

# ON BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

## A Critique of *On Becoming a Person*, by Carl R. Rogers

Although now deceased, Carl Rogers is one of the most popular psychologists in the world. His "client-centered" therapy has made inroads among many, including the Christian community. His approach assumes the inherent goodness of man, contrary to Scripture, and destroys the very idea of giving *counsel* to another person.

Rogers was raised in "a very strict and uncompromising religious and ethical atmosphere" (5). During his first two years of college, he planned to enter the ministry (7). However:

"In major ways I for the first time emancipated myself from the religious thinking of my parents, and realized that I could not go along with them." (7)

Rogers admits to "revolt and rebellion" in his attitude at this time (7). He entered Union Theological Seminary and was attracted to a teacher who "believed devoutly in freedom of inquiry, and in following the truth no matter where it led" (8). In his own words, Rogers discovered that:

"I could not work in a field where I would be required to believe in some specified religious doctrine.... I wanted to find a field in which I could be sure my freedom of thought would not be limited." (8)

*Psychology* was that field.

### Authority and Truth

For Rogers, no external authority is adequate. This point can hardly be overemphasized, as it is the *foundation* of his approach to helping people.

"I can trust my experience...I have learned that my total organismic sensing of a situation is more trustworthy than my intellect.... I have found that when I have trusted some inner non-intellectual sensing, I have discovered wisdom in the move." (22)

"Evaluation by others is not a guide for me...I have come to feel that only one person (at least in my lifetime, and

perhaps ever) can know whether what I am doing is honest, thorough, open, and sound, or false and defensive and unsound, and I am that person." (23)

Here we come to the clincher:

"Experience is, for me, the highest authority." (23)

"Neither the Bible nor the prophets--neither Freud nor research--neither the revelations of God nor man--can take precedence over my own direct experience." (24)

It is critical for our analysis to note that Rogers discards God's infallible, authoritative Word in favor of his own internal, subjective experience and judgment.

Strangely enough, Rogers admits to the potential for error in what he considers to be the "highest authority":

"My experience is not authoritative because it is infallible. It is the basis of authority because it can always be checked in new primary ways. In this way its frequent error or fallibility is always open to correction." (24)

What about the question of *truth*? On this critical issue, Rogers tells us that "the facts are friendly," that "being closer to the truth can never be a harmful or dangerous or unsatisfying thing" (25).

When Rogers applies all of this to therapy, the result is that he does *not* give counsel:

"I trust it is clear now why there is no philosophy or belief or set of principles which I could encourage or persuade others to have or hold. I can only try to live by *my* interpretation of the current meaning of *my* experience, and try to give others the permission and freedom to develop their own inward freedom and thus their own meaningful interpretation of their own experience." (27)

This is the very antithesis of biblical admonition!

### **Order: The "Laws" of Personality**

Although Rogers rejects external authority, he desperately desires order. In his therapy, he assumes that there are "orderly forces" in the process, "forces which seem deeply rooted in the

universe as a whole" (5). At one point, he became attracted to research. He explains this ongoing fascination:

"The conviction grows in me that we shall discover laws of personality and behavior which are as significant for human progress or human understanding as the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics." (14)

This attraction to "order" is something that Rogers considers to be a personal, subjective "need" within himself:

"So I have come to recognize that the reason I devote myself to research, and to the building of theory, is to satisfy a need for perceiving order and meaning, a subjective need which exists in me." (25)

However, despite Rogers' desire to find order, he states that:

"Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed." (27)

Nevertheless, Rogers describes the therapeutic relationship as being governed by a certain "lawfulness" that also governs other interpersonal relations (37). He sees the right sort of "psychological climate" as encouraging self-direction, socialization, self-discipline, maturity, and a decrease in anxiety (37).

There is serious internal inconsistency here. Rogers desires "law and order" without the Lawgiver--God. He rejects the Creator of law and order. He wants order yet insists that "nothing is fixed" and enthrones every man as "god" of his own little universe, choosing his own "truth." But without the true God, there can be no order. Rogers can't have it both ways, but he tries!

## **The Goodness of Man**

Here we come to the underlying foundation of Rogerian therapy:

"One of the most revolutionary concepts to grow out of our clinical experience is the growing recognition that the innermost core of man's nature, the deepest layers of his personality, the base of his 'animal nature,' is positive in nature--is basically socialized, forward-moving, rational and realistic." (91)

Rogers specifically rejects biblical teachings about human nature, accusing Christianity of spreading the idea that man's nature is something other than basically good:

"Religion, especially the Protestant Christian tradition, has permeated our culture with the concept that man is basically sinful, and only by something approaching a miracle can his sinful nature be negated." (91, emphasis added)

Rogers also renounces the Freudian view of man's basically evil unconscious instincts (91). Instead he sides with those "occasional voices of protest," such as represented by Abraham Maslow, who attempt to make a case for the inherent goodness of man.

Appealing to his "authority," Rogers tells us that:

"It has been my experience that persons have a basically positive direction." (26)

This "positive direction" has nothing to do with living for the glory of God, but rather is "toward self-actualization" (26):

"I have come to feel that the more fully the individual is understood and accepted, the more he tends to drop the false fronts with which he has been meeting life, and the more he tends to move in a direction which is forward." (27)

However, Rogers cannot consistently ignore the truth, although he explains it away in psychological terms:

"I would not want to be misunderstood on this. I do not have a Pollyanna view of human nature. I am quite aware that out of defensiveness and inner fear individuals can and do behave in ways which are incredibly cruel, horribly destructive, immature, regressive, anti-social, hurtful." (27)

Notice here that man's fundamental problem is described in terms of "defensiveness" and "inner fear," rather than *sin*.

