus as the best way to overcome them. The cross is thereby stripped of its atoning merit and instead is granted the ongoing value of providing affirmation for people who need to accept themselves." (p. 130)

Once again, an underlying assumption must be exposed. We *do not* understand our "bad feelings" any better through the methods of psychological counseling. What Crabb says here about the cross is true, but he wrongly credits counseling with the ability to provide an accurate understanding of the inner man.

Crabb is right in pointing the believer back to the biblical function of the crucifixion:

"If we saw our wicked, stubborn violation of God's design, then we would value the cross as the place where God, through His Son, took on our sins and forgave us." (p. 131)

Crabb calls the self-absorption of modern counseling a "blind alley" (p. 163) leading to mere "cosmetic changes" which fail to impact the underlying sinful nature:

"We can resolve problems, relieve painful feelings, and improve difficult relationships without ever disrupting the fallen structure beneath them." (p. 101)

Really? Think again. Perhaps we can "resolve problems" or "improve difficult relationships" in accordance with the pagan standards invented by ungodly psychological theorists. But is it really possible to resolve problems and relationships *God's way* without confronting your own sin, or "disrupting the fallen structure"? No. Sin must be addressed in order to meet God's standards, which encompasses both the inner and outer man. Also,

the Christian should know that the "fallen structure" (the "old man" in Scripture) is reckoned *dead* on the basis of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:1-14). Crabb is unclear about the radical change that is brought about by regeneration.

Crabb considers the "restoration" offered by the self-help, recovery approach to be *limited* (p. 100). He contends that it is a battle waged against the "wrong enemy" (p. 102), as people focus on goals such as sobriety and self-assertion rather than finding God. He notes that people in "recovery" too often focus on *finding* themselves rather than on *giving* themselves (p. 102). The focus is on pain rather than on what we might still be able to give to others *in spite of* that pain (p. 112).

Crabb critiques the fashionable emphasis on love and esteem of self. He calls it a "disastrous alternative" to work on loving oneself in order to love others later, because:

"Once we start working to love ourselves, we never get around to loving others." (p. 114)

This statement is true. *However*, as we will see later, Crabb continues to teach that self-hatred is a major problem. Is there really so much difference between this emphasis and the recovery movement's focus on self-love and self-esteem?

Crabb also acknowledges that there is a "depraved function" to "low self-esteem," a function never exposed by the affirmation of support groups (p. 127). Contrary to so many others, he says:

"Let your *passion to heal* become a *passion to give hope*. The wounds won't all go away now. No method or group or counselor can completely heal them.... Don't wait for your wounds to heal before you serve." (p. 212)

In today's counseling climate, it is refreshing to hear a psychologist go against the trend by admitting the fallacies of self-love and self-esteem. Crabb even recognizes that God's peace is independent of one's self-esteem:

"God's peace belongs to those who have confidence in His goodness even when life is tough and their self-esteem is low. It should be noted that we can experience God's peace *and* a poor self-image at the same time." (p. 37)

The prophetic callings of both Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1) confirm that self-esteem is *not* essential to peace

with God. On the contrary, the recognition of sin, against the background of God's perfect holiness, is the prerequisite to real peace with God.

Crabb's intended focus throughout *Finding God* is to counsel believers to seek and trust God with their whole hearts, rather than to seek and trust self. While he believes it is not wrong to solve problems, he warns that:

"The difficulty comes when a legitimate desire becomes a final goal, when eliminating internal struggles or changing painful circumstances or feeling good about ourselves becomes our top priority." (p. 133)

"It is wrong to seek solutions to our problems with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to forget that continued trials provide a unique opportunity for us to develop confidence in God's goodness." (p. 134)

In the first quote, note once more an underlying assumption. Crabb uses the term "legitimate" to designate something that is *not sinful in itself*. But can we biblically support the view that it is "legitimate" to "feel good about ourselves" or "change painful circumstances" through psychological intervention, so long as it isn't our *top priority*? No, we can't. As we will discuss in a later section, trials are indeed designed by God for specific purposes in the ongoing sanctification of the believer. Crabb misses the force of James 1:2-4 when he so easily assumes that "changing painful circumstances" is necessarily legitimate.

Although Crabb's counseling methodology wrongly places confidence in the flesh, he says:

"A determined commitment to overcome life's difficulties is wrong on another count: it usually reflects a confidence in our own ability to solve our problems." (p. 134)

Jeremiah, too, warns against trusting in man rather than God (Jeremiah 17:5-8). The Christian must acknowledge the primary role of the Holy Spirit, who provides the grace and the power for him to grow in godliness.

Therapy and self-help support groups are cited by Crabb as meetings that "too easily become narcissism factories, manufacturing gloated egos" (p. 200). He does not acknowledge the additional problems of gossip and slander, but he at least affirms the self-absorption encouraged by these groups.

Finally, we can commend Crabb for the eternal dimension that finds a place in his thinking. The glorious hope of heaven is absent from most "Christian" psychological literature, a glaring omission. Crabb notes the inevitability of suffering in this life, and the fact that "future hope is more valuable than present relief" (p. 61). He mentions the truth that as believers we will meet the Lord in our heavenly home (p. 66). He criticizes the "counseling bandwagon" that wrongly urges believers to seek fulfillment and relief now rather than waiting until heaven (p. 79-80). This emphasis is welcome, particularly amidst the self-centered gratification so evident in "Christian" counseling circles today. One concern, however, is that Crabb often disregards the possibility of consistently experiencing real joy in the Lord during this life. It is true that believers do not experience "present relief" of all trials while on earth. However, Crabb places the Christian in a state of continual psychological suffering, and he exalts this introspective state. The person who claims to experience joy is "in denial," and this is obviously a no-win situation.

It is my sincere hope here to provide a clear and accurate representation of Crabb's critique of the recovery movement. His critique is unusual, and we can pray that his statement will be used by God to turn many readers away from the self-centered concerns of modern counseling.

However, this is not the entire story. Looking *only* at Crabb's critical comments about modern "recovery," one might prematurely conclude that he has turned from his commitment to psychology. Unfortunately, the facts do not bear out this conclusion. We will look next at his *misunderstanding* of the purely biblical position held by authors who are critical of adding man's psychological "wisdom" to the Word of God.

"Nothing Buttery" Revisited

In *Prophets of Psychoheresy I*, Martin and Deidre Bobgan have carefully documented Larry Crabb's defense of adding psychological theories to the Scriptures. The Bobgans note Crabb's use of the term "nothing buttery" to describe those who hold to the sufficiency of Scripture in solving the problems of life. They document how Crabb claims to hold a position that is opposed to the "nothing buttery" as well as to the "tossed salad" (integrationist) approach. He claims to have presented a *third alternative*. The very same claim, to a "third way," is emphasized once again in *Finding God* (p. 19-20, 81). Crabb has clearly not joined those who hold to a position of biblical sufficiency. He

continues to misrepresent and criticize that position, as the following introductory comments make clear:

"One school of thought tells us that feeling hurt and longing to feel better is selfish. Students in this school warn against preoccupation with self and the corrupting influence of psychology. They insist that trying to understand our thirst-driven passions and desires is an ungodly concession to 'pagan' psychology. They further declare that healing personal wounds and restoring a sense of enjoyable identity is rubbish--dangerous, humanistic rubbish.

