

# RAPHA'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

## A Critique of *Search for Significance Workbook* and *Search for Freedom* by Robert S. McGee

Rapha was founded by Robert S. McGee in 1986, taking its name from the Hebrew word meaning "Our God Who Heals." Rapha claims to offer inpatient psychiatric treatment that is biblically based and Christ-centered (SF 231). However, these claims are not substantiated by a discerning review of Rapha literature. There is a heavy unbiblical focus on self-worth, along with strong reliance on the methods of Rational-Emotive Therapy, founded by atheist Albert Ellis. These errors, along with other problems, are found extensively in both *Search for Significance* (SS) and *Search for Freedom* (SF). We will consider what these two books teach on key theological issues, such as regeneration, justification, propitiation, reconciliation, repentance, forgiveness, and sanctification. Often, accurate biblical statements are used to draw conclusions that are neither biblical nor logical. We will also examine Rapha's view of sin, needs, family, relationships, fear of man, pain, and shame. First, however, we must look closely at Rapha's use of Scripture.

### Rapha Roots: Scripture?

In *Search for Significance*, McGee appears to affirm a high view of scriptural authority:

"God's speaking to us through the truths of His Word, not our feelings, is our authority." (SS 193)

"God's Word is the source of truth--the truth about Christ, the cross, and redemption--and we should pray that God will speak to us through it." (SS 165)

Elsewhere, he asks the reader to consider:

"Do you know Him in a close way as he has revealed Himself? Or are your perceptions of Him founded on reason, experience, the human and sometimes faulty examples of parental modeling, and the ideas of others?" (SS 166)

It is good that the author recognizes God's Word as the foundation for knowing Him (SS 167). However, *Search for Freedom* moves us into a more mystical view of how God speaks to us. This occurs in

considering the "strongholds" that work to keep us in bondage to sin:

"There is a structure to the strongholds that plague our lives. We were not aware when they were being created nor do we really know how they relate to each other.... No matter how well we might understand this book intellectually, we will not be able to directly apply these truths without first receiving our *individual instructions* from God." (SF 149)

To support the necessity of "individual instructions from God," the author must make room for revelation that goes beyond the bounds of Scripture:

"Many sincere believers have concluded that we are to receive every message from God through the words of Scripture alone. Certainly, no one is questioning the Bible is the Word of God. However, Scripture gives many accounts of God speaking personally to people." (SF 150-1)

This mysticism is dangerous! It is exactly this type of thinking that has led to the heresies of Roman Catholicism, where the traditions of men are placed on a par with the Bible. People do *apply* the teachings of Scripture to individual situations, using their God-given minds to understand how God's eternal truth relates to their particular circumstances. However, direct personal revelation (the canon of Scripture) clearly closed with the apostolic period. Scripture warns against addition to or subtraction from its words (Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19).

The author does caution that human beings can be deceived in believing they have heard from God (SF 152). (That's why this is so dangerous!) He cautions that (1) God doesn't ever contradict Himself; (2) it's wise to seek input from a godly person; (3) be careful of "anything you hear from God that makes you feel driven in any way" (SF 152). The author says that he makes this point, about God speaking to us personally, because:

"Too many people don't understand God's desire to be actively involved in our lives.... Some imply that with the completion of the Bible, God's communication to us also became complete." (SF 153)

We must seriously question the logic here. Is additional, personal revelation necessary in order to affirm that God continues to be intimately involved in our lives? Hardly. The Bible loudly asserts God's ongoing sovereignty and personal

involvement in the lives of His people. Acceptance of the closing of the canon leads to an *affirmation* of God's active involvement if the words of Scripture are taken seriously--not a denial of it.

The example given of "God speaking to us" (SF 154-159), unfortunately, is one that involves the retrieval of repressed memories of early childhood abuse, in a counselee who had been in counseling a very long time without progress. There has been much written in recent years about the dangers of this type of memory retrieval. It isn't necessarily accurate, and frequently it leads to serious accusations and broken families. The fruits of such "revelation" are not in line with God's Word. It seems that Rapha is using its particular view of ongoing revelation to support a specific psychological perspective, one that aligns with Freud rather than Christ. Although we'll find many biblical statements tucked into Rapha's writings, there is much error intermingled.

### **Rapha Roots: Rational-Emotive Therapy of Albert Ellis**

Rapha authors see the root of sin in terms of wrong beliefs and lack of self-worth, rather than recognizing its root in the *heart*. McGee teaches that both emotions and behavior are rooted in our thoughts, particularly "a biased, strongly evaluative, deep-felt kind of thinking" (SS 205). He borrows heavily from the system of Albert Ellis (an outspoken atheist!):

"Ungodly thoughts and actions usually reflect the false beliefs you use to evaluate yourself. One of the Holy Spirit's goals in pointing out your sin is for you to see that you are basing your self-worth on false beliefs." (SS 186)

Certain basic "false beliefs" are repeated numerous times in the Rapha literature (SS 1, SF 66-79):

1. I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.
2. I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself.
3. Those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.
4. I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.

McGee believes that 90 percent of all painful emotions can be traced to these "four false beliefs about your worth as a person"

(206). His responses to these beliefs relate to the important theological concepts of propitiation, justification, regeneration, and reconciliation, which we will be considering in a later section. Some of this material is correct, but the focus is on *seeing ourselves as having great worth*, rather than seeing that *Christ has broken the enslaving power of sin*. Our worth is not the focus of passages like Romans 6.

Not surprisingly, Rapha authors trace the roots of "false beliefs" to childhood influences:

"Our beliefs were formed as children, prior to salvation, when our minds were hostile to the things of God." (SF 85)

"Beliefs based on childhood patterns are not reasoned out logically...not developed out of a relationship with God.... The definition of 'truth' established during early childhood and the resulting behaviors usually precede a person's spiritual awareness." (SF 29)

Thus strongholds develop and "the majority of our thinking is completely at odds with what God knows to be true" (SF 85). The author describes what he believes to be the process of forming beliefs. First, he says, we are born with little knowledge of any truth. People then begin to tell us about our own worth, who we should trust, what is good and bad. Finally:

"Our definition of 'truth' becomes whatever it is that we have been taught, and our beliefs begin to dictate our behavior. Then, as other people respond to our behavior, their responses tend to reinforce what we believe to be true." (SF 28)

It is important here to note that many people are saved during childhood years! Also Rapha authors assume that our thinking remains basically unchanged *after* salvation (apart from psychotherapy, of course!). Their scheme leaves little room for the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in leading us to a knowledge of the truth.

Rapha authors believe that "to understand ourselves we must recognize how our cognitive processes have become distorted" (SF 34). It is asserted here that we *subconsciously* expect history to repeat itself. McGee recommends transferring our "false beliefs" from the unconscious to the conscious realm:

"Focus on your false beliefs again and again, in various types of problems situations, until you become highly conscious of them. This lifts your false beliefs from your unconscious into your conscious awareness!" (SS 220)

In addition, this author recommends affirmations of self-worth in order to change your belief system:

"You can tell yourself, *How marvelous it is to know I am a new creation of infinite worth! I really can believe this, so I don't have to feel like a person of low self-worth. I can regret this painful situation but don't have to overreact to it....* Merely affirming your identity in Christ does not mean your mind instantly agrees with what you are affirming. Affirming is a way by which you get a truth into your belief or value system." (SS 220)

This "affirmation" process is one that focuses on *self*, rather than on *God*. There's an affirmation at the back of the workbook, "My Identity in Christ." While the statements there are generally biblical, there is a subtle shift from glorifying God to glorifying self.

McGee says that "the Holy Spirit helps" (222). This is not a sufficiently strong view of the Spirit's role. God both initiates and completes the process of sanctification in His children. Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as our Helper, but His role is so very crucial that without Him it wouldn't even get off the ground!

At a Rapha seminar, participants were asked to write down: (1) attitudes of anger, resentment, hatred, bitterness; (2) thoughts or feelings of despair and hopelessness; (3) personal fears (SF 177-8). (One major red flag here is that the sins of *others* are likely to be confessed!) The author finds a scriptural basis for such practices in John 8:32, where Jesus says that the truth will set you free. (Jesus referred specifically to *the gospel*, to *His Word*, as "the truth.") He claims that truth must be known *experientially* as well as intellectually. He does note, rightly, that scriptural truth must be practiced, not merely known intellectually (SS 184).

It is biblical to examine the thoughts of your heart to discern whether they conform to Scripture. However, Rapha equates "taking every thought captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5) to a process of overcoming "false negative messages we learned as children" that "continue to control us" (188). There is far more to

sanctification than such attempts to control the mind. It is the *heart*, the whole inner man, that requires the life-changing power of the Spirit. Thoughts are but one aspect of the heart.

### **Rapha's View of Sin**

McGee has a somewhat biblical view of human nature *before* the Fall, being in intimate fellowship with God, created to glorify God and exercise dominion over the rest of His creation (21 SS). Man before the Fall was without sin. However, he also says that:

"We need to examine the nature of human beings before sin caused them to lose their sense of security and significance.... Before the first persons did a single deed, God said they were very good; therefore, the basis of God's evaluation could not have been their performance. The first persons were acceptable because God said they were." (21 SS)

However, God most certainly *did* evaluate Adam and Eve on the basis of their deeds, as indicated in the dialogue recorded in Genesis 3. God also *graciously* provided a plan to redeem fallen man from the eternal consequences of his sin. His recurring evaluative statement in Genesis 1, "very good," is based on *His* goodness as Creator.