Rogers describes the experience of a client:

"Underneath the layer of controlled surface behavior, underneath the bitterness, underneath the hurt, is a self that is positive, and that is without hate." (101)

This seems like a new version of psychoanalytic digs into the unconscious! But instead of finding basically evil drives within the Freudian unconscious, Rogers insists on finding a good self. He insists on applying his experience (as he sees it) to mankind in general:

"Do we dare to generalize from this type of experience that if we cut through deeply enough to our organismic nature, that we find that man is a positive and social animal? This is the suggestion from our clinical experience." (103)

When Rogers discusses motivation for personal change, he says that:

"The individual has within himself the capacity and the tendency, latent if not evident, to move forward toward maturity.... It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life--to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature." (35)

The primary problem, according to Rogers, is that:

"This tendency may become deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defenses." (35)

It "awaits only the proper conditions to be released and expressed" (35).

Trust in self is one of the goals Rogers expresses for his therapy. Such a goal must presuppose the basic goodness of man, although Rogers does admit that human judgment isn't infallible (191). Rogers hopes his clients will reach the point where:

"Doing what 'feels right' proves to be a competent and trustworthy guide to behavior which is truly satisfying." (189)

Rogers also sees man as fundamentally rational rather than irrational:

"I have little sympathy with the rather prevalent concept that man is basically irrational, and that his impulses, if not controlled, will lead to destruction of others and self. Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve." (194-195)

However, are these goals that honor *God*? Rogers must *assume* man's basic goodness in order to affirm such goals.

Rogers considers man's impulses, feelings, and thoughts to be "very satisfactorily self-governing when not fearfully or authoritatively guarded" (203). His entire approach to psychotherapy reflects this major presupposition about the inherent goodness of man's nature. It is thus in direct conflict with the Scripture, which presents man's most basic problem as *sin*, resulting in separation from God and the pressing need for reconciliation. Man's nature is essentially depraved, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This fundamental error of the Rogerian approach is one that colors the entire process. Giving godly, biblical counsel is the very antithesis of the Rogerian style.

### **The Freedom of Man**

On the one hand, Rogers states that "every thought, feeling, and action of the client is determined by what preceded it" (192). Yet he strongly promotes freedom to be true to oneself. He describes the "fully functioning person" as one who:

"...not only experiences, but utilizes, the most absolute freedom when he spontaneously, freely, and voluntarily chooses and wills that which is also absolutely determined" (193).

Rogers considers such an individual "a fit vanguard of human evolution," the "most likely to adapt and survive under changing environmental conditions" (194). Man is seen as a "free agent" who can choose to hide behind a facade or to "enhance himself and others" (203).

The Rogerian view of autonomous man conflicts with Scripture, as does the deterministic view of man. Man is a moral agent responsible before God, his Creator. The unbeliever is enslaved to sin, so although he has the ability to make choices, the choices are highly limited. He is *both* unable *and* unwilling to do what pleases God (Romans 8:7-8). Yet, while lacking freedom, he remains responsible. The believer has a new allegiance to Christ. He has freedom, but not the *autonomy* promoted by Rogers.

### **Rogerian Therapy: The Therapeutic Relationship**

As a therapist, Rogers considers himself a "midwife to a new personality...the emergence of a self, a person" (5). He asks:

"How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?" (32)

"If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur." (33)

Rogers discuss several significant "learnings" in his work as a counselor:

"In my relationships with persons I have found that it does not help, in the long run, to act as though I were something that I am not." (16)

"I find I am more effective when I can listen acceptantly to myself, and can be myself...the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change...we cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are." (17)

"I have found it of enormous value when I can permit myself to understand another person." (18)

"I have found it enriching to open channels whereby others can communicate their feelings, their private perceptual worlds, to me." (19)

"I have found it highly rewarding when I can accept another person...and his feelings." (20) Here Rogers emphasizes the "separateness of individuals," insisting that "each person is an island unto himself" (21).

"The more I am open to the realities in me and in the other person, the less do I find myself wishing to rush in to 'fix things.'"

"I cannot be of help to this troubled person by means of any intellectual or training procedure." (32)

However, these "learnings" are pure *speculations* on the part of Rogers. They are his opinion, rooted and grounded in his unbiblical view of man and his unbiblical therapeutic goals.

Rogers wants to provide "acceptance," which he describes as:

"...a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth--of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings." (34)

He wants to provide the person with freedom, specifically:

"...a freedom to explore oneself...complete freedom from any type of moral or diagnostic evaluation, since all such evaluations are, I believe, always threatening." (34)

We need to ask: Is this even *possible*? The absence of *any* evaluation is in itself an evaluation of sorts--an evaluation that the person is inherently good and has the answers within himself! Rogers, as we have seen, admits to this positive evaluation of the nature of man.

Rogers sees the therapeutic relationship as one which "has the intent of promoting the growth, development, maturity, improved functioning, improved coping with life of the other" (40). In looking at research related to parent-child relationships, Rogers reports that the "acceptant-democratic" attitude "seemed most growth-facilitating" (41), encouraging "self-realization" (42).