These people are wrong! Powerful, painful, deceiving forces within us are crying out to be understood, sorted through, and handled. When we obey God out of duty, stifling our feelings of pain and confusion, we miss something vital about what it means to relate to Christ. A firm belief in the sufficiency of Christ and His Word does not mean we have to look away from our ugly memories or deep wounds. Our Lord invites us to come to Him as we are, pretending about nothing, feeling our pain, admitting our rage, and longing to satisfy our souls with rich food." (p. 17)

Crabb is *wrong* about the necessity of digging into "ugly memories and deep wounds" as an essential part of knowing the Lord more deeply. Nothing in the Bible suggests such a process. Crabb paints a *distorted* picture of the biblical position, however, in his implication that there is *no necessity* for examining the inner man. The biblical position teaches that the Holy Spirit, using the powerful, living Word of God, is the only One qualified to perform such deep searching, and to empower radical changes. *The human counselor is incapable of performing the Spirit's work.* Elsewhere Crabb's caricature is reiterated:

"Who I am doesn't really matter. Healing my childhood wounds isn't as important as following the rules. Obedience will heal whatever needs healing. I must therefore believe what is true and act accordingly. I must do right no matter how I feel. Then I'll be fine." (p. 50)

But it really *is* more important to obey and serve God than to "heal" childhood wounds. Obedience is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit's work is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, longsuffering, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Crabb is *wrong* to claim that genuine obedience, which encompasses the inner man as well as

outward acts, cannot lead to peace and joy. He denies the clear teachings of Scripture in the statement just quoted.

Interestingly, Crabb calls his counseling methodology "biblical counseling." In their latest book, *Against Biblical Counseling - For the Bible*, the Bobgans urge believers to discontinue use of the term "biblical counseling" and replace it with less confusing terminology. Their point is very well taken, in view of Crabb's system and his growing popularity. When Jay Adams (pastor who has been instrumental in attacking the intrusion of psychology in the church) uses the term "biblical counseling," it means one thing. When Larry Crabb uses the same two words, it means something utterly different. Those who are not intimately familiar with their systems are too easily misled. Crabb is unlikely to change his wording and admit his integrationist position, so clarity is left to those who desire biblical purity.

"Not Enough." Crabb repeatedly asserts that the normal disciplines of Christian life are *not enough* to properly handle the problems of everyday living. He begins early in the book:

"In our search for explanations, we discovered that wounds from childhood are deep, and that time does not always heal. The normal activities of Christian community--going to church, studying the Bible, praying and working in the food pantry--don't provide a sufficient remedy." (p. 16)

Note here the low view assigned to God's powerful, living Word (Hebrews 4:12), to communion with Him in prayer, and to His people. Crabb's goal for the believer is to develop a *passion for knowing God*, but he asserts that prayer, worship, Bible study, fasting, and the like are *all inadequate*, because "we cannot generate true passion for God by an act of will" (p. 53). However, what he fails to realize here is that God commands His people to continue in such disciplines, and He uses His Word in such settings to convict and change hearts. Bible study, prayer, and worship *are not inadequate!*

Crabb may *seem* to rightly acknowledge the role of God's Spirit in sanctification. In discussing how to build a godly internal structure, he says that:

"The answer extends beyond the obviously necessary requirements that we spend time in prayer, in the Word, in Christian fellowship, and in service. Those requirements must become opportunities for encountering God, or they are nothing. And the answer lies beyond the catch-all suggestion

to 'get counseling.' It demands supernatural resources that we can never manipulate, only trust." (p. 190)

There is again a critical note about modern counseling, but it is coupled with a degrading view of the "normal" disciplines of prayer and time spent in God's Word. It is in the context of those very disciplines that the "supernatural resources" of the Holy Spirit are available and active in the life of the believer.

Crabb attempts to explain his position by appealing to the sin that corrupts every aspect of man:

"Our desires, even for God, are so badly corrupted with self-centeredness that they cannot be purified by personal discipline, religious activity, or enthusiastic singing." (p. 167-8)

He carries his explanation *even further* by claiming that prayer and time in the Word can create *avoidance* of, or "moving around," the real problems:

"Spending more time in Bible study and dropping to our knees more frequently in prayer sometimes helps us avoid the very realities of life that, if faced, could meaningfully drive us to God." (p. 161)

Crabb claims that only *external* conformity, rather than a genuine knowledge of God, is achieved by these normal Christian disciplines:

"When we refuse to own all that is happening in our lives, when we never 'tell our stories' to one another, our pursuit of God is reduced to an organized set of activities energized only by the proud passion of discipline." (p. 162)

Note here how Crabb has judged the internal motivation behind such disciplines as prayer and Bible study: "*proud* passion." But is this necessarily a fair evaluation of the heart of every believer who immerses himself in Scripture and prayer, without disclosing intimate details to other persons? This is a sweeping generalization that must be questioned--and rejected. Another broad generalization here is the idea that believers "refuse to own" what is happening in their lives, and thus *avoid* handling problems. In a later section, we will critique Crabb's continuing emphasis on the unconscious, even though he doesn't use that specific term or give credit to Freud as he did in earlier writings. This is a dangerous and unbiblical emphasis. He has no

biblical basis for assuming that believers do--or even can--avoid and *deny* the real issues in their lives through prayer and faithful study of Scripture. Crabb acknowledges that much modern counseling is obsessed with the exploration of internal problems, but he neglects to provide a truly biblical alternative.

One alternative that he does provide is excessive disclosure to other people about our "stories," including details of both present relationships *and childhood ones*. In all of this, he fails to offer counsel that differs fundamentally from that of the recovery movement that he criticizes. He says:

"We go to church, attend a weeknight Bible study, pray, listen to gospel music, and buy books from a Christian bookstore. Some of us spend regular time in personal study of the Scripture; we teach Sunday school; we share Christ with unbelieving friends; we sacrifice time and money to serve the Lord. But very few of us talk to one another."
(p. 199)

"We in the Christian community need to tell our stories, risking shame and rebuke, because we want to find God."
(p. 200)

But is Crabb right in assuming that such "telling" of "our stories" will truly lead to a deeper relationship with the Lord? Is it true that time in Scripture, prayer, worship, and evangelism are *not adequate*, that believers need to expose themselves *and their relationships, and the sins of other people*, in order to grow in Christ and "find God?" Crabb cannot cite one text of Scripture, nor does he make an attempt to do so, to prove his thesis. He recognizes the narcissistic tendencies in self-help groups, but recommends something that is basically *the same method*. He fails here to acknowledge the danger of exposing *others* in a manner forbidden by Scripture, through gossip or slander. Furthermore, he ignores the biblical principles governing the believer's response to the sins of others (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5, for example).

"The Gospel of Impersonal Obedience." Crabb's gross misunderstanding of the biblical position involves his belief that it promotes impersonal outward conformity grounded in ungodly motives of self-protection. He neglects the biblical emphasis on sound doctrine, and seriously misrepresents those who would actually uphold that emphasis.