The author defines our "deliberate rebellion" against God (which he admits to be deserving of God's anger) as "our attempts to find security and purpose apart from Him" (23 SS):

"God did everything to make sure that Adam and Eve would live a completely fulfilling life. They had a perfect sense of significance. Put another way, they fully loved and accepted themselves, because they knew they were completely loved and accepted by God. Unfortunately, this perfect world did not last. They each made a tragically wrong decision that caused the loss of their sense of significance. Instead, they began to experience guilt, shame, and fear. Worst of all, their failure, passed on to all mankind, continues to cause emotional and spiritual confusion for each of us today."  
(15 SS)

"Adam and Eve tragically lost their perfect self-worth because they rebelled against God." (20 SS)

"Unfortunately, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they suddenly realized that they were no longer trusting Him to meet all their needs. This made them feel inadequate and

ashamed. Besides feeling inadequate and ashamed, they also became afraid to be seen by God." (25 SS)

"Adam and Eve lost their sense of significance. That is, they were no longer able to love and accept themselves, because they no longer felt loved and accepted by God." (26 SS)

McGee states that the fall resulted in man's separation from "God's love and security" (165). There was indeed a separation from God resulting from sin. However, these quotes focus more on the loss of *self-worth* and *self-love*. Man's problem is his lack of love for *God*, his separation from *God*, not the loss of love for *self*.

Scripture, however, records man's initial act of rebellion as a direct violation of God's command and an attempt to "be like God" in knowledge. There is no "seeking security and purpose" in the text of early Genesis, nor is there loss of self-love or self-worth. McGee inserts this psychological view onto the pages of Scripture.

McGee does acknowledge the cosmic impact of the Fall, in both personal problems and natural disasters (23 SS).

**Guilt.** There are major problems in McGee's view of guilt. Instead of defining guilt in terms of the violation of God's law, this author sees guilt as focused on self-condemnation and unworthiness, leading to a loss of self-esteem, fear of punishment, depression, additional sin, shame, alienation, bitterness (203 SS). Guilt is primarily a *feeling*, a subjective, internal state, rather than an objective reality based on God's law. This is not a biblical view of guilt.

**Bondage to sin.** In *Search for Freedom* there is a heavy focus on man's ongoing bondage to sin. McGee notes that we are born in sin but are often unaware of that fact (25 SF). He believes that everyone has a strong desire for "a greater sense of freedom in life," but that pursuing freedom without God's help actually leads to bondage instead (9 SF). "Freedom" is defined as "escaping the grasp of anything that desires to capture and enslave." Aside from Jesus, "everything we flee to in hope of finding refuge and freedom has the potential to enslave us" (11 SF). Certainly, sin is enslaving and true freedom involves escaping from its power. However, we need to closely examine McGee's view concerning the power of sin in the life of the *Christian* as compared to the *unbeliever*. He affirms the possibility of freedom for the

Christian with God's help (21 SF), but his solutions, in general, revolve around psychotherapy more than Scripture. Serious problems do emerge.

The author sets out to provide "a clearer picture of what fallen humanity is" (12-15 SF):

Sinful (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Ignorant, blind, with darkened understanding (Ephesians 4:18).

Evil in conscience (Hebrews 10:22, Genesis 6:5).

Corrupt, deceitful hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). The author states that the heart is *also* "desperately sick," because it "has been poisoned with fleshly and destructive input since birth" (14 SF).

Rebellion (Romans 8:7).

McGee notes that these passages all describe our condition at birth. He is correct. But do any of these verses refer to the condition of a *Christian*? This author evidently believes that there is only a *partial* regeneration of the inner man:

"The flesh is not redeemed at salvation; it remains fallen and victimized by sin. We may learn to avoid corrupt external behavior, but the nature of the flesh does not change. *We are born in sin and we struggle against a fallen nature throughout our lifetimes.*" (16 SF)

The author notes that "we often admire what the flesh can do," that "we *like* some of our fleshly behaviors" (18 SF). He says that "most Christians lost sight of the fact that we are really at war within ourselves" (19 SF).

The unregenerate man is fully enslaved to sin, unwilling *and* unable to do what pleases God. The Scriptures quoted in Ephesians 2, Ephesians 4, and Romans 8 describe the *unbeliever*. These verses are quickly followed by contrasting descriptions of the *believer*. Yes, Christians do continue the "war within," battling indwelling sin throughout their earthly lives. Sometimes, as McGee indicates, people prefer to deal only with "*external* manifestations of their problem" rather than the "*enemy within*" (20 SF). However, Christ has broken the power of sin such that believers are no longer dominated by its power as they were prior



to salvation. (I strongly recommend Jay Adams' excellent book, *The War Within*, for a far more biblical view of this topic than what Rapha offers.)

McGee provides only a weak view of the believer's new freedom in Christ. He believes that many people desperately want to break childhood patterns but simply can't seem to do it. The problem isn't ignorance, indifference, or laziness (64 SF). Instead, the problem this author sees is *fear*:

"Even though they no longer desire to behave a certain way, the person seems powerless to change the behavior. He or she has grown so dependent on the source of the problem that it is a difficult and frightening proposition to imagine living without it." (65 SF)

The term "stronghold" is used throughout this book to describe "any area of our lives we cannot control that is destructive" (84 SF), or "those things that control us...compulsions...those behaviors that we regret doing, but continue doing" (101 SF):

"Somewhere along the way, the things we do to protect ourselves as children become destructive adult patterns which eventually become *strongholds*." (94 SF)

To eliminate these strongholds:

"The main requirement is *wanting* to see your strongholds fall, realizing that when they do, you'll have to find another way to live and establish some 'new and improved' patterns of behavior." (95 SF)

Specific "strongholds" include depression, doubt, bitterness-anger, rebellion-stubbornness, insecurity-inferiority-shyness-timidity, pride & self-righteousness, infirmities & addictions, sexual impurity, deceit, the occult, fears (101), and self-rejection (108 SF). (It is hardly conceivable that a true believer would be involved in the occult!) The author notes that strongholds often multiply, and we are easily deceived about their existence, destructive power, and rapid spread (109 SF).

McGee seems to take a dim view of sanctification apart from the type of psychotherapy offered by Rapha. Salvation doesn't seem to be quite enough:

"Our strongholds are located in the deepest feeling and thinking processes of our soul. We know we've been saved.

we know we're supposed to have love, joy, peace, freedom, and all the other things God promises. But we just can't shake our strongholds, the baggage of a lifetime of rejection and failure." (130 SF)

The author locates "strongholds" in the *soul*, which he separates from the *spirit*, taking a trichotomous view of man. (Scripture does not confirm this three-part analysis. Only a dichotomous picture is consistent with the Bible. A full defense of that position is beyond the scope of this paper.) McGee also says that strongholds "affect us at all levels--mind, will, emotions, thoughts, decisions, and feelings. They are the fortresses that Satan has established to claim territory in our lives." The author claims that "Satan energizes our fleshly desires, playing on our craving to feel good," and that when we sin to feel better, "we begin to identify *what we do* (our sinful responses) with *who we are*" (136 SF).

However, Satan holds no claim to "territory" in the life of the believer, who has *switched sides* in the battle, having been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:13). Sin does impact every aspect of the person, but every aspect has been redeemed by Christ's death and resurrection. The believer has been "bought at a price" and belongs fully to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The full redemption of our bodies will occur only at the resurrection, and *complete* freedom from sin is also future. However, Rapha authors fail to account for the freedom of the believer in *this* life following regeneration. The *entire inner man* is regenerated, made alive together with Christ. Nowhere does Scripture split the inner man into redeemed and unredeemed portions, nor does McGee offer scriptural support for such a view. Their overly pessimistic view is one that opens the door to the psychotherapy offered by Rapha.

In all fairness, McGee does inject some good statements about the role of the Holy Spirit. He states that "strongholds are spiritual problems that require a spiritual solution." Eliminating them is "not a do-it-yourself project" (126 SF). He rightly points out that you must depend on the Holy Spirit to "demolish strongholds" (85 SF). Meanwhile, the Spirit works to restrain the dominion of sin:

"It is the inhibiting power of the Holy Spirit that keeps our strongholds from having more destructive power over us than they do." (109 SF)

The author rightly notes that one of the Holy Spirit's tasks is to convict us of sin and help us see the seriousness of our sinful actions (109 SF).

Even here, however, grave weaknesses appear. The Spirit, in McGee's view, is restrained by man:

"The Spirit of God dwelling within our spirit is in opposition to the ungodly thinking and feeling processes dominating our lives. Yet God allows each man and woman to choose our deepest beliefs about ourselves, about Him, and about each other." (130 SF)

Similarly, following a good section about the role of prayer (162-170 SF), the author quotes John Wesley as saying "God will do nothing, but in answer to prayer" (170 SF). The author doesn't believe he was ignoring the concept of grace. However, remember that Wesley views salvation as initiated by human free will rather than God's sovereign grace. This leads us into some controversial but unavoidable theological issues about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility--both affirmed emphatically by Scripture. McGee's view is one that leaves far too much to the "free will" of man, and far too little to the sovereign, powerful, gracious initiative of God, who *does not depend on man for anything*.