He also considers research regarding changes made during therapy. Persons in therapy cited "being understood by the therapist" and "the feeling of independence they had had in making choices and decisions" as major positive factors (43). "Direct specific advice" and emphasis on past history were both evaluated as negative procedures in the same study (43).

However, we must consider the impact of sin on such reports. Part of the essence of sin is man's desire to be *autonomous*, to liberate himself from God's authority. Thus it is no wonder that independence and lack of specific advice would be cited as favorable!

Rogers also cites research indicating "that success in psychotherapy is closely associated with a strong and growing mutual liking and respect between client and therapist" (44). He concludes from all of the various studies that:

"It is the attitudes and feelings of the therapist, rather than his theoretical orientation, which is important." (44)

"It is the way in which his attitudes and procedures are *perceived* which makes a difference to the client." (44)



In the body of Christ, we have relationships with one another, and we are exhorted to love, encourage, admonish, instruct, rebuke, and such. Relationships are important, but the Rogerian style is quite superficial compared to the love of *Christ* shared by believers.

Research is also referenced which indicates that comments like "mhm" or "good" may influence a person without his awareness (45). This is an important notation in the context of a therapy which proclaims its desire to be nonjudgmental and to exclude external evaluations!

Another study indicated that therapy based on learning theory was less effective than either psychoanalysis or the client-centered Rogerian approach (47). This method identifies problem behaviors, considers the reasons for them, and then reeducates the individual (47). Rogers relates the failure of this approach to the fact that it is impersonal. He states that:

"To withhold one's self as a person and to deal with the other person as an object does not have a high probability of being helpful." (47)

Here is his alternative:

"If the counselor likes the client, unconditionally; and if the counselor understands the essential feelings of the client as they seem to the client--then there is a strong probability that this will be an effective helping relationship." (49)

In addition, "personal change is facilitated when the psychotherapist is what he *is*" (61).

Furthermore, Rogers recommends that the therapist attempt to be perceived as trustworthy (50), express himself unambiguously (51), and maintain a positive attitude toward the client rather than an aloof, "professional" attitude (52). At the same time, he is concerned that therapist and client maintain separate identities, with separate feelings and needs (52-53). He wants the therapist to enter into the "private world" of the client, to exhibit "empathic understanding" to the extent that he loses all desire to evaluate or judge it (53, 62). The client, Rogers believes, should be set free from any possible external threat, such as an external evaluation would present, so that he can deal with his internal feelings and conflicts (54). The Rogerian

therapist maintains "positive feeling without reservations, without evaluations" (62). Even a positive evaluation is considered unhelpful because it implies the right to evaluate (55). Rogers wants to leave all evaluations to the individual himself (55), rejecting all outside authority.

Biblically, the impersonal, "professional" relationship promoted by much psychotherapy is to be emphatically rejected by Christians. There must indeed be personal involvement in the lives of others, involvement that extends far beyond mere conversation, to the giving of all sorts of mutual care. Rogers has hit on a key issue, but he falls far short of the *biblical* view of caring relationships within the church body. He also errs gravely in his rebellion against external authority. The Christian can never abandon *God's* authority (nor can the unbeliever, but he tries!).

In considering the feelings of the therapist for the client, Rogers says that:

"There is, I think, within the therapist, a profound experience of the underlying commonality--should we say brotherhood--of man." (82)

This is a counterfeit of what believers share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is how Rogers describes the therapist's attitude:

"It is a caring enough about the person that you do not wish to interfere with his development, nor to use him for any self-aggrandizing goals of your own. Your satisfaction comes in having set him free to grow in his own fashion." (84)

The Christian who ministers care to another is concerned about that other person's growth as a believer and his relationship to the Lord. He is concerned about *God's* glory, not his own or that of the other person. Rogers distorts this important truth.

Rogers believes that the good therapist enters into "an intensely personal and subjective relationship with the client" (184), seeing him as "a person of unconditional worth: of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings" (185). He provides "a climate which will permit the client the utmost freedom to become himself," i.e., he is able to explore "increasingly strange and unknown and dangerous feelings in himself" (185). In experiencing those feelings, supposedly "he

has experienced *himself*," because "he is all these feelings" (185):

"He approaches the realization that he no longer needs to fear what experience may hold, but can welcome it freely as a part of his changing and developing self." (185)

The Christian, rather than seeing another as "a person of unconditional worth," sees the other as *the image of God*, and a brother or sister in Christ with whom he will share eternity. In ministering to another believer, the focus is not on fallible human feelings, but on living to please God through the gracious work of the Spirit. Neither person is in the limelight; rather, God is central. It is through His Spirit and Word that godly change occurs.

**The Client's Experience.** Rogers concentrates attention on "the nature of the client's experience of change in himself" (73). Here's what he states about the conclusions he asserted earlier in *Client-Centered Therapy*:

"I felt very bold, and very unsure of myself, in pointing out that in successful therapy clients seem to come to have real affection for themselves. I felt even more uncertain in voicing the hypothesis that the core of man's nature is essentially positive." (73)

Now, however, Rogers believes that his own experience has confirmed these initially tentative conclusions (73-74). We have already reviewed the clearly unbiblical nature of this assumption about the "essentially positive" nature of man. It is equally unbiblical to pursue affection for self. The believer is to pursue wholehearted love for God and others. Rogerian therapy runs contrary to Scripture in both its assumptions and results.