While Crabb critiques the indulgent attitude of the recovery movement, he is equally critical of "conformists" whose focus is on "doctrinal precision and rule-keeping" (p. 50):

"Their proud commitment to truth enforces the kind of obedience that never builds good relationships." (p. 50)

"Conformists work hard to cure the moral disease of license with the deadly virus of legalism." (p. 50)

Faithfulness to sound doctrine, and to the standards revealed in God's Word, is not "legalism." Legalism *adds* to those standards and makes personal obedience, *rather than Christ's obedience*, the ground of salvation. These practices are wrong, but they are not synonymous with adherence to sound doctrine and biblical obedience. Yet Crabb delves into the *motives* behind obedience and truth, claiming that the "conformist" is self-indulgent to the same extent as the person who openly pursues indulgence. Such people, supposedly in an effort to protect self, live their lives so as "to disregard the desires of the self and to cooperate with the world outside them" (p. 50). This leaves a crucial question unanswered: Is it possible for a believer to grow in obedience to God, contend for the truth of His Word, apart from such self-serving motives? This appears to be a no-win situation! Either the believer disobeys and follows the "gospel of personal gratification," or he obeys in pursuit of the "gospel of impersonal obedience." Does obedience fit into Crabb's system at all? That's a difficult question to answer from his writing.

Theology and Sound Doctrine. In the Scripture, we find that sound doctrine is emphasized so strongly that the emphasis is impossible to miss. Yet Crabb and other modern psychologists are quick to dismiss it as irrelevant in the sanctification of the believer, or to assign a more prominent role to *experience* and *emotions*. Crabb says that "theology becomes rich only when it survives the onslaught of pain" (p. 29). He elaborates in a footnote:

"The gripping message of the Bible will never be fully heard in the library. When we value scholarly precision and doctrinal purity above a personally transforming encounter with the God who reveals Himself in His Word, when we fail to see that an academic grasp of Scripture often leads to a proud appreciation of knowledge more than a humble and passionate appreciation of Christ, we develop an orthodoxy that crushes life. And we miss the gospel that frees us to live." (p. 29)

Later in the book, Crabb notes biblical metaphors such as *panting after* God (Psalm 42), and concludes that "finding God is not merely academic" but rather is "a sensual experience" (p. 181).

But we must ask piercing questions. Does genuine orthodoxy, or sound doctrine, really "crush life"? Perhaps the unregenerate person can have a prideful "academic grasp of Scripture," but is this an accurate statement about an individual who has truly been born again by the Spirit of God? The Christian *by definition* has not "missed the gospel that frees us to live." It is the knowledge of Christ, something gained *through His Word*, that provides everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4). Crabb has set up a dichotomy that is alien to the Scripture. Nowhere does the Bible claim that sound doctrine ever "crushes life," just as nowhere does Scripture state that obedience is opposed to knowing the Lord more deeply. The closest we come to Crabb's position is in the letter to the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7), which was quick to discern false apostles but lacking in love. However, Christ has an equally sharp rebuke for the compromising and corrupt churches of Pergamos and Thyatira, where false doctrine is tolerated (Revelation 2:12-29). Remember, too, that sound doctrine *includes* strong teaching about love (1 Corinthians 13). It not only *includes* love, but is *summarized by* the commands to love God and others. As defined by Scripture, sound doctrine is not equivalent to a dry, lifeless, merely academic understanding of the truths of God's Word.

Crabb, nevertheless, is more emphatic about emotion, or "passion," than about an obedient witness:

"We must recover our passion for God--or we will never really live. The church will continue to be filled with proper, moral Christians who sense little of the excitement of contact with the supernatural and whose lives are unattractively different from non-Christians." (p. 175)

There are serious problems in this statement. When Christians really *do* live moral lives in obedience to God's Word, their lives are *anything but* "unattractively different from non-Christians." Unbelievers are incapable of living lives that are pleasing to God (Romans 8:7-8). Particularly in today's immoral climate, "proper, moral" lives provide an outstanding witness to a lost world. Obedience is empowered by the supernatural, not opposed to it as Crabb implies! Statements like this attack the biblical doctrine of sanctification and grossly misrepresent the kind of lives that believers are called to live amidst a dark world.

A "Third" Way!? Rejecting both scriptural sufficiency and the self-indulgent recovery movement, Crabb points to what he insists is a "third" alternative. Having described and criticized the other two positions, he concludes:

"The first, common in fundamentalist circles, crushes the soul under the weight of academic truth and proud obedience. The second, popular among church renewal advocates, creates an illusion of life that honors the deadly virus of selfishness by calling it a different name. Neither addresses us as thoroughly *fallen* creatures.... This third option requires that we face the fallen structure in all of its loathsome, stubborn, wicked power and submit to a painful process of dismantling." (p. 81)

Again, *truth* does not crush the soul! The *truth*, on the contrary, is exactly what sets the Christian free from sin and death (John 8:31-36). Obedience, being empowered by the Spirit rather than by self, is not grounded in pride but rather crushes that sort of arrogance. Biblical truth and obedience *do* address the fallen nature of man, and they address that sin *sufficiently*. Crabb is very wrong in his analysis and critique of the position that honors the sufficiency of God's Word and the path of obedience to its standards. Yet he claims, in the introduction and throughout *Finding God*, to offer a superior alternative:

"We need a third way of handling our lives--a way that combines a passionate sensitivity to our deepest struggles with a tender insistence that something matters more than how we feel." (p. 19)

Biblical sufficiency and obedience are not insensitive to our "deepest struggles." The Bible urges believers to demonstrate compassion to one another (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Crabb's "passionate sensitivity," however, has to do with internal feelings of pain and hurt based on the past sins of others, rather than struggles to contend for the faith and personal battles waged against sin. He hasn't departed radically from the self-centered focus of the recovery movement that he criticizes, nor has he departed from his previous emphasis on security and significance:

"But bowing before God, living for His pleasure rather than ours, does not reduce us to slaves whose personal feelings do not matter. God cares about our hurts. He wants us to enjoy our new identity as unique, forgiven, valuable men and women with something important to contribute." (p. 19)

God does care deeply about His children, and that loving concern is never denied by those who hold to biblical sufficiency. But notice the focus here on *hurts* and *personal feelings*. That is the focus of the recovery movement, a focus Crabb claims to critique. Believers who grow in their walk with the Lord are never taught in Scripture to dig into such hurts, replay them, get in touch with them, or otherwise focus on their feelings. The New Testament does refer to Christians as *bondslaves* of Jesus Christ, but certainly not robots serving an impersonal or cruel slavedriver. Rather, it is considered a wonderful privilege to focus on serving the Lord of glory. The believer is a new creation in Christ, being conformed to *His* image, but the *focus* of Scripture is never on personal identity for its own sake. Crabb talks much of forsaking self-absorption, but his teachings remain a dangerous mixture of self-denial and self-focus.

What is Sin?