**The Gospel.** Despite some serious deficiencies, McGee does make a major point of proclaiming the work of Christ:

"Apart from the redeeming work of Christ, people are unable to enjoy a close relationship with the Father as Adam and Eve did before the fall. In fact, people hide from God, as Adam and Eve did." (165 SS)

People do indeed attempt to hide from God, holding down the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). McGee includes a section entitled "What is your relationship with Christ?" (23 SS). He rightly acknowledges that salvation is God's free gift and that it is not based on our own works. All of the past, present, and future sins of the Christian are forgiven based on the work of Christ (24 SS). McGee's presentation of the gospel identifies him as a brother in Christ, but nevertheless, we must view his theology with great caution and discernment. Rapha's view of sin is one that leaves much to be desired. Sin is always a key issue when reviewing books in the counseling area.

## Rapha's Need Theology

Rapha places a heavy emphasis on unmet needs as the source of many so-called psychological problems:

"We all have strong, God-given needs for love, acceptance, and purpose." (SS 25)

The strongest emphasis is placed on the "need" for self-worth:

"Our desire to be loved and accepted is the symptom of a deeper need--the need that often determines our behavior and is the primary source of our emotional pain. Often unrecognized, this desire represents our need for self-worth." (SS 17)

For McGee, the need for self-worth is *the* key to unlocking the mysteries of human behavior:

"Whether we call it self-esteem or self-worth, the feeling of significance is crucial to humankind's emotional, spiritual, and social stability and is the driving element within the human spirit. Understanding this single need opens the door to understanding our actions and attitudes. What a waste to attempt to change behavior without truly understanding the driving needs causing such behavior!" (SS 19)

He believes self-worth to be a *God-given* need, created by God to be satisfied by Him alone:

"We can understand that this hunger for self-worth is God-given and that only He can satisfy it." (SS 19)

"God created our inner, undeniable need for personal significance to make us search for Him. He alone can fulfill our deep need." (SS 153)

The author notes that although we crave love and acceptance, we fail to achieve it by worldly pursuits:

"Since our emotional and spiritual well-being is at stake, it is crucial to learn what this deep longing really is and how it can be satisfied. This longing, which we spend so much time and energy to meet, is our need for SIGNIFICANCE or SECURITY." (SS 7)

In discussing the subject of honesty, McGee claims that:

"The Lord wants us to be honest with ourselves, with Him, and with at least one other person." (SS 29)

Specifically, this honesty concerns "our painful needs."

This heavy need orientation, particularly the focus on self-worth, is one that finds no scriptural support. Man's need is for reconciliation with *God*, not self.

### **Rapha's Victim Theology**

In addition to focusing on man's claimed need for self-worth, Rapha literature obscures biblical truth about sin by viewing man as primarily a *victim* of the sins of others. Included here is a Freudian-based view of repressed emotions.

McGee clearly insists on viewing childhood victimization as a prominent factor in later problems of living:

"Some of us have deep emotional and spiritual scars resulting from the neglect, abuse, and manipulation that often accompany living in a dysfunctional family." (SS 14)

"No matter how old we might be, *the choices we made during childhood probably continue to dominate our life experiences today.* As children we had no spiritual direction or development, so our childhood choices were made as part of a defective process." (SF 83)

The "dysfunctional family" is defined as "a family in which alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce, absent father or mother, excessive anger, verbal and/or physical abuse exists" (SS 14). Biblically, we ought to distinguish *godly* families from *ungodly* families. "Dysfunctional" is a mechanical word that is better applied to machines than to human beings made in the image of God. The characteristics of the "dysfunctional family" are all concerned with man's *sin*.

The author attributes great significance to early family influences. He believes that people from "relatively stable backgrounds" can be honest about their joys and hurts with little difficulty. But those who have "deep wounds" put up defenses against such honesty (SS 30). Even more serious, however, is McGee's view that poor parenting results in a distorted view of God:

"The poorer the parental model we have of God's love, forgiveness, and power, the harder time we have experiencing and applying these characteristics in our lives. If we have been deeply wounded, we may recoil from the truth of God's love instead of being refreshed by it. We may believe that we are unlovable." (SS 100)

This issue is discussed in more detail in another paper, reviewing two Rapha books about parental influences. Their perspective in this area is heavily coated with Freud, not Scripture. For a biblical view, consider the case of Josiah, who became king at the age of eight after his wicked father was murdered. The Bible commends him as one of the most godly kings of Israel. He is credited with demolishing idolatry and reestablishing God's Word among the Israelites (2 Kings 22 and 23). Yet the parenting he received was extremely poor! Scripture never indicates that he went through anything like the modern psychological counseling process in order to worship and serve God properly.

In spite of this clear blaming of parents, however, McGee notes that "many psychologists today believe that blame is the core of most emotional disturbances," and he responds, "how right they are!" (SS 112). He seems particularly hard on those who blame *themselves*:

"Whether consciously or unconsciously, we all tend to point an accusing finger, assigning blame for virtually every failure.... More often than not, we can find no one but ourselves to blame, so the accusing finger points right back at us." (SS 106)

Biblically, however, it is critical to sort out responsibilities *according to God's standards*. Rapha seems more concerned about diminishing of self-worth than about an accurate, scriptural assigning of responsibility. This unbiblical focus emerges clearly when they begin to address solutions:

"Can we do anything about our past? Yes and no. Obviously, we can't go back and relive it. We never can escape its negative circumstances. However, we can deal with previous poor choices and damaging experiences so that they don't continue to influence our self-worth." (SS 173)

The author suggests thinking back to past hurtful events, how you felt about it then, and how you feel about it now (SS 173). His concern continues to center around *self*:

"If merely thinking about a past event causes you to have a strong emotional reaction, this event likely has affected your self-esteem." (SS 175)

It seems that the impact on *self-worth* and *self-esteem* is the most fundamental concern of Rapha when they consider the influences of childhood. McGee places a lot of emphasis on both verbal and nonverbal messages given to young children by their parents, *particularly* messages about self-worth (SF 118):

"Sometimes misguided parents think that if they can make their children feel badly enough about themselves, then they will behave as the parents want them to. They do not realize that we act the way we do, not because of how badly we feel but because of what we believe to be true about ourselves."  
(SF 121)

The impact, according to this author, stretches over many years:

"Messages can be carved so deeply within the soul of their target that the person continues to repeat them long after the offending person has been left in the past." (SF 124)

The author does go on to reject the popular "once a victim, always a victim" view of so many in our culture. He believes it is possible to demolish "strongholds" (SF 124). Nevertheless, Rapha's work is far too immersed in a Freudian deterministic view of parental influences.

A key topic for McGee is the *emotions* related to childhood events and the *repression* or "denial" of those emotions. He attaches huge significance to this area, believing that "emotional pain readily reasserts itself" (SF 91):

"The way we respond to emotional pain creates the most important behavioral patterns we have. It is, in fact, these patterns that create the core relation problems in our lives." (SF 26-27)

The author says that "human beings develop fancy ways to block pain and to gain significance" (SS 14). This includes suppression of emotion, perfectionism, withdrawal, driving ourselves to succeed, helping people so they'll appreciate us, and saying hurtful things to people who hurt us (SS 14). McGee believes that people in emotional pain have difficulty identifying their emotions (SF 60), and he buys the popular notion that depression is disguised anger:

"Depression generally results when a person turns anger inward and/or has a deep sense of loss...depression is generally the body's way of blocking the mind's pain." (SS 42)

**The inward journey.** McGee believes that freedom from childhood patterns is possible (SF 33), but for him such freedom clearly involves a lengthy journey inward to focus on emotions. He recommends "getting in touch with our true feelings" through the help of a friend or counselor, and warns against both unrestrained ventilation as well as repression and denial. He claims that "we need a safe environment to express our emotions" (SS 110).

*Search for Significance* devotes a full chapter to the "trip in," described as "a look inside yourself in a special, deliberate way to enable you to correct the false beliefs causing your painful emotions" (SS 212). McGee believes that the devil works against believers through their thoughts and basic beliefs:

"Satan's goal is to keep our minds as they are so that we won't be transformed. Satan does this by establishing fortresses of deception which produce thoughts that go against the knowledge or understanding of God. Fortresses of deception are belief systems that are reinforced over the years by the thoughts, emotions, and actions they produce." (SS 213)

The "trip in" is designed to identify problem emotions by focusing attention specifically on them:

"Some emotions, such as anger and hatred, are sharp, clearly felt, and easily labeled. But underlying emotions such as fear and shame often are unclear until you focus on them deliberately." (SS 215)

Such identification is claimed to facilitate the unbiblical "grieving" process but also to assume proper responsibility:

"Zeroing in on the underlying emotions you feel in a bothersome situation allows you to be honest about the realities of a situation and your response to it; it allows you to grieve the sense of loss you feel; and it allows you to take responsibility for your choices and behaviors." (SS 217)



Emotion--"release"--is the standard by which the inward traveler can determine a successful identification of root emotions:

"The more you take The Trip In, the more easily you can tell when you have arrived at the underlying emotion, because you often experience a feeling of release." (SS 216)

McGee lists a number of "show me" prayers, and raises the question of why it's necessary to take an expedition into the past. He believes this is the only way to demolish *all* of one's strongholds rather than only *some* of them:

"Until you get back to the original stronghold, you won't have dealt with the actual problem. You need to go back to the beginning and let God give you a fresh start." (SS 12)

This seems like a sort of psychological perfection that is being promised, but it is a poor substitute for ongoing biblical sanctification.