Experiencing of the "potential self" is considered by Rogers an important aspect of therapy (76):

"The client can let himself examine various aspects of his experience as they actually feel to him...without distorting them to fit the existing concept of self." (76)

Client *learning* in Rogerian therapy is anything but intellectual in nature:

"Learning as it takes place in therapy is a total, organismic, frequently non-verbal type of thing which may or

may not follow the same principles as the intellectual learning of trivial material which has little relevance to the self." (86)

Rogers clearly views therapy as a process of self-discovery, "significant learning which...one person *cannot* teach another" (204).

None of this describes the experience of the *Christian* who is learning and growing in the Word of God through the power of His Spirit. Believers must instruct and exhort one another in the Word. Learning is not an adventure in "self-discovery," but a growing knowledge of God according to His revelation in the Scriptures. Knowledge of oneself is *also* according to God's Word, as well as the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Rogerian "learning" (if we can even call it that!) is the antithesis of biblical instruction in God's truth.

### **Goals of Therapy**

Although Rogers wants to "counsel" without imparting a particular system of values, it is clear that his therapy definitely *does* involve certain values. Rogers hopes that the therapeutic relationship will lead to the individual valuing himself more highly, becoming more self-confident and self-directing, accepting himself, and becoming more adaptive in meeting new situations (36). These are clearly *values* imparted by the Rogerian methodology.

Rogers indicates that psychotherapy does not provide **motivation** for change, but rather:

"Therapy does play an extremely important part in releasing and facilitating the tendency of the organism toward psychological development or maturity, when this tendency has been blocked." (60)

"Psychotherapy (at least client-centered therapy) is a process whereby man becomes his organism--without self-deception, without distortion." (103)

It seems that motivation for constructive change (as defined by Rogers) supposedly exists inherently in man. Biblically, the motivation for godly change occurs with the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The motivations of the human heart are by nature sinful.

One goal of Rogerian therapy, shared with other methods, is the **recognition of feelings**:

"He begins to receive the communications from within himself--to realize that he *is* angry, to recognize when he is frightened, even to realize when he is feeling courageous." (63)

As we will see, this focus on feelings is undoubtedly the most central aspect of the Rogerian approach.

**Acceptance of self** is yet another goal of Rogerian therapy, one that is supposed to be facilitated by the therapist's "unconditional positive regard" (63). According to Rogers, the client "moves toward a conception of himself as a person of worth, as a self-directing person, able to form his standards and values upon the basis of his own experience" (65). As Rogers describes it more fully:

"The client not only accepts himself--a phrase which may carry the connotation of a grudging and reluctant acceptance of the inevitable--he actually comes to *like* himself. This is not a bragging or self-assertive liking; it is rather a quiet pleasure in being one's self." (87)

Rogers hope is to see a client discard the "mask" he has been wearing and to uncover the "real self" hiding underneath (109). This involves examining behavior that is inconsistent with that "real self," thus discovering "how much of his life is guided by what he thinks he *should* be, not by what he is" (110). The process may be painful and troubling, however, as "false faces" are finally removed (110).

A key aspect of discovering the "real self" is the experience of feelings (111). Rogers believes that the therapeutic relationship allows for expression that would be unsafe in other settings (111). He applauds the results:

"When a person has, throughout therapy, experienced in this fashion all the emotions which organismically arise in him, and has experienced them in this knowing and open manner, then he has experienced *himself*, in all the richness that exists within himself. He has become what he is." (113)

Much modern psychology agrees that a person *is* his emotions, that feelings are the fundamental *core* of man. Rogers describes it as the discovery of the "unity and harmony" existing in one's

feelings and reactions (114). "Becoming a person," Rogerian style, is becoming *oneself*, "not a facade of conformity to others, not a cynical denial of all feelings, nor a front of intellectual rationality" (114).

Self-acceptance is not a biblical goal! When Isaiah came into the presence of a God, His *holiness* consumed any self-acceptance Isaiah may have previously enjoyed (Isaiah 6). Believers are accepted by God on the basis of Christ's righteousness, not any worth or works of self. Because of man's ongoing struggle with sin, the pure self-acceptance of Rogerian therapy is totally unacceptable for believers.

**Becoming "fully man"** is another way of expressing the basic Rogerian goal. Rogers believes that:

"When man is less than fully man--when he denies to awareness various aspects of his experience--then indeed we have all too often reason to fear him and his behavior, as the present world situation testifies. But when he is most fully man, when he is his complete organism, when awareness of experience, that peculiarly human attribute, is most fully operating, then he is to be trusted, then his behavior is constructive." (105)

In line with his view of individualized truth, Rogers presents this statement as his personal *conviction*, but not necessarily absolute truth to which all must agree (106).

Man *is* fully man, and as such, he is the image of God. Humanity is not identical to sinfulness, as the full humanity of Christ will attest. However, since the Fall human sin is universal *except* for Christ, the One who is fully man and fully God. "Becoming fully man" is hardly a biblical goal. Rather, *becoming conformed to the image of Christ* is a biblical goal. Rogers omits God from any consideration.