Unlike many other psychologists, Crabb does at least acknowledge the reality of sin, calling it the "evil structure within us" (p. 73). In attempting to find God, he says:

"I become aware of something terribly wrong with me, something so evil that it must be overcome, but so strong that it reliably overcomes me. And yet it must be weakened and eventually destroyed." (p. 73)

Crabb draws a diagram of the "six floors" of this "fallen structure" inside man (p. 74):

1. I doubt God.
2. I need you.
3. I hate you.
4. I hate me.
5. But I will survive.
6. Here's how!

Going back to the origin of sin, Crabb claims that Eve made three fundamental errors in the Garden (p. 84):

1. "She missed her freedom to enjoy God's abundant supply" when she focused on the one forbidden tree rather than on all the others from which they were permitted to eat.
2. "She lost sight of the truth that God's plan for His children is life, not prohibitions" because she failed to

note that the tree of life was also in the center of the garden.

3. "She added to God's restriction" when she told the serpent that they were not allowed to even *touch* the forbidden fruit: "When rules are emphasized more than liberty, the rules begin to multiply."

Crabb summarizes Eve's sin as the failure to trust God, the doubt of His goodness (p. 85). Adam's sin, however, was that:

"He had no confidence that the goodness of God *as he knew it to that point* would be sufficient...he had no experience with God's forgiving nature." (p. 85)

The result for all of their descendants is seen by Crabb as an innate doubt of God's goodness that leads to rage against Him:

"Each one of us is now a born doubter. And this doubt has been passed on like a virus to every human being since that time, except one.... Nothing in the infant naturally trusts the universe to be fully sensitive to his needs...every child from the point of birth knows terror.... Doubt of God's goodness creates the terror of aloneness in an unreliable world, which leads to rage against God for doing so little to protect us from suffering." (p. 85-6)

Thus Crabb comes to write the following definition:

"Sin is simply our effort to supplement what we think are deficiencies in God's goodness. It is trusting in self instead of trusting God." (p. 89)

"The fallen personality structure within each of us is built on one central lie: God cannot be trusted with the things that matter most." (p. 95)

Man's most *fundamental problem*, according to Crabb, is his tendency to conclude that God is not good or that He doesn't even exist (p. 105).

Moving to the "second floor" of the "fallen structure," Crabb believes that sinful man demands what he wants from other people rather than seeking God and trusting His provision (p. 111-2). On the "third floor," disappointment in relationships leads to rage and hatred of others:

"When someone can give us what we need but refuses, we are more than offended--we're outraged!" (p. 121)

On the "fourth floor," hatred of others turns to hatred of *self* accompanied by trust in that self:

"We begin to rearrange the way we look at ourselves in the hope that we can make life a satisfying experience without ever having to trust God." (p. 123)

Crabb explains that trust in self is "addictive" and is the "root of all other addictions" (p. 128). Meanwhile, however, he says that self-hatred serves to place blame for the sins of others "on something within us that we can correct" (p. 129). It is then possible to work hard on overcoming a negative self-image. This, Crabb states, is a type of "works salvation." He believes that some truth is involved, but distorted:

"Can you see how clever Satan is? Something about us *does* block relationship with God and with everybody else. We are unattractive! Satan brings us close to that truth and then deftly steers us in a hopelessly wrong direction." (p. 128)

Thus, Crabb concludes, Christians wrongly assume that pressure to conform is rooted in self-hatred, rather than the failure to trust God in handling disappointments:

"We prefer to see ourselves as wounded in our relationships, not sinful before a holy God." (p. 129)

"It comes more naturally to hate ourselves and be driven by pressure to improve, than to judge ourselves in a way that leads to a celebration of grace." (p. 132)

Critique of Crabb's Doctrine of Sin. Crabb engages in a great deal of speculation concerning the thoughts and motives of both Adam and Eve. The Scripture informs us that Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eye, and that it would give her wisdom (Genesis 3:6). She doubted God's *Word*, and she transgressed His clear commandment. The Bible makes a brief, simple statement that she gave some to her husband, and he ate. Nothing is said about his thoughts or motive prior to eating. Crabb reads into the motives of both Adam and Eve, according to his psychological presuppositions. He wants to stress *freedom* rather than *rules*. However, although the abundance of God's goodness is stated, the Scripture lays emphasis on God's command, designed to test Adam's obedience. Crabb comes close to

excusing Adam in his statement that Adam had not yet experienced God's forgiving nature, and thus he could not foresee that God might respond to sin with His grace. Scripture emphasizes the transgression of God's law, not the failure to recognize God's abundant supply. The freedom enjoyed by Adam and Eve was primarily the freedom *from sin* and the freedom to do what was good and pleasing to God. They were *free to obey*, whereas unregenerate man after the fall is enslaved to sin. But psychologists are not inclined to focus on obedience.

Crabb emphasizes *wrong belief* as a fundamental ingredient of sin when he claims that the "fallen personality structure" is grounded in the "central lie" that God cannot be trusted in the most important matters of life. However, the Bible does not root sin in a lack of knowledge, or wrong thinking, but in the ethical orientation of the heart, which lives in rebellion against God. God has clearly revealed Himself in the creation such that man is without excuse, but man holds down the truth, and *refuses* to give God the worship and thanksgiving due Him. He serves the creature instead of the Creator. He attempts to be autonomous, refusing to submit to God. His mind is darkened as the *result* of his rebellion (Romans 1:18ff). Crabb's descriptions view man as a needy, insecure, frightened creature rather than one who willfully rebels and refuses to bow before his Creator. In addition, he considers the "fallen structure" something to be "weakened and eventually destroyed" (p. 73, emphasis added). He fails to realize that Christ already *has* overcome that structure on the cross, and only rubble remains. The "old man" is reckoned *dead*, not awaiting destruction at some later date. Thus his general doctrine of sin is inadequate. We will also see how his view of progressive sanctification is distorted, as observed here briefly.

The concept of self-hatred poses critical problems. Crabb seems to tower above other psychologists when he goes against the flow of self-esteem teachings in the church. He appears to acknowledge that self-hatred is not the real problem. Nevertheless, he holds out "I hate me" as one of the "floors" of the "fallen structure." Never does the Bible claim that hatred of self is part of man's fundamental problem. It is rather the excessive love and esteem of self that Scripture warns against. Crabb rejects the self-oriented teachings of psychology in one breath only to embrace them in another. His teachings are misleading in this area.

Pain, Passions, and Progressive Sanctification

Crabb exalts the experience of pain as crucial to "finding God." He relies on a Freudian view of the unconscious, *while not specifically using the term*, in his analysis of the *passions* that he claims to be the driving force behind human behavior. His view of *progressive sanctification* in the life of the Christian is deficient.