This continuing self-centered introspection is not a process ever recommended in Scripture. Rapha combines the theories of two of the most hostile, outspoken twentieth century atheists, Sigmund Freud and Albert Ellis, in order to concoct their theory.

To his credit, McGee does reject the position that emotions should be ventilated and allowed to run rampant (SF 5). He also affirms that we are not to be dominated by emotions:

"It's much more reasonable to acknowledge that our emotions are obviously given to us to God. Scripture teaches that we are not to be dominated by our emotions. Our emotions expose us to the things that are taking place in our souls. If we ignore them, we lose valuable information that could direct us. If we let our emotions run wild, we will live our lives erratically." (SF 63)

Caution is needed here, however. Although God created us with emotions, sin impacts the *entire* man, every aspect. Sin impacts the emotions; they are not morally neutral as psychologists generally teach. McGee recognizes that negative emotions can be used by God to *reveal* areas that need attention (SF 60). *Sin* may come to light through emotions that are not honoring to God. However, Scripture doesn't present the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as an activity that centers or depends on human emotions.

McGee believes that some people ignore emotions as "part of the flesh," operating instead according to logic and cognition (SF 62). He insists that people can just as easily be enslaved to logic and intellect as to emotions. Again, sin impacts every aspect of man, including the emotions and the intellect and the will and desires. Rapha's literature tends to alternate between an unbiblical focus on emotions (Sigmund Freud) and an equally unbiblical focus on thoughts (Albert Ellis).

**Denial and deflection.** McGee discusses *denial* as one way in which strongholds grow even stronger. This may be denial that the problem exists, or insistence that the behavior is actually helpful (SF 141). A second response is described as *deflection*, actually a term for blaming others or blaming circumstances (SF 143). Neither of these corresponds to the Christian denial of self for Christ:

"The Christian principle of denying oneself has nothing to do with denying one's problems. There's nothing wrong with denying myself in order to put God first in my life. But denying my problems is not at all Christlike." (SF 142)

In both instances, truth is the key to freedom:

"Remember the *truth* sets us free. Denial and deflection both keep truth hidden--and we like it that way." (SF 143)

Certainly, we can agree that believers need to face their problems and sins honestly. They are to exhort and admonish one another according to the standards God has revealed in His Word. When Scripture uses the word "deny," however, it is not the same concept as the psychological, Freudian term "denial." The latter destroys responsibility before God, while the former establishes it. Freudian "denial" involves a huge reservoir of repressed childhood emotions, buried in the "unconscious" and motivating the individual without his conscious consent. When people *deny* their responsibilities and sins, they are *responsible before God*.

**Shame.** One particular emotion requires particular attention. McGee defines shame as:

"A painful emotion caused by awareness of guilt, shortcomings, or improper behavior, a condition of humiliating disgrace." (SS 142)

The author connects shame with defective self-worth, the central concern in Rapha literature:

"Shame often occurs when we consider a failure in our performance or a 'flaw' in our appearance so important that it creates a permanently negative opinion about our self-worth." (SS 15)

However, McGee offers hope for an increase in deflated self-worth:

"Shameful views of ourselves can change through honesty, others' affirmation, the truths of God's Word, the Holy Spirit's power and encouragement, and time." (SS 153)

But is this the right goal, biblically? The believer, of course, need not be ashamed because he has been declared righteous through the atoning work of Christ. However, Scripture calls believers to live for Christ and His kingdom, not to center their lives on shame, self-worth, repressed emotions, and the like.

### **The "Performance Trap": By What Standard?**

McGee describes **perfectionism** as rooted in the belief that "I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself" (SS 35). The life of the "perfectionist" is dominated by *rules* (SS 37). McGee sees low self-esteem as the underlying culprit:

"Perfectionists often appears to be highly motivated, or driven, but their motivations usually come from a desperate attempt to avoid low self-esteem when they fail." (SS 41)

Even successful performance is cited by McGee as an improper basis for self-worth:

"When we base our self-worth on our performance and when we succeed in that performance, we often develop an inflated view of ourselves. This inflated view of ourselves is pride." (SS 41)

The author sees this as a *temporary* self-esteem:

"The self-confidence that most of us try to portray is only a false front to hide our fear of failure and insecurity."  
(SS 41)

The life of the Christian is to be centered on *Christ* rather than performance:

"The focus of the Christian life should be on Christ, not on self-imposed regulations. Our experience of Christ's *lordship* depends on our moment-by-moment attention to His instruction, not on our own regimented schedule." (SS 38)

Even *godly* standards, according to McGee, should not be used to build self-worth:

"Any standard of performance--even a Christian standard--used to obtain a more positive sense of self-worth is contrary to God's truth and is, therefore, an ungodly means to fulfill your need for significance.... Once we realize that our self-worth is secure in Christ, we want to do things that bring honor to Him." (SS 43)

The author expresses concern that the "performance trap" will lead to condemnation of both self and others:

"If we believe that performance reflects one's value and that failure makes one unacceptable and unworthy of love, then we usually feel completely justified in condemning those who fail, including ourselves." (SS 107)

Citing 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and 1 John 4:16-19, McGee emphasizes that the believer responds to God's love by loving Him. However:

"This great motivating factor is missing in many of our lives because we really don't believe that God loves us unconditionally. We expect His love to be conditional, based on our ability to earn it." (SS 57)

Scripture speaks to the matter of depending on *works* for *salvation*. It is abundantly clear that salvation is by grace alone, through faith (no works!) alone, in Christ alone. Both Galatians and Romans address this issue in no uncertain terms. However, McGee's focus is not on *salvation*, but on *self-worth*. This is a subtle shift of attention but a crucial one! The Bible does not encourage or exhort believers to build their self-worth, but it does exhort them to rely on the work of Christ, rather than human efforts, for eternal salvation.

## **The Fear of Man**

McGee addresses the *fear of rejection* as a motivation for service to others. (Biblical translation: the *fear of man*, which Scripture contrasts with the *fear of the Lord*.) We have just seen the author's concern about building self-worth through

performance. Here is a variation on the same theme, but instead of meeting self-imposed standards, the individual attempts to increase self-worth according to the standards of *others*. McGee sees God's acceptance of us as the only antidote:

"The only way we can overcome the fear of rejection is to focus on the reality of God's acceptance of us based on our position in Christ rather than on the approval of others based on our performance.... Basing our self-worth on what we believe others think of us causes us to become addicted to their approval. The only way we can overcome the fear of rejection is to value the constant approval of God over the conditional approval of people." (SS 74-75)

Repeatedly, McGee focuses on the fundamental *problem* as attempting to achieve what he sees as a legitimate "need" -- self-worth -- through the wrong means:

"Turning to others for what only God can provide shows how overwhelmingly we accept Satan's lie that others must accept us before we feel good about ourselves." (SS 77)

"We fear rejection in proportion to the degree to which we base our self-worth on the opinions of others. If we believe the lie, *I am what others say I am*, the fear of rejection will plague us." (SS 77)

"To attempt to find completeness through any other source, including success, others' opinions, prestige, or appearance, is to be deceived completely (Colossians 2:8)." (SS 155)

Here the term "completeness" is substituted for self-worth, but the thought is basically the same. Colossians 2:8 does speak to the issue of being deceived by the ungodly philosophies of man. It has nothing to do with self-worth or "completeness" in context, but it is an excellent verse to warn the church about falling captive to the ungodly theories of modern psychology!

Honest communication is one area that the author believes will suffer, but again, the emphasis is on faulty self-worth:

"When we fear rejection, we find it difficult to open up and reveal our inner thoughts and needs because we believe others will reject us if they know what we're *really* like. The reason we experience the fear of rejection and its accompanying problems is because we believe Satan's lie that our self-worth = performance + others' opinions." (SS 80)

Control of others is another possible relational result:

"In their fear of rejection and in their efforts to avoid being hurt, many people constantly try to maintain control of others and dominate most situations." (SS 81)

The author believes that blaming self and others leads to fears of failure, rejection, and punishment (SS 115). He roots this specifically in wrong thinking, resorting to Albert Ellis' system yet again:

"The false belief, *Those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished*, is at the root of our fear of punishment." (SS 114)

Most serious, however, is the failure to witness to those who need to hear the gospel:

"Perhaps the most critical result of the fear of rejection is that it keeps many of us from sharing our faith. Nonbelievers use it to threaten us to they won't have to deal with the gospel." (SS 83)

Rapha solutions center on finding what they consider legitimate avenues to increase self-worth, a goal assumed to be worthy of our attention:

"Any change in our behavior requires us to release our old self-concept, which often is founded in failure and in others' expectations. We can learn how to relate to ourselves in a new way. To accomplish this, we can begin to base our self-worth on God's opinion of us and to trust in His Spirit to accomplish change in our lives." (SS 147)

McGee believes that depending on God for self-worth will result in improved relationships with others:

"As we depend less on other people for our self-worth, their sins and mistakes will become less of a threat to us, and we will desire to help them instead of feeling that we must punish them." (SS 107)

The author considers how to respond to those whose approval you thought you needed. He recommends "unconditional acceptance" yet notes that this may include confrontation, correction, or discipline (SS 85). Meanwhile, he cautions that "it may be

impossible for us totally to shed our need for others' approval and our fear of rejection" (SS 84).