**"Openness to experience"** is one of the supposedly positive results of client-centered therapy, where the person "is able to take in the evidence in a new situation, as *it is*, rather than distorting it to fit a pattern which he already holds" (115). This also involves holding beliefs that are not rigid, and the ability to tolerate ambiguity (115). Rogers considers this openness "the polar opposite of defensiveness" (187). This includes particularly an openness to experiencing of one's own feelings, "owning" them.

Biblically, the believer learns to evaluate his experiences in the light of Scripture, taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ, thinking God's thoughts after Him. He is to see situations as God sees them, not according to the distortions of human sin.

**Self-evaluation and authority.** In line with Rogers' view of locating authority solely within self (not God!), he states that in successful therapy:

"The individual increasingly comes to feel that the locus of evaluation lies within himself. Less and less does he look to others for approval or disapproval; for standards to live by; for decisions and choices. He recognizes that it rests within himself to choose." (119)

The only standard for choice, in this scenario, is self-satisfaction. This is the antithesis of living to glorify God! Meanwhile, Rogers does caution that this can initially be rather frightening:

"To recognize that 'I am the one who chooses' and 'I am the one who determines the value of an experience for me' is both an invigorating and a frightening realization." (122)

This exaltation of self, as the ultimate authority, is one of the most unbiblical goals of Rogerian therapy. Its conflict with God's divine authority should be obvious.

Still another goal is **contentment with being a process** instead of a *product*, a "fixed entity" where all of his problems are solved (122). Drawing on Kierkegaard's existentialism, Rogers stresses this state of "becoming" rather than a static, fixed state of affairs:

"One of the most evident trends in clients is to move toward becoming all of the complexity of one's changing self in each significant moment." (172)

The "good life," from Rogers' perspective, is *not* "a state of virtue, or contentment, or nirvana, or happiness" (186). The goal is not to reduce tensions and drives (186):

"The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination. The direction which constitutes the good life is that which is selected by the

total organism, when there is psychological freedom to move in *any* direction." (186-187)

Biblically, we recognize that in *this* life, we are in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. We are being sanctified by the gracious work of God's Spirit. However, our ultimate hope is heavenly. The time is coming when indeed that process will be complete, when we experience glorification, resurrection bodies, and a new heavens and earth. We are never content with the Rogerian concept of "being in process" indefinitely.

**"To be that self which one truly is."** Here is a prime description of what Rogerian therapy hopes to achieve. Rogers believes that each individual must determine his own goals and purposes in life (164). In surveying the many goals that have been chosen over the centuries, Rogers lumps living for God's glory with a variety of others (164-165). He groups man's many goals into "five dimensions":

1. Responsible, moral, self-restrained living (165).
2. Confident initiation of change, "vigorous action for the overcoming of obstacles" (165).
3. Self-sufficient inner life, strong self-awareness (165).
4. Receptivity to both people and nature (165). Inspiration comes from external sources (166).
5. Sensuous self-enjoyment and pleasure, "relaxed openness to life" (166).

To achieve the goal of being true to self, the Rogerian therapist seeks to provide safety, warmth, and empathetic understanding (167). Rogers believes that a client first tends "to move away, hesitantly and fearfully, from a self that he is *not*" (167). Later he defines what he *is*, negatively at first (167). Meanwhile, there is a move away from "oughts" defined by other people (such as parents) (168) and from pleasing others (170). Being true to self also involves increased self-direction and autonomy, a "frighteningly responsible freedom" according to Rogers (170-171).

Rogers advocates both acceptance of self and acceptance of others (174), along with trust and valuing of self (175). All of this means that:

"The individual moves toward *being*, knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually *is*."



He moves away from being what he is not, from being a facade." (175)

This "being oneself" is supposed to facilitate change rather than to encourage a fixed, unchanging self (176). Rogers contrasts this authenticity with denial of one's true feelings and reactions (176). He denies that unleashing of such feelings will lead to uncontrollable evil (177).

Rogers believes that positive social goals are inherent in this "being true to self." He states, for example:

"We could openly advance both our selfish interests, and our sympathetic concern for others, and let these conflicting desires find the balance which is acceptable to us as a people." (180)

"We tend to value and respect the dignity and worth of each individual, yet when we are frightened, we move away from this direction." (179)

For the Christian, being "true to self" is an improper goal. Being true to *Christ* and to His gospel is the goal! Because He has given His life for our sins, we no longer live for ourselves but rather for Him, for His glory.

**"Existential living"** is another expression of the Rogerian goal. This means "to live fully in each moment," such that "the self and personality emerge *from* experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit preconceived self-structure" (188-189). There is an absence of rigidity and organization (189).

Biblically, this too is in error. Experiences are to be understood according to God's revelation and purposes. The believer is changed by God's gracious working in his life, using His Word and Spirit. He does not "emerge from experience."

**Interpersonal communication** is supposed to improve with Rogerian therapy:

"The whole task of psychotherapy is the task of dealing with a failure in communication." (330)

Explaining this task, Rogers blames efforts to evaluate others:

"The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person, or the other group." (330)

Rogers believes that this tendency to evaluate is strongest when strong emotions are involved (331). Another obstacle is the failure to enter into the other person's frame of reference (334).

James 1:19-20 exhorts us to be slow to speak and quick to hear, because man's anger doesn't bring about the righteousness of God. The Rogerian approach may *seem* similar in its emphasis on listening to others, but there is a failure to consider the impact of sin. For example, Rogers believes that empathetic understanding would lead to peaceful relations with the Communists (335). When we *do* respond to another person, after having carefully listened, that response must be in accordance with scriptural standards and exhortations, not a blind "unconditional acceptance" such as Rogers advocates.

