

RAPHA REVIEW IN SUMMARY

Rapha is a counseling program combined with an inpatient psychiatric clinic, founded by Robert S. McGee in 1968. Its name is derived from the Hebrew verb *rapha*, meaning "heal," and its services are directed toward Christians. Rapha has become quite popular within the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years. There is a claim to be biblical, but close examination reveals a mixture of truth and error.

This writing serves to summarize four papers offered by Discernment Publications:

- "Rapha and Codependency," reviewing
Codependency, by Pat Springle, and the accompanying 12-step workbook
- "Rapha's Search for Truth," reviewing
Search for Significance Workbook and
Search for Freedom, by Robert S. McGee
- "The God Factor," reviewing
The Parent Factor, by Robert S. McGee, Jim Craddock, and Pat Springle; and
Father Hunger, by Robert S. McGee
- "Rapha's 12 Steps in the Wrong Direction," reviewing
Rapha's 12-step Workbook

We will quickly review the major areas of concern about Rapha's approach to counseling.

The Twelve Steps. The very fact that Rapha utilizes the 12 steps originated by Alcoholics Anonymous is a grave concern. Rapha buys into the common myth that these steps are biblically based, but a careful look at official AA literature indicates that Scripture had nothing at all to do with their creation. Scriptures are pasted onto these steps without careful exegesis of the texts used. These 12 steps are a pagan counterfeit for biblical truth about how people change. The 12-step paper noted above provides a relatively short tour of the steps as used by Rapha, showing how the Bible is *misused*.

"Codependency." Rapha buys into the erroneous concept of "codependency" and utilizes the 12 steps of AA as a "recovery" program. In addition, they seek to increase the self-worth of the "codependent." The behaviors of the "codependent" should be seen in terms of *sin* rather than *disease*. The whole concept of "codependency" is one that encourages man's natural focus on self,

rather than love of God and others. It is one of the most dangerous ideas ever to enter the church.

Self-Worth. Here is Rapha's cornerstone! At every point, Rapha authors tirelessly seek to increase man's sense of self-worth. Often what they say *seems* biblical at first glance, because they emphasize being right with God on the basis of pure grace rather than works. However, it seems that *self-worth* has been substituted for *salvation* in the equation. The believer receives eternal salvation by grace rather than works, being credited with the righteousness of Christ. It does *not* follow that he therefore has "infinite worth," as Rapha claims. It is *salvation*, not *self-worth*, that is received by God's grace apart from works. It is Christ, not man, who has infinite worth. God alone is worthy to be praised!

Theological Issues. Rapha authors return frequently to certain key theological matters, including regeneration, justification, propitiation, reconciliation, repentance, conviction, forgiveness, and sanctification. Often, they make biblical statements followed by erroneous psychological conclusions. For example, the believer is justified by the work of Christ on his behalf, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to him. True, but Rapha authors conclude without biblical precedent that this justifies high self-worth.

The area of **regeneration** is a serious concern in that Rapha authors insist that only *part* of the inner man is regenerated, namely the *spirit*. Scripture doesn't support this partial regeneration. Rather, the entire inner man is born again. This error is one that greatly impacts and hinders **sanctification** in its suggestion that some part of the believer remains *unregenerate*.

Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (Albert Ellis). Rapha relies heavily on the theories and methods of atheist Albert Ellis. In a nutshell, Ellis teaches that negative feelings and behaviors are rooted in wrong thoughts. Although Scripture certainly speaks to the issue of thinking correctly (biblically), it is not possible to trace all sinful emotion and action to thoughts *alone*. Man is carried away and enticed by the lusts (desires) of his own heart (James 1:14).

The medical model. Rapha's very name is an endorsement of the medical model employed so often today in handling all types of *sin*.

The Hebrew verb *rapha* has more than one sense in its Old Testament use. One use concerns physical healing of the body. Occasionally, it is used to describe the restoration of a physical object or substance (the turning of salt water into fresh in Jeremiah 19:11). Of particular significance is the use of this verb in a figurative sense, for the forgiveness of sin or the healing of disease that God has afflicted as discipline for sin. It is used in Isaiah 19:22 and 57:18 to describe the coming of forgiveness to the Gentile nations. Most believers have heard the phrase in Isaiah 53:5, "with His stripes we are healed."¹ What we do *not* find in Scripture is the "healing" of psychological "diseases" or "wounds" that result strictly from the sins of *others* (notably parents), for which the "victim" bears little or no responsibility. The medical model of sin is strictly absent from the Old Testament (also the New Testament!). It is interesting that in all of these Rapha books, not once do the authors actually take us to passages where the verb *rapha* is used! If biblical use actually supported their psychological theories, that would be the natural thing to do.

The influence of family. In this arena we move from Albert Ellis to the speculations of another aggressive atheist, Sigmund Freud. There are serious problems in Rapha's approach to the family and its influence on an *adult* child. On the whole, Rapha views man as a *victim* of the sins of others, rather than a *sinner* who is responsible before God. There is excessive focus on psychological "needs" that Rapha claims *must be met*, such as self-worth and a father's love. Although the gospel is presented at points, there is not sufficient emphasis on man's most basic need: to be reconciled to God.

Parental influences on a child's view of God are taken to unbiblical extremes. Parents do have serious God-given responsibilities. However, Scripture never indicates that they *determine* a child's relationship with God in the manner advocated by Rapha. The example of Israel's godly king, Josiah, is evidence quite to the contrary!

It is alarming to note Rapha's promotion of the "repressed memory" concept. If you don't already believe you're a victim of parental abuses in your childhood, Rapha will attempt to convince you of your victim status. The "repressed memory" syndrome is a hot topic today, one with many tragic results. This sort of unbiblical idea feeds man's natural tendency to shift blame.

¹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute (1980).

Conclusion. There are a couple of sections, scattered in the various books, where the authors provide an excellent study of the Old Testament names of God. If extracted from the psychological context, such a study would be quite worthwhile. Otherwise, Rapha writings are entangled with too much psychological error to be recommended. Some correct theological statements are made, yet some of Rapha's theology (regeneration, for example) is clearly out of line. Rapha literature generally leads to viewing oneself as a *victim*, rather than a *sinner*, and to an unbiblical elevation of self-worth. The church needs to turn away -- far away! -- from Rapha and other similar approaches, back to the infallible, sufficient Word of God.

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