Biblically, the issue addressed here is the *fear of man*. Scripture contrasts such fear with the reverential fear of the Lord and with trust in Him (Proverbs 29:25; Jeremiah 17:5-8). Related to this is the attempt to please man rather than God. Scripture exhorts believers to live for God, not self or other men (2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 1:10; Acts 5:29). Building self-worth is a modern psychological goal, not a biblical one. The biblical focus is on *God's worthiness to be praised and honored*, not man's self-worth.

## Theological Issues

Rapha literature, psychological as it is, devotes considerable space to important theological matters, such as: justification, regeneration, propitiation, reconciliation, repentance, conviction, forgiveness, and sanctification. Often accurate statements are made, yet all too frequently these are followed by highly unbiblical conclusions. There is a critical need for discernment!

**Justification.** There is hardly a theological matter more crucial to much of what Rapha authors teach.

Justification is listed as the answer to one of the "four false beliefs" repeated throughout Rapha's writings. That is the belief that "I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself" (SS 11). Rapha's answer is stated:

"Because of *justification* I am completely forgiven by and fully pleasing to God. I no longer have to fear failure."  
(SS 11)

Elsewhere, McGee demonstrates a reasonable understanding of justification. He states that "we are placed in right standing before God through Christ's death on the cross, which paid for our sins." Also, "He credited to us the very righteousness of Christ in addition to forgiving our sins" (SS 47). It is correctly noted that Christ's payment for sin "has satisfied the righteous wrath of God" (SS 52). The author affirms that our redemption was completed at the cross, with no further work required (SS 162).

McGee also believes that, having been justified, we are now *pleasing to God* (SS 52). This is true in the sense that we are *in Christ*, reckoned as holy and blameless (Ephesians 1) because *He is*

*holy and blameless.* But McGee takes it much further than Scripture allows, seeing in justification a basis for *self-worth*:

"God has a solution for our fear of failure! He has given us a secure self-worth totally apart from our ability to perform. We have been justified and have had credited to us the very righteousness of Christ." (SS 51)

There is indeed a "solution for our fear of failure" if "failure" means eternal condemnation for our sins. But does it? To McGee, it appears to mean a failure to experience self-worth. The difference is not minor!

Confusion runs rampant. McGee indicates that "nothing makes us unacceptable." Rather, because of Christ's death:

"We are holy and righteous before God, even in the midst of sin. This does not make sin less damaging to our lives. Instead, it makes even greater the indescribable sacrifice of Christ." (SS 95)

This is very true. So is the following:

"Since our relationship with God was bought entirely by the blood of Christ, it is the height of pride to think that our own good works can make us acceptable to God." (SS 97)

Absolutely! However:

"We are totally accepted by and acceptable to God." (SS 97)

"Accepted by," yes..."acceptable"...?? In a *sense*, but not such that we can base an *infinite personal worth* on Christ's work! Yet this is exactly where Rapha authors go with the precious doctrine of justification. Such a view sadly detracts from the *infinite worth* of Christ. He alone has infinite worth.

Scripture presents justification as a judicial act in which God declares the sinner to be righteous in His sight. That declaration is based on the *imputed* righteousness of Christ. It is not grounded in our own righteousness (Romans 3:20, 10:3; Philippians 3:9; Galatians 2:16, 3:11; Titus 3:5-7), but rather on *God's* own righteousness (Romans 1:7, 3:21-22, 10:3; Philippians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 5:21), specifically *Christ's* righteousness (Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:17; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24-25, 5:9, 8:1,33-34). Good works are never the ground for justification, but rather are evidence that saving faith is genuine (James 2:14-



26). McGee does acknowledge that justification should not lead to the conclusion that our actions are no longer important (SS 54).

Rapha literature includes some true statements about biblical justification as a judicial, declarative act of God grounded in the righteousness of Christ rather than human works. However, such knowledge should lead us to praise *God* for His awesome grace, for saving us *in spite of our unworthiness*, rather than to see ourselves as having "infinite self-worth."

**Propitiation.** Certain key aspects of Christ's atoning work are discussed in depth by Rapha literature. Propitiation of God's wrath is a doctrine often glossed over in an age where people highlight God's love but fail to give equal emphasis to His holiness and righteousness.

Rapha cites propitiation as the answer to the first "false belief," that "I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself" (SS 11). McGee states that:

"Because of propitiation I am deeply loved by God. I no longer have to fear punishment or punish others." (SS 11)

The definition of propitiation, and explanatory statements, are generally well grounded in biblical truth:

"Describes what happened when Christ, through His death, became the means by which God's wrath was satisfied and God's mercy was granted to the sinner who believes on Christ."  
(SS 121)

"Propitiation means that the anger of someone who has been wronged unjustly has been satisfied. It is an act that soothes hostility and satisfies the need for getting even."  
(SS 122)

"Propitiation means satisfaction. Propitiation refers to Christ's death on the cross, which satisfied, or took care of, the penalty for our sins." (SS 123)

McGee also indicates that the cross demonstrated God's hatred for sin:

"Because God is holy, He used His righteous anger to show how much He dislikes sin. However, God not only is righteously angry about sin, but He also is more loving than we ever can imagine." (SS 123)

Propitiation is indeed an appeasing of God's wrath against sinners (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, 4:10). The cross is remarkable in that *God Himself* took the initiative to satisfy His own wrath. McGee's comment about satisfying "the need to get even" is certainly not the best description of Christ's atoning work. God doesn't have a "need to get even" but rather is perfectly holy and just in His judgments. He did much more at Calvary than merely "show how much He dislikes sin." He actually provided full satisfaction of divine justice. However, McGee does note the satisfaction of God's justice in his writings. He also rightly affirms the love of *both* the Father and Son in propitiation (SS 125). The Son is not appeasing an angry, unwilling Father!

In spite of some accurate theological definitions, Rapha literature draws the reader away from biblical truth once again. Good theology is used to draw erroneous psychological conclusions.

McGee believes that Christians may be lured by Satan into attempting self-atonement:

"No matter how much we do to make up for our sin, we will continue to feel guilty and to believe that we need to do more unless we resist Satan, our accuser." (SS 129)

But this is wasted effort:

"We can stop trying to overcome our feelings of failure by trying to make up for our wrongdoing with certain acts. Defending ourselves or trying to pay for our sins by our actions is impossible." (SS 129)

It is true that man cannot atone for his own sins through good works or any other human efforts. However, McGee uses this truth to support his central theme, self-worth:

"Because we are His children, performance no longer is the basis of our worth. We are unconditionally and deeply loved by God." (SS 125)

The biblical emphasis is not on self-worth, but on Christ's worth! His atonement for our sins hardly proves our worthiness. It demonstrates the very opposite: our unworthiness! Our salvation is to the praise of His glory, not our own. Drawing high self-worth out of Christ's glorious work is a gross misuse of

Scripture. Note how, in Revelation (5:3,9), only the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) is *worthy* to open the seven seals.

**Reconciliation.** This aspect of Christ's work is Rapha's answer to another of the "four false beliefs," that "I am what I am; I cannot change; I am hopeless" (SS 11). McGee states that:

"Because of reconciliation I am totally accepted by God. I no longer have to fear rejection." (SS 11)

He also indicates that "because of reconciliation we have gone from being an enemy to a friend of God" (SS 88). His further explanation is at points very biblical:

"Because of your sin you were an enemy of God and were hostile in mind. Your sin made you subject to God's wrath; but if you have trusted Christ, you now are declared holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.... The fact that Christ accepts us unconditionally is a profound, life-changing truth. Salvation is not simply a ticket to heaven. It is the beginning of a dynamic new relationship with God." (SS 90)

Biblical justification, a "courtroom" scene, immediately ushers the new believer into the family room. No longer God's enemy, he is now God's own child. We are adopted into God's family (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1,2,10). McGee contrasts justification and reconciliation by noting that the former is the *judicial* aspect of our salvation, while the latter is the beginning of a personal *relationship* with the Lord (SS 90).

In his chapter on reconciliation, McGee maintains a strong focus on our being *unconditionally acceptable* to God because of reconciliation:

"Because of reconciliation God has wiped out of His memory some action that the world might see as a big mess. Through Christ's death and resurrection we have become acceptable to God. You never will begin to experience freedom from the fear of rejection until you realize that God has completely accepted you." (SS 92)

Yes, God has *accepted* us as His children. But can that acceptance accurately be termed *unconditional*? As McGee is well aware, the *condition* is a heavy one. God's justice demanded the public, humiliating execution of His Son! It is better to admit that

there is indeed a *condition* for God's acceptance, but the condition has been fully met by Christ. Acknowledging the condition, however, leaves little room for the point McGee insists on making at every turn. You guessed it: self-worth!

"When we base our self-worth on past failures, dissatisfaction with personal appearance, or bad habits, we often develop a fourth false belief: *I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.* This lie binds people to hopeless pessimism--or the belief that things can't get better--associated with poor self-esteem." (SS 143)

Thus McGee connects low self-esteem with the "lie" that reconciliation is claimed to answer.

At the beginning of *Search for Significance*, the author defines redemption, saying that it "pertains to the redemptive work of Christ, in which He bought deliverance for sinners through His death from the guilt and power of sin." True, but he wrongly concludes that: "Because of Christ's redemption I am a new creature of infinite worth" (SS 9). No! Christ was able to redeem us from sin because of *His infinite worth*.

**Regeneration.** At this point we enter into the realm of the Holy Spirit, who applies the completed work of Christ to the individual believer. There is some truth about regeneration in Rapha literature, but also serious error. This is one of the most problematic theological areas for their approach.