**Creativity** is highly valued by Rogers. He believes it to be lacking in our modern world (348), yet very much needed:

"Unless man can make new and original adaptations to his environment as rapidly as his science can change the environment, our culture will perish." (348)

Here is his definition of the creative process:

"...the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other." (350)

Rogers relates creativity to his client-centered therapy, believing the mainspring of creativity to be "man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities" (351). However, this tendency to expand and develop "may become deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defenses" (351).

It is not surprising to learn that Rogers believes creativity is encouraged in a climate of "psychological safety," where the individual is accepted as a person of "unconditional worth" and where "external evaluation is absent" (357). However, Rogers believes that his "permissiveness" is "permission to be *free*, which also means that one is responsible" (359):

"It is this type of freedom responsibly to be oneself which fosters the development of a secure locus of evaluation within oneself, and hence tends to bring about the inner conditions of constructive creativity." (359)

In all his talk of "creativity," Rogers never once mentions the *Creator*. Man's creativity is derivative, given by God. His ability to create works of arts, to think through problems and creatively apply God's revelation in specific situations--such ability derives from God, **the** Creator. Rogers offers a counterfeit that derives solely from man--the *creation* instead of the *Creator*.

### **The Process of Psychotherapy: Feeling-Centered Therapy**

Rogers devotes a chapter to considering "the *process* by which personality change takes place" (126). He wonders whether research can actually address the "ongoing movement" of personality change, rather than what is true at a particular moment. Perhaps, he thinks, only *theory* can address this process (127).

Rogers tells us that quite frequently a feeling will simply "hit" a client when he's talking in therapy (129). Such a client will often seek the "precise word" to describe that feeling (130). Thus begins the "process" of client-centered -- perhaps better called *feeling-centered* -- therapy.

In considering further the process of this therapy, Rogers assumes certain conditions are present, such as the client experiencing himself "as being fully *received*" and understood by the therapist, just as he is (130-131).<sup>1</sup>

Initially, the client may come to therapy unwillingly and communicate only about external matters, rather than himself (132). This Rogers calls the "first stage." There is no desire to change and no recognition of problems (132). At this point, "there is much blockage of internal communication between self and experience" (133).

At the "second stage," personal experience is still viewed in remote terms, and feelings are not "owned" (134).

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<sup>1</sup> I can't help but think of the old hymn, "Just as I am...." But as that hymn continues, God's acceptance of me, "just as I am," is based on the shed blood of Christ.

Moving on to the "third stage," according to Rogers, necessarily involves being "received" by the therapist (135). A freer expression of experience and feelings occurs, but *past* feelings are described more than *present* feelings (135). There is still little acceptance of feelings (136).

At "stage four," feelings are experienced in the present, but there is distrust and fear, with little open acceptance of those feelings (137). Responsibility increases somewhat:

"There are feelings of self responsibility in problems, though such feelings vacillate." (138)

Feelings are finally "expressed freely in the present" at "stage five" (139). They are "very close to being fully experienced" (140). There is still fright, rather than pleasure, when feelings "bubble up" (140).

Rogers describes the sixth "stage" as one where feelings are no longer denied or feared, and where self is loved and cared for (146). Also, problems are no longer seen as either external or internal. Rather, "the client is living, subjectively, a phase of his problem" (150).

The final "stage" is the seventh. At this point, the therapist's role is longer so crucial:

"New feelings are experienced with immediacy and richness of detail, both in the therapeutic relationship and outside." (151)

Feelings are "owned," accepted, and the client has "a basic trust in his own process" (151). There is clear "internal communication" (154).

After all of this discussion, Rogers says that "perhaps there are several types of process by which personality changes," in addition to what he describes (155). Clearly, however, he favors an approach that centers on feelings. Every one of the "stages" is described in terms of feelings -- experiencing feelings, "owning" feelings, expressing feelings, accepting feelings. Rogers centers the process of change in *self*, specifically the *feelings* of that self.

The Bible centers change in the gracious work of God's Spirit, using His powerful Word, as well as resources such as

preaching, teaching, exhortation, and other ministries of mutual care in the body of Christ. Believers, being *in Christ*, are given exhortations to obey based on their radically new position in Him. The feeling focus of Rogers is absent from the scriptural view of how godly change takes place.

### **Implications for Education: "Student-Centered" Teaching**

The method of therapy devised by Carl Rogers has implications that reach into a number of areas. One significant area is education.

Rogers insists that it is not possible to *teach* another person anything that really matters. Rather, the most important learning, learning that influences behavior, is asserted to be *self-discovered* (276). Rogers calls the outcome of teaching "either unimportant or hurtful" (276).

Implications of his approach for education, according to Rogers, would include the elimination of teaching, examinations, credits, grades, and degrees (277). He does not consider the "accumulation of facts" to be "significant learning" (280). For "significant learning" he turns to psychotherapy as he conceives it (281). The Rogerian psychotherapist provides "unconditional positive regard" and empathetic understanding, which are supposed to create a climate where *self-discovery* will naturally occur. The "learning" pertains mostly to *feelings* rather than "facts" as he has previously conceived them (285).