The Power of Pain. Crabb believes that it is deep pain that opens the human heart to search for God (p. 29). It is a terrifying realization that "we are out of the Garden with no way back" (p. 30). It is not the self-centered hurt evident in the recovery movement, Crabb claims, but rather:

"...the pain of someone who wants to enjoy pleasures he cannot find and who fears that misery seems inevitable and perhaps deserved." (p. 30)

The path of pain that leads to God also is said to involve frightening truths both about oneself and life in general:

"God's Spirit gives us a fuller experience of Christ to the degree that we are willing to face terrifying truths about ourselves and life, truths that will either destroy us or drive us to trust in the Lord." (p. 54)

Severe internal suffering, without the relief of sinful pleasures, is the type of pain that Crabb says will lead to *total* restoration rather than the *limited* restoration offered by modern counseling (p. 100). This pain may not seem to be worth the effort, but Crabb exhorts believers that we must cry out to God to "expose our fallen structure as dangerously evil" (p. 101). In the process, he cautions against the denial of painful feeling and avoidance of "unanswerable questions" (p. 78). He explains that:

"A God whom we can find only by denying realities that undermine our confidence in Him is not worth knowing." (p. 31)

Crabb teaches that unbearable inner pain and anger toward God begin early in life. Paraphrasing the infant's response to life, he says:

"I didn't decide to need love that is unavailable. Someone decided it for me, then refused to give it to me. It just isn't fair. My inescapable pain makes me mad!" (p. 86)

Later in life, "a perverse energy in my soul *actually wants to challenge God!*" (p. 87, emphasis his). The purpose of this anger, supposedly, is to create *identity*:

"It is the fallen structure within the soul of every man and woman that delights to challenge God, because doing so creates a powerful sense of identity." (p. 88)

Crabb teaches that this type of intense rage is the driving force behind "psychological disorders" of every sort:

"Beneath most symptoms of psychological disorder...lies a reservoir of seething fury fed by springs of demanding from others, which in turn are fed by the even deeper and more vile spring of doubting (and therefore hating) God." (p. 121)

Relationships, likewise, are driven by these same energies. Crabb defines a "style of relating" as:

"...a fairly consistent plan for getting along with people that hides our weaknesses and parades our strengths." (p. 143)

Beneath every one of these "styles," he teaches, is "an energy that reflects either our fallenness or our redemption" (p. 144). The "style" is directed toward self-protection and survival.

His response, which is psychologically and not biblically grounded, is to dig deep into the "roots" of rage. Obedience to God's Word, evidently, is not enough:

"But it is a serious mistake to deal with our anger without getting to its roots. We prefer to think that we can overcome anger through controlling it or learning to identify and accept the hurt beneath it." (p. 120)

Beware of expecting to consistently experience the joy of the Lord in this life:

"Confidence in God and hope in His provision do not, in this life, always reflect themselves in a breezy joy. Confident, hopeful people are marked by perseverance and a refusal to seek illegitimate relief in the midst of their ongoing struggles." (p. 116)

Rather than such joy, Crabb's teaching leads one to anticipate an intense experience of "you are alone," or "angst." Perhaps that loneliness will lead to *finding God*, if He is trusted instead of self:

"That moment when the soul first shudders in the presence of despair is an opportunity to find hope in God. But none of us moves in that direction under our own power." (p. 127)

The little hope Crabb offers is fleeting, because he relates that even if one is so fortunate as to *experience* a brief time of knowing God deeply, he can expect to be rudely awakened to the realities of life and left to wonder whether the experience was a reality or fantasy (p. 64-5). Nevertheless, he insists that "incurable pain" leads to exhaustion, immobilization, and eventually the freedom to pursue God (p. 62).

Friendship with Freud. Unlike earlier books, *Finding God* makes no mention of either Freud himself or his discredited theory of the unconscious. But despite changes in terminology, the concept remains intact, misleading believers concerning the process of sanctification. In *Finding God*, there is a continued heavy reliance on the role of *unconscious* pain and passion which supposedly must not be *denied*. Anger seething beneath the surface is stressed as a driving force behind a variety of sinful behaviors. Relationships are likewise guided by "energies" under the surface. Crabb brings in the perspective of modern existential (atheist) philosophers in his descriptions of "angst," or severe aloneness. In this system, sanctification progresses more by feeling pain than by walking in obedience to God's Word. Sinful behaviors are seen as driven by disappointments and fears, more than by rebellion. Crabb mentions man's futile attempt at autonomy--independence from God--and he notes the work of the Spirit, but his system is firmly rooted in a theology of *need* and *longing* rather than the full reality of man's transgression of the law of God. Note his "explanation" of man's efforts to avoid trusting God fully:

"They are all efforts to avoid the despair that sets in when we realize that no earthly relationship will give us what we need. Disappointing relationships should have the power to drive us to fall face down, before God, begging mercy and comfort. But that rarely happens, and never without the Spirit's work." (p. 126)

Of course, man ought to be on his face before God begging for mercy, but not on the basis of "disappointing relationships."

Such an analysis skirts the real issue that sin is *lawlessness* and that man's most basic need is to be delivered from the wrath of God and reconciled to Him by the blood of Christ.

Biblically, the Lord does have specific *purposes* for ordaining various trials in the life of the Christian:

"Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must have its perfect work, that you might be mature and complete, lacking nothing."
James 1:2-4

The Lord specifically foreordains the testing of the believer's faith in order to complete His work of sanctification. He also ordains trials so that the Christian can present a faithful witness to an unbelieving world (1 Peter 2:21-25 and many other passages). Sometimes he uses trials as discipline, to teach His child (Hebrews 12:3-11). The Lord indeed uses painful life experiences, but not in the manner described by Crabb's psychological system. The focus is on testimony to the world and the believer's being conformed by God to the image of Christ--not on internal emotional hurts.

The Power of Passion. In earlier works, Crabb speaks of "deep longings" and "unmet needs." Now the term "passion" covers that same territory.

Crabb defines passions as:

"...strong, mysteriously compelling forces that emerge from somewhere deep within us." (p. 43)

He claims that "everyone is passionately engaged in the pursuit of something," and that this situation has existed since the time of the fall (p. 44). Assigning enormous power to passions, he claims that they *shape our theology* (p. 49).

His definitions and assertions are again dependent on the Freudian unconscious, particularly when he repeats his warning against *denial*:

"People who feel no deep passion have only buried it."
(p. 44)

The "core passion," Crabb teaches, is to make one's life better. From this one driving passion spring "all our troublesome passions" (p. 45). It begins as early as infancy:

"Every child contends with two forces in his life: forces within himself and forces in his immediate world. From birth on, desire stirs within the *self* of the emerging person, demanding attention." (p. 47)

But beware, because "our deepest longings are inconsolable" (p. 55). Crabb warns:

"We have to acknowledge that our hunger for God comes from Him and will not be completely satisfied on this earth.... Until we attain unity with Christ in heaven, an inconsolable longing for *more* will remain in every human heart." (p. 57)

Referring to "citizens of this world," he says that:

"Beneath their every act of altruism, benevolence, and sacrifice lies the motive of self-service that destroys its moral value." (p. 45)

It is accurate to note that the *unregenerate* person does not want to please God and is unable to do so (Romans 8:7-8). However, this statement occurs within a psychological system that exalts the power of *unconscious* passions. Crabb goes beyond scriptural teachings in his statements about the inner motivations of the human heart.