Regeneration is Rapha's answer to yet another of its "four false beliefs," that "those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished" (SS 11). McGee responds that:

"Because of regeneration I have been made brand-new, complete in Christ. I no longer need to experience the pain of shame." (SS 11)

It is true that the Christian is a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). But is it really false that "those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished"? It is precisely *because we have failed, or sinned* (Romans 3:23), and deserve God's righteousness wrath, that the cross was necessary. Acknowledging this as true does not detract from God's incredible love and mercy shown toward us. On the contrary, it *magnifies* His love.

There is both truth and error in what McGee says about regeneration. Here is his definition:

"The renewing work of the Holy Spirit that literally makes each believer experience a new birth the moment he trusts Christ." (SS 142)

"Regeneration is a special work of God that literally makes each believer a new person the instant he trusts Christ to be his Savior." (SS 108)

"Regeneration is the renewing work of the Holy Spirit by which a person literally becomes a new creation. Our regeneration took place at the instant of our conversion to Christ."  
(SS 157)

Regeneration is indeed a special work of God the Holy Spirit. It is a *new birth*. But McGee is wrong about its position being *after* faith is placed in Christ. Regeneration is *causally* prior to faith, an act of the Holy Spirit *in us* that must take place before we respond in saving faith. This is stated in John 3:3, where Jesus says that a man is not able to see the kingdom of God--an act of faith--unless he is first born again from above. This truth is expressed by John near the beginning of his gospel, when he states that the new birth occurs not by the will of the flesh or the will of man, but the will of God (John 1:12-13).

This causal relationship finds its foundation in man's total depravity. That which is born of the flesh is flesh (John 3:6), flesh having ethical connotations here. Man's sin impacts every aspect of his being (Genesis 6:5 & 8:21). A leopard cannot change its spots (Jeremiah 13:23). When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he was told that his own righteousness was insufficient; as His disciples questioned him later about the possibility of salvation, He responded that it was possible only with God (Matthew 19:26). Sin arises out of the heart of man, which is sinful (Matthew 15:19); a response of faith cannot proceed from that evil heart unless God initiates that act by regeneration.

Although it is man who believes the gospel, numerous Scriptures represent faith as God's *gift*, again affirming the priority of regeneration (Ephesians 2:8; James 2:5; 2 Timothy 2:25; Philippians 1:29).

Regeneration is described in terms of a new *birth* from above (John 3:3 again). No creature is able to beget itself. The book

of 1 John speaks frequently to the fact of that new birth and its inevitable fruits. When we examine 1 John 3:9, we see that regeneration is the *cause* of sanctification (notice the two *purpose* clauses there). This is confirmed in 5:18, and from there, we can see other fruits of regeneration (2:29, 5:4, for example), including the belief that Jesus is the Christ (5:1).

Resurrection imagery is also used in the New Testament to describe regeneration (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:4-6; Romans 6:8, 13), along with "new creation" (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17). No dead man can resurrect himself! McGee briefly admits the total inability of the unbeliever when he says that:

"The 'old self' lacked both God's truth and God's power. Not only were we unable to change, we didn't really want to."  
(SS 116)

Unfortunately, this admission is buried amidst the author's view that man can exercise saving faith *before* the Holy Spirit gives him new life.

McGee rightly states that:

"Regeneration is not a self-improvement program, nor is it a clean-up campaign for our sinful natures. Regeneration is nothing less than the giving of new life." (SS 154)

There are some good Scriptures listed here, including Titus 3:3-7, Romans 8:10-14, Colossians 2:9-10.

He is right about the radical nature of regeneration when he says that:

"Your new birth brought about more than a change of direction. It gave you a completely new nature with new abilities to reflect God's image in your daily life." (SS 156)

But McGee confuses the issue when he claims a new set of standards for self-evaluation:

"God has made you a new creature! Regeneration provides you with a new system by which you can evaluate yourself and your life." (SS 159)

But it isn't the *standards* that have changed. God's eternal standards never change. Regeneration provides you with new life,

eyes to see, ears to hear God's truth, and the ability to obey God's commands.

A particular concern arises when McGee limits the extent of regeneration:

"The part of us that the Holy Spirit regenerated is our spirit." (SS 157)

Rapha holds a trichotomous view of man -- body, soul, spirit. Although many Christians today affirm such a view, Scripture does not confirm it.<sup>1</sup> The entire inner man is reborn! The Holy Spirit is given; not merely a new *human* spirit. McGee's statement, considered with regard to his three-part view of man, leads to the strange conclusion that only some *part* of the inner man receives new life. This presents serious theological difficulties in addition to discouraging the believer in his walk with the Lord.

**Forgiveness.** Always a key issue for believers, Rapha considers forgiveness one of the three "unique" facets of their approach. They emphasize the "processing of forgiveness" which includes "forgiveness of self, others, and God, and dealing with offenses, unforgiveness, and strongholds" (SF 232). The forgiveness of self is highly unbiblical, and it is found absolutely *nowhere* in Scripture. The very idea of forgiving *God* borders on outright blasphemy, although we must hesitate to judge the hearts of Rapha authors. Hopefully they haven't thought through the full implications of what they teach! (Fortunately, there is no extensive discussion of "forgiving God.")

Here is McGee's definition of forgiveness:

"...the act of ceasing to feel resentment against (an offender)...the act of granting relief from payment of a debt." (SS 161)

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<sup>1</sup> Two key Scriptures are used to defend the three-part view of man. One is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which piles up the terms "body, soul, spirit" in order to emphasize the redemption of the *whole* man. Nothing in the text indicates an intention to divide man into three distinct parts. Another passage is Hebrews 4:12, which teaches about the power of God's Word to expose the inner intentions and thoughts of the *whole* inner man. Again, the passage does not propose to teach a three-part division of man. A close look at biblical uses of "soul" and "spirit" does not lead to the conclusion that there are two clearly distinct "parts" of the inner man. Often the two words are used interchangeably. Sometimes "soul" simply means "person" or "life." Unfortunately, a full analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

Cancellation of a debt is definitely involved, and surely the godly person does not continue to hold resentment against an offender. But is "ceasing to feel resentment" part of the *definition* of forgiveness?

One good emphasis is that McGee recognizes that human forgiveness is modeled after God's forgiveness. He rightly cites the parable of the servant who owed the king a huge debt but failed to forgive another a much smaller amount (SS 134). He says that:

"We often fail to forgive others (and ourselves) because we don't think it's possible to do so. We forget how God graciously has forgiven all of our sins through Christ's death, and we come up with reasons we can't forgive."  
(SS 130)

"We deserve judgment but, because of Christ, receive freedom instead. And we are expected to extend the same forgiveness to others as we are able. We are able to forgive others as we begin to see what Jesus really did on the cross for us."  
(SF 140)

One weakness here, in addition to self-forgiveness, is that God's *command* to forgive seems conditioned on our *ability*: "as we are able." The parable of the unforgiving servant presupposes that as believers we already are able. It is the *unbeliever* who is unable to grant biblical forgiveness.

McGee rightly rejects any system of "works-righteousness" involving penance for sin so that the person may "feel forgiven" (SS 189). He correctly indicates that forgiveness is not merely understanding another (SS 176), and that it acknowledges the full reality of the offense, yet knowing that *Christ* has made full payment (SS 134):

"Remember that forgiveness does not mean overlooking an injury or denying its painful consequences in our lives. We never can experience healing from our wounds by neglect." (SS 178)

Although McGee is right about acknowledging sin, his focus is on "healing our wounds" rather than restoring the offender and honoring God by forgiving as He has forgiven us.

This heavy attention to self appears again:



"Failing to forgive others can cause stress and bitterness, can block love, can shut others out of our lives, can cause constant conflict, and can cause us to injure ourselves again and again." (SS 133)

Failure to forgive may truly result in problems for the one who has been offended, but injury to self is never cited in Scripture as the key problem with unforgiveness. Scripture is concerned with the *love of God and others*.

A combination of injury to self *and others* is seen in the following:

"A lack of forgiveness on our part may cause us to be harsh toward others; to be self-critical, demanding, guilt-ridden, and resentful; to find fault; to be motivated by 'ought-to's'...to hold grudges; and to work hard to make up for shortcomings." (SS 136)

A strong emphasis is placed on resolution of bitterness in order that forgiveness might be possible:

"Christ died to forgive us so we could be free to forgive others. But you can't forgive without first resolving any bitterness.... This is the key in your search for freedom. If you can destroy the stronghold of bitterness, *then* you can deal with the unforgiveness in your life." (SF 138)

Believers are exhorted against bitterness. However, Scripture doesn't *postpone* the command to forgive until bitterness is "resolved" through some lengthy psychological process.

It is particularly disturbing, though not surprising, to see how self-worth is brought into the picture yet again. When discussing the difficulty of a parent dealing with a child's misbehavior, McGee says that:

"Beneath it all is the internalized and unconscious belief, *Someone must take the blame*. Also beneath it all is our inability to forgive ourselves for times we have made mistakes as parents." (SS 138)

McGee's response is to ground *self-worth* in Christ:

"Our worth is totally secure in Christ, so our children's success or failure doesn't affect our value in the least."  
(SS 139)

Note the emphasis on *self*: *self-forgiveness* and *self-worth*. In Scripture, forgiveness is a gracious, tender act toward *another* person who has sinned. It is a focus *away* from self, not an act either toward self or for self.