The Rogerian "teacher" (using the term loosely!) is one who knows how to be the person that he is, who is aware of and accepts his own feelings, but doesn't impose them on others (287). Like the Rogerian therapist, this "teacher" provides "unconditional positive regard" to his students (287), allowing expression of feelings about all sort of matters, whether or not related to the school curriculum (288). Rogers believes this will facilitate creativity as well as "uniqueness...self-direction...and self-initiated learning" (292), rather than the accumulation of factual knowledge.

Just as Rogerian psychotherapy is client-centered, Rogerian education is student-centered. Both are *self-centered*. For believers, education is *God-centered* and definitely involves teaching from others that is in accordance with God's Word. Underlying Rogerian education is the erroneous assumption of man's inherent goodness and wisdom. It is just as dangerous in education as it is in counseling.

## Implications for Family Life

Rogers devotes a chapter to consideration of how clients change in their family living after client-centered therapy (314ff). One result is the expression of true feelings to family members (315). Such expression becomes "a deeply satisfying thing, where formerly it has nearly always seemed destructive and disastrous" (318). Relationships are "lived on the basis of the real feelings, rather than on the basis of a defensive pretense" (318). Rogers claims improvement in two-way communication (323-324) as well as willingness to allow other family members to be separate persons (325). He believes that such trusting of others begins with trust of *self* (325).

Good relations among believers begin with trust of *God*, never trust of *self*. Scripture gives exhortations about how family members are to relate to one another in love, and expression of feelings is not the highest priority. This doesn't mean that Christian families ignore emotions and never voice them. Rather, feelings are subordinate to principles of godly living based on love for God and one another.

## Implications for Interpersonal Relations

Rogers attempts to define:

"...a perceived underlying orderliness in all human relationships, an order which determines whether the relationship will make for the growth, enhancement, openness, and development of both individuals or whether it will make for inhibition of psychological growth, for defensiveness and blockage in both parties." (339)

Rogers fails to offer an explanation, however, of the origin of such "order" in relationships. Only God the Creator can provide such universal order. Yet Rogers denies God's authority.

"Congruence" is defined by Rogers as the "accurate matching of experiencing and awareness" (339). He believes that an individual "is not a sound judge of his own degree of congruence" (340):

"When there is an incongruence between experience and awareness, it is usually spoken of as defensiveness, or denial to awareness. When the incongruence is between

awareness and communication it is usually thought of as falseness or deceit." (341)

Rogers believes that clear communication is facilitated by congruence (342), and that the relationship is likely to move in a direction of good reciprocal communication (344).

Believers need to consider principles of *biblical* communication, principles that arise from God's authoritative commands rather than from some impersonal system of order or "law."

## Scientific Research

Rogers would like to establish a scientific basis for the success he claims for his therapeutic method. In view of its inherent subjectivity, however, he admits that:

"I have felt an increasing discomfort at the distance between the rigorous objectivity of myself as scientist and the almost mystical subjectivity of myself as therapist." (200)

But Rogers presses on, stating his hypothesis, or "faith" that:

"...my liking, my confidence, and my understanding of the other person's inner world, will lead to a significant process of becoming." (201)

Scientifically, Rogers says that he wants to *understand* what happens in therapy (205). However, he insists that no knowledge of *absolute truth* is possible, only high probability (206):

"Nor could we ever discover any underlying reality in regard to persons, relationships or the universe. We could only describe relationships between observable events." (206)

Rogers notes some of the questions that a scientist would ask. One is how we can know that a given account is actually *true* (209). Due to the subjective nature of Rogerian therapy, a variety of inward perceptions of truths would have to all be admitted as legitimate (210). The scientist would also question the assumption that certain elements of therapy *cannot* be predicted, that some behavior is *not* caused (210). At the same time, there is an assumption that a particular therapeutic climate does in fact cause certain types of personality changes (210). So, the scientist asks: "Why not at least *aim* toward uncovering the causes of *all* behavior?" (211). Rogers has conflicting goals

and claims. He wants to assert man's autonomy, yet he desires a scientific precision that would lend a high credibility to his methods. Noting the potential of psychotherapy (supposedly!) to effect substantial changes in a world of pressing social problems, Rogers indicates that "surely the course of action is to apply to psychotherapy the most rigorous canons of scientific method" (211).

One major concern is the potential for social control "of the many by the few" (213). This is indeed a concern! Psychotherapy already does exercise considerable control, imposing its values on people throughout our society. It *cannot* be neutral, free of all values. Rogerian therapy, though claiming to help the individual "be true to himself," has certain values inherent in its approach. Those values--autonomy, heightened self-worth, self-direction, rejection of "oughts"--conflict with Christianity.

Rogers admits that science is concerned with particular values:

"Science has its inception in a particular person who is pursuing aims, values, purposes, which have personal and subjective meaning for him." (216)

The scientific hypothesis results from a "creative forming" and is described by Rogers as "a statement of a tentative, personal, subjective faith" (217). Note the term *faith*! The scientific method is certainly not neutral:

"And even throughout the use of such rigorous and impersonal methods, the important choices are all made subjectively by the scientist. To which of a number of hypotheses shall I devote time?" (218)

Rogers asserts that scientific endeavors do not lead to any "body of scientific knowledge" that we can count on to be true:

"Actually there is no such body of knowledge. There are only tentative beliefs, existing subjectively, in a number of different persons. If these beliefs are not tentative, then what exists is dogma, not science." (219)

Such radical skepticism is a flat rejection of Christian theism, because it assumes that God cannot give us an infallible, authoritative revelation such as we find in creation (general revelation) and Scripture (special revelation). Some discoveries of knowledge about the creation are tentative and subject to



change. However, such knowledge rests on the certain foundation of what God *has* revealed in His Word.