Crabb analyzes the basic problem with passions by stating that our "good passions" are too weak:

"We work to weaken bad passions. But perhaps *bad passions are strong because good passions are weak....* Something must be released within us that *wants* to resist more than to yield." (p. 169)

"We need to find a direction to take that will *disrupt the bad passions* that too often rule us and *release the good passions* lying dormant within us." (p. 175)

He explains further that our innate tendency to doubt God's goodness is what dulls our "good passions," our appetite for what is good and for God Himself (p. 170). At the same time, we develop "bad passions" in response to violent inner emotions:

"...we happen upon a pattern of behavior that relieves the turmoil and fills us, for one golden moment, with a wonderful sense of completion and rest and satisfaction." (p. 176)

Sometimes, one wrong passion is substituted for another in our efforts at solving problems apart from God (p. 177). Crabb explains that:

"The fruit of the fallen structure is any *ruling passion* that directs us to look for life in anything other than knowing Christ better by obeying Him more completely." (p. 177)

Doubting God's goodness, Crabb says, is the driving force behind our "bad passions," as "we permit ourselves to desire only what we can control" (p. 178).

Meanwhile, emphasis is placed on "noble passions" that Crabb believes "lie dormant in every Christian, waiting to be released" (p. 178). However, such "noble passions" are buried and inactive due to efforts to live life without trusting God (p. 178). Even when a *conscious* decision is made to live for God rather than self, "we may feel the strength of bad passions more than when we were ruled by them" (p. 180). Explaining further:

"We may be *ruled* by a passion for God but *feel* bad passions with a stronger intensity. The measure of what rules us is not which passions *feel* stronger but rather which passions we are *obeying*." (p. 180)

There is reliance on the Freudian "unconscious" in all of this passionate talk, but note how Crabb now slips in *obedience*--an obedience *in spite of feelings!* Isn't this the position he has criticized as "the gospel of impersonal obedience?" It is anything but easy to make sense of Crabb's attempt to blend need-oriented psychology with growth in godliness. Note also the idea of noble passions *lying dormant* within the Christian, *buried* under a lack of trust. *Nowhere* in Scripture do we find this idea.

Crabb maintains, however, the necessity of admitting our "bad passions" in order to be consumed by the passion of knowing God:

"As you admit your rage, terror, and doubt, a passion begins to emerge, a passion to make it on your own no longer, a passion to be consumed with the wonder of Christ, a passion to know Him as Lord." (p. 206)

"We find God to the degree that we want to find Him. Until our passion for finding God exceeds all other passions...we will not find Him as deeply as He longs to be found."
(p. 167)

Once again, digging inside of *self* is held out as the way to know God more deeply. The work of the Holy Spirit, initiated by God and not by *man*, is replaced by the power of human passions. It is God who seeks and saves man, who wanders like a sheep when left to himself. Crabb reverses this crucial biblical order of events, and rummages around within the heart of man as a prerequisite to finding God. He admits at certain points that "true passion for our Lord is a work of the Holy Spirit," but then states that *we must cooperate* in order for God to draw us into a loving relationship (p. 53). Crabb glorifies an intense emotional race after God as if it is our effort that brings results, rather than God's graciousness to reveal Himself. It is God who calls a person out of spiritual darkness into His light. He is fully able to do so. He changes the heart and inward desires of man; He gives the gift of faith in Christ. He ordains the eternal destiny of man, and it is His work of grace that transforms man in the process of sanctification.

Psalm 42 is an excellent passage to examine what the Scripture has to say about the believer's desperate search for God's presence. The Psalmist *pants for God* just as the deer pants for brooks of water. His soul is downcast (verses 5, 6, & 11) and his enemies mock him asking, "Where is your God?" (verses 3 & 10). Yet in this dark time he remembers God's past faithfulness (verses 4, 6-7). He remains confident in God and praises Him (verses 5 & 11, 8). The writer here longs for God, yet in a significant sense has already *found Him*. There is no sign here of rummaging around in the unconscious mind seeking hatred, anger, fear, disappointment, or unfulfilled longings, in order to "release noble passions." From beginning to end, the psalmist's clear focus remains steadfastly on God, and his attitude is godly. The setting is one of a troublesome season in life, not the ongoing experience with pain and trauma that Crabb seems to require.

Progressive Sanctification. Key passages of Scripture, such as Romans 6-8, Ephesians 4, and Galatians 5, direct us to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of the Christian. Crabb's view of sanctification, what it is and how it happens, must be examined in the light of these relevant biblical teachings. He states correctly that "the Holy Spirit is a person who works in our lives" (p. 60); some of Crabb's statements cited so far also note the Spirit's involvement. Unfortunately, these

statements are blended with psychological teachings alien to the Bible.

We have seen how Crabb defines sin in terms of the "fallen structure" within man. He also equates it with the "old nature" and insists that it remains after conversion to Christ:

"Some insist that the new birth gets rid of all the vicious arrogance that defines the old nature, or at least weakens it enough so that it's no longer a bother." (p. 99)

"But if the fallen structure I am describing in these chapters survives the new birth...then we must anticipate an internal revolution as we seek to find God." (p. 100)

It is true that the Christian remains a sinner, and that his sanctification is *progressive*, not instantaneous. However, Crabb does not clarify the radical nature of regeneration. Christ has broken the power of both sin and death; the believer's union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection is the basis for his ability to live a new life, yielding now to righteousness rather than to sin (Romans 6:1-14). Crabb's process doesn't line up with the biblical process. The latter doesn't speak of looking at inner pain, but rather of *putting off* the practices of the "old man" and being renewed in the image of the Creator, in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of the truth (Ephesians 4:22-24). The Holy Spirit uses the living, active, powerful Word of God to convict and expose the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Nowhere is the believer instructed to dig deeply into his hurt feelings and disappointments, as suggested by Crabb and other psychologists.

Scripture does not provide an exact timetable for sanctification. However, Crabb's view of "finding God," and of developing a real passion to know Him, is one that postpones almost indefinitely any visible signs that sanctification is actually progressing:

"We must give up any hope of finding a method that will allow us to trust God better. We must simply do our best to obey, to pray, and to soak in His Word and then, when months, perhaps years, pass by without visible change in our experience of Him or our dealings with others, we will be introduced to deeper capacities within us for passionate trust. We will more keenly feel our intense contempt for God, we will recognize our awful demand that someone take care of us, and we will become aware of a deep longing to trust God. Only then will we see clearly how natural it is

to require something from others rather than to give something to them." (p. 115)

Where does the Bible ever say we must "more keenly feel our intense contempt for God?" Is "contempt for God" an accurate description of the person who is truly born again, knowing His love and forgiveness? Does a "deep capacity for trusting God" already exist in the "unconscious," needing to be drawn out? Does it really take years, without visible changes, for sanctification to get off the ground? Absolutely not! The believer may have seasons when he doesn't experience God's presence as fully as at other times, but "contempt for God" is characteristic of the unregenerate. No Scripture indicates an innate capacity to trust that emerges over time. The Spirit's work produces fruit (Galatians 5), "visible changes." Note, too, how Crabb's description in this quote involves obedience, prayer, and Bible study, the very disciplines he claims are not adequate. In *his own description* they do appear inadequate, but Scripture teaches otherwise.

Crabb wants to focus away from solving real problems, and instead to cooperate with God in order to "dismantle" the "fallen structure" through a painful process of facing its stubborn, evil power (p. 81, 83). He notes that "hurting people want practical help," but the desire for such help involves the "deeper, more subtle assumption that *we can do it*" (p. 137). He states that only God can give life, even though Christians have been given the resources to obey (p. 137). In looking away from problem solving, he claims that certain problems (like Paul's "thorn in the flesh") are not intended to disappear in this life (p. 137).