Finally, let us look at how McGee views the role of confession. He defines confession in terms of agreeing with God about our sin. True, but then he says that:

"Confession is a way for us to *experience* our forgiveness, not a means for us to *obtain* it." (SS 188)

Yet 1 John 1:9 says that if we *confess* our sins, God is faithful and just to *forgive* those sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It sounds as if confession is indeed a means to obtain forgiveness. McGee states that after we confess our sins, we then *claim forgiveness* (SS 187). We do, of course, recognize that as believers Christ has already paid for all of our sins, past, present, and future. If we look at God as *Judge*, then perhaps we "claim" forgiveness rather than obtaining it at the time of confessing sin. However, considering God as our *Father*, we do confess our sins to Him in order to obtain His *fatherly* forgiveness. Similarly, when we confess to other people, we ask forgiveness for the sins we have committed against them.

Forgiveness is an important matter for Christians, one that we dare not overlook. The psychological counseling community regularly confuses the issue in its continuing focus on self-worth, self-forgiveness, and benefits accruing to self when others are forgiven.

**Repentance and Conviction.** Here we move into the area of Christian growth, the heart of counseling. In spite of his emphasis on worth-without-works, McGee does see the harboring of willful sin as an obstacle to growth (SS 195), and he recognizes the need to turn from sin to godly living:

"Please note: No one should feel good about sin. Dishonoring the Lord and harming ourselves and others produce a sorrow that is right and proper. But God intends for this sorrow to be a response to the destructiveness of sin and the righteousness of Christ, not an effort to pay for sin through blame." (SS 119)

The author defines **repentance** as turning away from sin to God, rather than merely feeling sorry about being caught (SS 188), and

he states rightly that restitution to others may be needed (SS 189). He verbalizes repentance as follows:

"I am deeply loved, completely forgiven, fully pleasing, totally accepted, and absolutely complete in Christ. I now choose to act in a way that honors Him, which means I will (name what you will do differently)." (SS 187)

McGee lists three "weapons of repentance." The first is contrition, or godly sorrow. The second is rejection of false beliefs, for which he recommends "self-talk." Third is confession of the truth (SS 210). These last two are Albert Ellis warmed over! Godly sorrow and God's truth are important (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). However, sin arises out of the *heart*, not merely false beliefs. Also, the Holy Spirit is the agent of sanctification.

Rapha literature is a real mixture. Along with using the rational-emotive therapy of Albert Ellis, McGee notes that the Holy Spirit is the agent of **conviction**, which leads to repentance and turning away from sin:

"Conviction produces a fear of the destructiveness of the act itself: this behavior is destructive to me and to others, and it robs me of what God intends for me." (SS 202)

The author rightly notes that we should lean on the Spirit, not on our own understanding, in the conviction of sin (SS 186). However, he also warns against "confusing guilt with conviction." He counsels the reader to "ask Him to show you which are guilt feelings and which actually are sins" (SS 186). This poses a false dichotomy between guilt and conviction. Guilt is wrongly viewed as a *feeling*! Rapha's 12-step workbook devotes considerable space to distinguishing between conviction and *guilt*, when they ought to discern between conviction and *condemnation*.

Repentance and conviction are important theological issues in helping Christians grow in the Lord. God addresses these issues *sufficiently* in His Word, without the addition of psychological theories. Rapha makes some good statements on these matters, but mixes biblical truth with the theories and techniques of men like Albert Ellis and Sigmund Freud. The person struggling with sin is hindered by such integration.

**Sanctification.** Last but by no means least is the important topic of sanctification. Sanctification is at the very heart of giving counsel and exhortation to other believers as they grow in the Lord. Rapha makes numerous comments on this issue, but once

again we are faced with a mixture. Although some biblical truth is stated, Rapha's general view of sanctification is one that depends too heavily on man's will and efforts. It is also weak in terms of failing to cover some of the rich biblical truths that Christians need in their ongoing walk with Christ.

There is, to be sure, a recognition of the vital *importance* of sanctification and the believer's continuing struggle with sin:

"But if the redemption we enjoy is complete, why do we fail to see how it has changed our lives? Why do we wrestle day after day with the same temptations, the same failings, and the same distractions we always have fought?" (SS 162)

McGee rightly recognizes, at points, the centrality of the cross in sanctification:

"Just as the cross of Christ is the basis of our relationship with God, it also is the foundation of our spiritual growth." (SS 183)

"We don't grow because we fail to remember what Christ's forgiveness means. The cross is central to our motivation and development." (SS 165)

Also, the author rightly sees that the Christian life is not merely self-effort. He notes the metaphor of vine and branches in John 15 (SS 183).

**Union with Christ.** It is that very picture, of vine and branches, that highlights the key factor in sanctification: our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We are chosen (Ephesians 1:4), united with Him in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-7:6; Galatians 2:29-20; Colossians 2:11-13,20 & 3:1-4), called to saving faith (1 Corinthians 1:9), regenerated (Ephesians 2:10), justified (Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:6-7)--all *in Christ*. We persevere in Him (1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 6:15-17; John 15). We die in Christ as believers (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16; Revelation 14:13). We are resurrected and glorified in Him (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 8:16-17). Our union with Christ is personal (Colossians 1:26-27; 1 Peter 1:18), spiritual (Romans 8:9-11), by faith (Galatians 2:20). His righteousness is imputed to us, so that there is a judicial aspect to this vital union (Romans 5:12-21). It is a life giving union (John 14:19; John 15; Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12-13) and a sacramental union (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). We are united with the entire body of believers in Christ (1 Corinthians

12; Ephesians 4:25, 5:30). Our union with Christ is indissoluble (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:38-39).<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the richness of what we find in the Scriptures, Rapha's presentation is rather anemic, only touching quickly on this vital, life-giving union we have with Christ. Without that union, our sanctification would never even begin. But with that union, our sanctification cannot fail!

**The Holy Spirit.** McGee acknowledges a role for the Holy Spirit in helping believers to understand and apply God's truth so that spiritual fruit is produced (SS 182). He recognizes the Spirit's role in conviction of sin (SS 185), such that we ought not to fall into morbid introspection (SF 191).

The Holy Spirit dwells in the believer *by definition* (Romans 8). McGee sees this,<sup>3</sup> but separates that indwelling from the Spirit's control:

"When we accept Christ, the Holy Spirit automatically comes to live within us. But the Bible also teaches that He wants to have control of our lives." (SS 126)

He not only *wants* to have control, however. He *does* have control. But McGee assumes that man's will is stronger than the indwelling Spirit. He also considers self-esteem, his pet topic, to be among the "truths" that the Spirit reveals:

"The Holy Spirit wants to lead us into all truth, including truth about our self-esteem. However, we often stop the Holy Spirit from controlling our lives." (SS 127)

Sometimes, according to McGee, we pray for the removal of strongholds and nothing happens:

"But perhaps God actually wants us to discover that He has provided us what it takes to deal with the problem. We have His Holy Spirit, access to His power and authority, promises from Scripture, and much more." (SF 127)

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<sup>2</sup> I am debted to Dr. Robert Strimple, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, for this presentation on our union with Christ. This material has been adapted from his course on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There are other relevant texts, too; only a sampling has been chosen.

<sup>3</sup> He isn't consistent, however. At one point he says that the wise person, having demolished his strongholds, will praise God and "ask Him to fill their newly cleaned out souls with His Holy Spirit" (SF 212). The true believer is *already filled with the Spirit*.

The author calls for *action* rather than *passivity*. He says that:

"We need to closely examine our patterns and strongholds, and consciously decide to handle our problems God's way." (SF 128)

Here and elsewhere, he attributes far too much to man's abilities and initiative:

"God gives us the choice to keep in step with the Spirit so that our old fleshly patterns will not automatically take over. If we listen to the messages of our old lives, we will continue to live in pain and bondage." (SF 131)

Certainly, Scripture calls for believers to be active in their obedience to God's commands. But it is not so much a matter of man's free will as Rapha indicates. We work *because* God is at work within us (Philippians 2:12-13). There is a causal relationship between God's work and our response. The view presented here is one that envisions sanctification as grounded more in man's free will than in God's power. The author wants to impress us with the power of God in effecting change, yet we're left with a process where human decision takes precedence, and where a genuine *believer* may continue to live in bondage indefinitely.

This man-centered perspective returns with a vengeance when the author raises the question of *continuing* in new patterns of obedience. He correctly explains that freedom from strongholds means that you are now free to be what God created you to be, that you now are capable of obedience (SF 212), but he also says:

"Can you again be victimized by your strongholds? From now on, that will be up to you." (SF 199)

"Nobody can ever enslave you again...not without your permission." (SF 218)

The author personifies strongholds and claims that "they will try to come back" (SF 199). This sounds like a type of works-righteousness, rather than sanctification being the work of the Holy Spirit. Also, "victimized" is not a good term to describe human responsibility for sin. It is inconsistent not only with Scripture, but with the author's own view that it's basically all up to you.

The author says that your new freedom isn't guaranteed. Instead, he claims that:

"You are free to return to your former way of life if you so choose. So even after all the work you've already done and the pain you've already experienced--don't get too comfortable." (SF 211)

The author points out that "evil is much more powerful and has a far greater impact than most of us realize" (SF 213). He believes that although only God can (and will) eventually eliminate *all* evil, we can eliminate it in our own lives. This denies the nature of sanctification as the work of the Spirit, and attributes far too much power to man.