In the midst of his teachings, Crabb cites two interesting examples of young men who criticized his teachings. One of them says:

"I see no value to rummaging through your life to find pain...God tells me to forget what's behind and get on with my life. When I face a problem, I go to the Word to find out what it says. And then it is up to me whether I obey. If I do what God tells me, then He blesses; if not, He disciplines. Why do you complicate things so much with all your talk of relationship and longings and motives? You're bringing the Trojan horse of psychology into the church. Stick with the Bible. Keep it simple. Do whatever God says." (p. 79)

Crabb's evaluation is that this gentleman "used obedience to avoid pain" and thus "he was living in a fool's paradise" (p. 79). (Does Crabb perhaps inadvertently use *pain* to avoid *obedience*?) It is not always true that obedient believers are blessed (in every possible sense) in this life; sometimes they are called to suffer joyfully for the sake of righteousness. Perhaps, however, the young man referred to *spiritual* blessing. But where does Crabb claim the right to make such a sweeping judgment of the motives of an individual who was not even one of his counselees, but came to him after a public teaching? Our objector here is basically correct in his focus on God's Word rather than on searching for emotional pain.

In another case, a seminary student came to him describing a serious sin problem. Crabb's response involved probing into unconscious motives based on a core emptiness in his soul. The student rightly objected to this exploration of "psychological insides" in lieu of directing him to scriptural exhortations. Crabb later learned that the young man was part of a group seeking to expose him as an unbiblical counselor (p. 162). While we ought not to condone this type of devious method, the student raised valid objections. Scripture does not teach that sin is fueled by emptiness.

Crabb disagrees with the assumed premise of his student "counselee" that biblical counseling involves looking only at the obvious behavioral sins (p. 162). He does not consider "responsible living," important as that is, to be our top priority (p. 173). Too often, he claims, we assume that God becomes obligated to us when we live responsibly (p. 172). He believes that we must "face our impact on people," "face the damage done to us by other people," and "face our attitude toward God" (p. 158-9). He stresses, repeatedly and forcefully, his conviction that we must face inner hurt, fear, and pain in order to know God:

"When bad passions seem to have the upper hand, we must remind ourselves that God is working to entice us with the prospect of knowing Him, and He is appealing to parts of our souls that are not drawn to lesser pleasures. And those parts define who we really are as Christians. God's method of drawing us closer to Him is to disrupt the fallen structure by allowing us to feel the terror and pain the structure was designed to overcome." (p. 181)

One glaring error here is the division of the person into "parts," some of which Crabb claims to be "who we really are as Christians." He implies, contrary to the Bible, that perhaps such

"parts" are not so seriously impacted by sin as other "parts." No such division of the inner man can be supported from Scripture. Nor does any passage teach that the believer must face and feel his pain and terror in order to grow in Christ and know God more deeply. The "responsible living" that Crabb downplays is not so unimportant. Obedience is empowered by Him, giving evidence that salvation is real and that sanctification is progressing.

Crabb claims that God's "deepest work" in the Christian is "to stir a passion for finding Him that exceeds all other passions" (p. 175). The strength to resist sin is claimed to be a product of seeking intimacy with God above all else:

"When holiness becomes more attractive than sin, when knowing God seems more important than finding self, when no cost seems too great to pay for the privilege of intimacy with Christ, then we will find the strength to resist sin meaningfully--not perfectly, but meaningfully." (p. 170)

The Scripture instructs us to "walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16); the flesh lusts against the Spirit (5:17). James says to submit to God, resist the devil, purify your hands and heart; draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:7-8). The emphasis is on *submission* to God in resisting sin. Biblically, God's deepest work in the Christian is to conform him to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29, Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24). Of course that includes a deep and intimate relationship with Him, but it is much more as well. God promises to *complete* that work in glory (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

One particular concern is Crabb's insistence that we "tell our stories" to other people:

"Moving through our problems toward finding God requires us to tell the story of our lives in a way that disrupts our contentment with each element in the fallen structure and awakens those deep longings in our hearts that make us pant after God." (p. 183)

"The exposure of bad ruling passions and the surfacing of good dormant passions most powerfully occurs as we tell our stories to one another in the presence of God, deliberately choosing to be open to His work of shattering and rebuilding." (p. 196-7)

It is again a mistake to assume that there are "dormant passions" needing to be "awakened." Furthermore, Scripture never says that we must "tell our stories" in the manner promoted here. Crabb insists that telling your "present story" will "uncover the subtlety and extent of your self-centeredness" (p. 200). He cannot support this from the Bible. In fact, this type of exposure could just as easily feed one's self-centeredness, as all too often happens in recovery meetings--by Crabb's own admission. Perhaps even more serious is his claim that one must dig into the past:

"Tell the story of your childhood, not to shift blame or to find yourself, but rather to admit the turmoil and rage and fear that grew in you over a long series of disappointments. You may have wonderful parents, but even the best have let you down. Chances are high that your parents are the source of your deepest, most shattering pain." (p. 202)

"Perhaps the greatest challenge to belief in God's goodness (a belief necessary for loving others well) is the universal and often severe failure of parents to provide well for a vulnerable, easily damaged child." (p. 202)

"Replay the events in your history that stand out as especially difficult or joyful." (p. 202)

Crabb notes that doubting God is a far more serious issue than any mistreatment suffered in childhood (p. 203). Certainly, too, we must acknowledge the reality of real child abuse, a growing problem in our time. But Crabb goes too far! While claiming not to shift blame, he does exactly that, with a virtually *universal* judgment against parents--even godly ones. Encouraging adults to "tell their childhood stories" in this manner is an invitation to gossip, slander, and all manner of unbiblical communication. No valid biblical purpose (certainly not sanctification!) is served by these methods, which are in direct disobedience to Scripture.

To conclude this section, it is most crucial to note that Crabb, as a human counselor, attempts to usurp the unique work of the Holy Spirit by performing the inner work that He only can do. Crabb probes deeply into the heart, making broad assumptions about motives and minimizing biblical obedience as "impersonal," as mere "outward conformity." But obedience to God is not impersonal, and *outward* conformity to God's standards is a fruit of *inward* purity. The Spirit convicts and changes the heart. In exhorting another believer, one does not *ignore* the importance of the inner man (the heart), but proceeds carefully in the knowledge that only God's

Spirit can accurately understand and expose its condition. Sometimes, perhaps often, sanctification proceeds in accordance with God's plan but *without* a detailed exposure of the individual's motives.

Crabb adds nothing to the Scripture in his views concerning sanctification--nothing but confusion, that is. In this crucial area, the teachings expressed in his earlier books remain basically unchanged, despite the semantic alterations of his terminology.

The Sovereignty of God: A Solid Theological Foundation

Crabb's discussion of *finding God* in the midst of tragic circumstances is one that touches on the crucial theological issue of the sovereignty of God. We noted earlier that Crabb downplays the importance of doctrinal precision in finding God and facing the problems of life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In reflecting on his brother's sudden death, and other similar tragedies, Crabb notes that we often want *answers* from God more than we want *Him*. Sometimes it's possible for us to see God working to bring good out of evil, but other times tragedies appear pointless (p. 78). In the midst of it all, Crabb concludes that:

"You know you're finding God when you believe that God is good no matter what happens." (p. 103)

However, he warns, the events of the present life are hardly evidence of God's goodness:

"No one will conclude that God is good by studying life. The evidence powerfully suggests otherwise. Belief in the goodness of God and the worship that naturally flows from this confidence depends on the revealing work of the Holy Spirit." (p. 104)

Consider what Crabb is saying. It *is not* experience, apart from the Spirit and the Word of God, that empowers the proper knowledge of Him. This is contrary to his earlier emphasis on pain and trauma as a prerequisite to growth in Christ. The *revealing work* of God's Spirit takes place primarily through God's *revelation*. That means *sound doctrine*, contrary to the psychological emphasis on emotions and inner journeys through the unconscious.

Crabb touches on the biblical truth that God is sovereign over all the events of life:

"Sometimes it's hard to know what God is doing. He informs us that He withholds nothing good from His children. I take that to mean that *there is nothing that perfect goodness coupled with absolute power should be doing that isn't being done--right now!*" (p. 187)

Yet baffling and tragic problems continue, and "we all rage at God, demanding He do more than He is doing" (p. 187). He remains in control:

"He refuses to redesign the plot of the book, having already written the last chapter and knowing that the ending is very, very good, and that every thread in our story is necessary to that conclusion." (p. 187)

Crabb is correct in describing God in terms of both "perfect goodness" and "absolute power." He is correct in stating that God has already designed all of history and that the ending is very, very good.

However, a more complete theological analysis would be extremely helpful in giving the reader a solid *hope*. Here is where "doctrinal precision," condemned as academic and bordering on irrelevant, is crucial. God has foreordained all that comes to pass *for His own glory*. The believer's salvation, his sure hope of eternal life, is foreordained according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). The crucifixion, performed by wicked men who are held fully responsible for their sin, was foreordained by the sovereign Lord (Acts 2:23, 4:27-28). Numerous other passages testify to God's foreknowledge and foreordination of all events, yet without compromising the reality of man's responsibility for sin. There is admittedly mystery when we examine these two truths revealed in Scripture. But we are dealing with the Almighty God, and we are finite, sinful creatures...is it any wonder there is mystery? The believer has the glorious hope of eternal joy which is fully undeserved according to his own merits. The Scripture is crystal clear in stating that salvation is grounded in the righteousness of Christ alone (Romans 5:12-21), and that man is undeserving. Does not this gracious gift supersede the most crushing of life's problems (Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?

Crabb describes what it means to "find God:"

"Finding God in this life does not mean building a house in a land of no storms; rather it means building a house that no storm can destroy." (p. 71)

But the Christian must be grounded in Scripture to accomplish this. He must know the truths revealed by God in His Word, not the "truths" buried in his own "unconscious," in order to build the kind of strong foundation that no storm can destroy. Crabb is aware of God's sovereignty, to an extent, but he grossly underestimates the importance of sound theology in facing the tragedies of this life.

Finding God - Glorifying God

Crabb's major focus in his latest book is on seeking God above all else:

"Nothing matters more than developing a passion for Christ as we try to handle life's struggles responsibly and wisely.... God reveals Himself to people who want to know Him more than they want anything else." (p. 174)

In developing this passion, Crabb emphasizes the dismantling of the "fallen structure" (his term for sin), and seeking Him in a spirit of absolute trust. He recognizes that Christians have "found God" in the sense of knowing Him as Savior, Father, and indwelling Holy Spirit (p. 105), but they sometimes still seek to avoid absolute trust (p. 125). Thus there is also a sense in which they continue to seek Him. Crabb cites Paul's words in Philippians 3:12-14, wherein he continues to press on toward his ultimate heavenly goal.

One of Crabb's major points, too, is that we too often seek God in order to use Him. He admits that after his brother's death, he sought God primarily to achieve a new level of spiritual maturity, rather than to *enjoy* God for who He is (p. 69).

Another emphasis is on the pride and "fallen personality structure" that separates man from God. Citing Ezekiel 8:18 and Hosea 7:14, Crabb points out that God sometimes *refuses* to be "found" because of this "fallen structure" being firmly in place.

Certainly there is some truth in all of this. It is *sin* that separates man from God in the first place. God refuses to hear the insincere pleas of those who remain entrenched in their idolatry (the context of Ezekiel 8 and Hosea 7). The believer does press on toward the day when he will see his Lord face to

face in eternity, having at last been fully sanctified. It is not wrong to seek the Lord. However, a couple of closing points must be brought to light.

Crabb's Commitment to Psychology. An excellent question is posed near the end of the book:

"Is it possible that your great need is not for more understanding of ritual abuse or sexual addiction but rather for richer and more powerful wisdom about what it means to know God? Could there be a dimension to knowing Christ that effectively addresses all the root causes beneath the problems with which you struggle?" (p. 210)

Citing the beautiful words of Hebrews 1:1-2, Crabb comments that God's *last word to you* is "Christ" (p. 210).

Does Crabb really believe his own words here? Does he know what he's really saying? If God's revelation is *completed* in Christ, in the New Testament, why must man mix that *final revelation* with the psychological "insights" of unregenerate men born centuries later? Nowhere does Crabb either raise or attempt to answer this question. While holding up absolute trust in God, and forsaking of trust in self, Crabb continues to place his own *trust* in the poisoned theories and methods of modern psychology. This is inconsistent and unbiblical. Crabb's own basic commitment must be exposed.

Glorifying God. Man was created in the image of God, good and upright. He was to reflect the glory of God, *to glorify Him*. He was also, of course, to enjoy an intimate relationship of covenantal fellowship with his Creator. But his sin involved *seeking his own glory* rather than God's glory, serving the creature instead of the Creator. Redemption involves the reconciliation of fallen man with God, along with the restoration of God's image in terms of righteousness, holiness, and truth (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10, Romans 8:29). Redeemed man can expect restored fellowship with God, and surely a special experience of His presence during trials, yet in this life he sees "as in a mirror dimly;" in the state of glory it will be "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

A believer should seek the Lord and grow into a more intimate relationship with Him. This book, however, is grounded in ungodly psychological speculations, despite occasional appearances to the contrary. Its focus is a subjective, and quite tentative, *experience* that is rudely disrupted by the realities of everyday

life. The Christian is not to emphasize such experience, but to concentrate on obedience, progressing in sanctification. He is progressively conformed to the image of Christ. He no longer lives for himself, but rather to *glorify God*. Crabb realizes that the believer is not fully sanctified in this life, but his teachings are more focused on living to *find God* rather than living to *glorify God*. He wants to turn from the self-absorption of the recovery movement. But he hasn't turned very far. His emphasis on *experience*, particularly of inner pain, is one that fails to highlight the Christian's life purpose: *glorifying God*. Crabb remains committed not only to psychology, but to a basically need-oriented theology. When *finding God*, for pure enjoyment, exceeds *glorifying God* in priority, the orientation is still rooted in self and its perceived "needs." Thus we must conclude that Crabb's fundamental position, despite his critique of the recovery movement, remains basically the same.

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