**Old Self - New Self.** The Scripture speaks of the believer having put off the old (unregenerate) man and putting on the new (regenerate) man (Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24). This is an important concept for understanding sanctification.

McGee describes a three-step process of "experiencing your new self":

1. "Laying aside the old self--rejecting the old self's hold on you, which dictates how you think, feel, and act, and choosing to stop living in worldliness.
2. Renewing your mind with God's truth--understanding what Christ has accomplished for you and how that gives you a new capacity to live for Him.
3. Putting on the new self--in your thoughts, words, actions, values, and relationships." (SS 158)

The author sees this process as being difficult, and he roots that difficulty in erroneous ways of seeking self-worth:

"It is difficult to lay aside the old self because much of your self-worth probably has been based on your performance and on others' opinions. False beliefs have become the primary basis you use to evaluate yourself and the situations you face." (SS 158)

In addition, the idea of crucifixion is cited as a reason for slow, painful change. He states that it isn't easy to "choose God's way over our way" because the Bible describes this change as a crucifixion of our familiar, sinful ways (SF 130).

McGee also lists "worries of the world" as a major reason for lack of Christian growth, from the parable of the sower (SS 163). (That parable, however, speaks about God's Word being initially received or rejected by an *unbeliever*.) Elsewhere, he describes the "soul" (psyche) as:

"...caught in the middle of a war between our old lives and the associated destructive patterns of thinking, feeling, and choosing, and the regenerated spirit of the new birth."  
(SF 131)

This statement reflects McGee's view that only the human *spirit*, but not the *soul*, is regenerated. As discussed earlier, that view is erroneous. Christians do continue to battle indwelling sin, but *the entire inner man is regenerated*. According to Scripture, the "old man" (in Adam) *already has been put off*, and the "new man" (in Christ) *already has been put on*. The believer is a new creation in Christ. The exhortations in Scripture are to put off (to crucify, put to death, or mortify) the *practices* of the old man. Such commands (as in Romans 6:12-13) are grounded in facts that are *already true*: we have been crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, resurrected with Christ (Romans 6:3-6). The imperative (command) has its foundation in the indicative (fact).

The Rapha perspective is one that fails to clearly present the biblical view of the old/new man. Due to their trichotomous view of man, and their belief that only *one* of the three parts (the spirit) is regenerated, they leave the believer in the bizarre situation of having both old and new man residing in the same body. The struggle with sin is serious enough without this sort of error.

**Event or process?** In the Youth Manual to *Search for Freedom*, McGee distinguishes between God's instantaneous act of salvation, and the progressive nature of further growth, saying that "we may have to peel off the layers as God initiates healing" (22). In the book, salvation is described as both an *event* and also as a *process* (SF 215). The author needs to distinguish more clearly between justification and sanctification, seeing that the latter has both a definitive and a progressive aspect, while the former is a judicial, one-time act of God. McGee doesn't see the perseverance of the saints, who are kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5), not by free will. We work, and we persevere in holiness, *because God is at work within us*.



There is a sense in which sanctification is definitive rather than progressive. The believer *has been* sanctified, cleansed, and set apart to belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:9; Titus 2:14). Yet there is an ongoing battle with sin (Romans 7:14-25) and a sense in which the believer progressively grows in godliness, putting off the deeds of the flesh (Romans 6; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Peter 1:3-11, 3:18; Romans 12:2).<sup>4</sup>

**Motives for change.** The author says that obedience is not an unpleasant alternative, where we do things that are against our wills. Obedience involves responding to God differently and relying on His power (SF 193). He rightly notes the importance of living to honor Christ, rather than being preoccupied with self-improvement, which "in many ways parallels our culture's self-help and personal enhancement movement" (SF 191). This is true, but unfortunately this author's focus, throughout the book, is on *self-worth*! He notes that a believer may become too mechanical in his Christian life, being rigorously scheduled and disciplined, lacking joy and spontaneity (SS 191). He also rightly sees the error of mysticism, depending on supernatural feelings to dictate our relationship to God and to motivate us. We don't need to wait until we "feel like it" to love others or study the Bible. Emotions are not God's primary way of speaking to us (SS 192). These comments are generally good, but again, Rapha's focus is more on building self-worth than on living to honor Christ.

### **Rapha's Cornerstone: Self-Worth**

Enhancing self-worth is unmistakably the chief cornerstone in Rapha's approach to psychotherapy. When noting the three "unique" elements of their counseling, they claim first to focus on God's identity. But the second element is:

"...based upon understanding and experiencing our self-worth according to who God says we are as His children, as opposed to who we think we are based on our performance and others' opinions." (SF 232)

The author believes that normally a "crystallizing event" occurs in the life of a hurting child to convince him he was right about his "low self-worth" (SF 92). It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of "low self-worth" in Rapha's teachings. If this one falls to the ground, the whole structure

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<sup>4</sup> Credit again to coursework at Westminster Theological Seminary, Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, given by Dr. Robert Strimple.

of Rapha's psychotherapy crumbles. Yet Rapha authors view self-worth as man's most basic need, and the lack of self-worth as man's fundamental problem.

**Self-worth defined.** Here is a basic definition:

"*Self-worth*, often called self-esteem or personal significance, is characterized by a quiet sense of self-respect and a feeling of satisfaction with who we are. True self-worth, unlike pride, is not based on how we evaluate our performance." (SS 15)

Related to self-worth is self-concept:

"A healthy self-concept develops when a person recognizes his or her value and worth." (SS 16)

The author believes that self-worth is more than simply "feeling good about ourselves," as promoted by many psychologists. It involves accurate perception of not only ourselves, but also God and others, based on the truths of the Bible (SS 18). (However, one of his prerequisites to "emotional healing" is "relationships that affirm me, or make me feel good about myself" [SS 29].) But McGee claims that even the church contributes to erroneous ideas about self-worth:

"A correct understanding of God's truths is the first step toward discovering our significance and worth. Unfortunately, many of us have been exposed to incorrect teaching both from religious and secular sources concerning our self-worth."  
(SS 18)

It is clear that Rapha wishes to counteract such "incorrect teaching." But are they right?

**Self-worth, sin, and salvation.** McGee believes that man's "sense of significance" and self-worth were lost at the fall:

"When God created human beings, He gave them a sense of purpose. When people rebelled against God, they lost that sense of significance." (SS 19)

However, according to this author, self-worth is not based on performance or on pleasing anyone else:

"We do not *have* to be successful or *have* to please others to have a healthy sense of self-esteem and worth. God freely has given us our worth." (SS 26)

Man, however, often does rely on performance and the opinions of others in self-evaluation:

"Failure often causes us to condemn ourselves and causes others to disapprove of us. These actions are severe blows to a self-worth based on personal success and approval." (SS 41)

"Though God does not intend it to be this way, our self-concept largely is determined by what others think about us. As a result the need for others' approval can drive us to do whatever we feel we must do to receive it." (SS 72)

"The desire for success and approval constitutes the basis of an addictive, worldly self-worth." (SS 93)

McGee acknowledges *salvation* to be God's free gift, and our faith as a response to that gift (93 SS). He repeatedly affirms self-worth, *like salvation*, to also be a free gift of God grounded in Christ's atoning work:

"Sometimes He will allow us to fail miserably so we will look to Him instead of to ourselves for our security and significance." (SS 46)

"You deserve to feel good about yourself because you are God's precious son or daughter.... When you think about it, no one really deserves to feel good about himself. We all deserve God's condemnation, but you can feel great about yourself because Christ loves, forgives, and accepts you." (SS 108)

Failure, or rather sin, is no basis for low self-esteem:

"God wants us to view our failure as a way we move forward in our relationships with Him. He does not want us to view our failures as threats to our self-esteem." (SS 111)

McGee affirms the truth that believers are set free from eternal condemnation, as Romans 8:1 teaches. Further sin, he concludes, should therefore not lead to either guilt or lowered self-esteem:

"Persons who accept Christ are free from eternal condemnation. God wants us to feel a godly sorrow, or grief, for our sins. He does not want us to experience guilt that eats away at us and destroys our self-esteem." (SS 201)

For this author, it seems that self-condemnation is the greatest possible "sin":

"When people allow guilt to burden them even after God forgives them, they can find themselves harmed emotionally. This kind of lingering guilt causes a loss of self-respect. It causes the human spirit to wither, and it eats away at our personal significance and self-esteem. It causes us to condemn ourselves." (SS 199)

McGee's accompanying Youth Manual makes similar statements directed at young people:

"Significance means fully loving and accepting yourself because you are completely loved and accepted by God." (7)

"Unfortunately, gaining a sense of our own significance is a difficult struggle for nearly everyone." (9)

"God wants us to get our self-esteem from believing that He is a perfect creator. He wants us to say to ourselves: '*God made me just right for His purposes.*'" (117)

Rapha's emphasis on self-worth blends huge error with biblical truths about sin and salvation. Self-worth is promoted almost as if it were salvation. Instead of *salvation* apart from works, Rapha hammers away at *self-worth* apart from works. Rather than highlighting sin as a violation of God's commands that ruptured the relationship between God and man, Rapha centers on loss of self-worth and self-esteem as the major result of the fall. It is as if man were separated from *self* rather than from *God*.

The Bible never commands man to increase his self-worth, self-esteem, or self-love. Such focus on self is the antithesis of godliness (Philippians 2:3; 2 Timothy 3:2). Rapha's chief cornerstone must crumble and fall to the ground.

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