Rogers believes that the results of scientific inquiry, tentative though they may be, can be utilized according to the personal choice of the scientist. Either way, scientific knowledge is presumed to have great power:

"What I will do with the knowledge gained through scientific method--whether I will use it to understand, enhance, enrich, or use it to control, manipulate and destroy--is a matter of subjective choice dependent upon the values which have personal meaning for me." (223)

Again, there is no neutrality!

Rogers cites attempts to research his "non-directive or client-centered" approach to therapy, which he describes as:

"...a deeply subjective existential experience in both client and therapist, full of complex subtleties, and involving many nuances of personal interaction" (226).

He rejects criteria such as "success" or "cure" because such terms are inherently indefinable, being *value* judgments (227). Instead he asks: "What are the concomitants of therapy?" (227). He wants to determine whether hypothetical changes actually do occur in therapy (228). Such changes include:

Experiencing of previous denied feelings;  
Self-concept becomes more congruent with the "ideal self";  
Behavior becomes more mature and socialized;  
Self-acceptance increases (228).

Rogers believes that research (based largely on *self*-evaluation) confirms that such results do occur during client-centered therapy. However, note the underlying assumption that such goals are *appropriate* and good.

As Christians, we should ask whether such *self*-evaluation is accurate. The heart of man is deceitful according to Jeremiah 17:9. Potential for self-deception is enormous! Only the Holy Spirit, using God's powerful Word (Hebrews 4:12), can properly discern the inner man and convict. Even if the desired goals are achieved--greater self-acceptance and self-love, for example--the believer has to question whether these are goals that honor God.

Rogers also believes, on the basis of research studies, that following therapy a client's perception of himself will more closely resemble the therapist's perception of him (238). Again, Christians must raise questions. Is another fallible man's perception necessarily accurate? (No!) Is it a *biblical* evaluation?

Rogerian research presumes that the counselor's role is "not to think *for* the client, or *about* the client, but *with* the client" (248). The question raised is thus:

"Is there a decrease in the degree to which his values and standards depend upon the judgments and expectations of others, and an increase in the extent to which his values and standards are based upon a reliance upon his own experience?" (248)

Rogers believes the answer is "yes." Even so, from a *biblical* perspective values and standards are derived from God the Creator and revealed in His infallible Word. Thus Rogerian therapy, in its promotion of *self* as the ultimate authority, works *against* change that is biblical and honoring to God.

## **Rogerian Therapy and the Behavioral Sciences**

In his quest for scientific status, Rogers briefly reviews the study of behavioral science, particularly as advocated by Skinner, to see how it might fit comfortably with his theories. He says that:

"Behavioral science...has made striking progress in discerning and discovering lawful relationships such that *if* certain conditions exist, *then* certain behaviors will predictably follow." (365)

Rogers believes that behavioral science has "a growing ability...to understand, predict, and control behavior" (365).

In the area of prediction, Rogers is convinced that a "competent clerical worker," or even a computer, could score tests and accurately predict behavior (368). He is also convinced of great potential for the control of human behavior:

"If we have the power or authority to establish the necessary conditions, the predicted behaviors will follow." (372)

Rogers sees his own type of therapy as one which results in constructive changes, while an opposite approach can cause the "disintegration" of a person:

"In short our knowledge of how personality and behavior may be changed can be used constructively or destructively, to build or to destroy persons." (376)

Rogers admits "deeply frightening aspects" to such control, a potential "nightmare of manipulation" (379). Nevertheless:

"Among behavioral scientists it seems to be largely taken for granted that the findings of such science will be used in the prediction and control of human behavior." (385)

Can human behavior really be studied scientifically, in view of man's ability to make decisions? One possible response is to answer this in the negative:

"We can say that man is always a free agent, in some sense that makes scientific study of his behavior impossible."  
(384-385)

Rogers articulates his rejection of the extreme view promoted by Skinner, where behavior is subject to strict prediction and control:

"To me this kind of world would destroy the human person as I have come to know him in the deepest moments of psychotherapy. In such moments I am in relationship with a person who is spontaneous, who is responsibly free, that is, aware of this freedom to choose who he will be, and aware also of the consequences of his choice. To believe, as Skinner holds, that all this is an illusion, and that spontaneity, freedom, responsibility, and choice have no real existence, would be impossible for me." (391)

It is interesting to note at this juncture that psychology is *not* a coherent discipline, but one in which many conflicting speculations exist side by side.

Rogers repeatedly emphasizes that "science takes off from a subjectively chosen set of values" (395). The set he chooses is one that "focuses on fluid elements of process, rather than static attributes" (395). For example, he values "man as a process of becoming; as a process of achieving worth and dignity through the development of his potentialities" (395). He hopes to determine

whether science is able to "predict and release an essentially 'unpredictable' freedom" (396). He cites research indicating that psychotherapy can be a subtle form of control and molding of individuals (396). However, in client-centered therapy:

"We have set the conditions which predict various classes of behaviors--self-directing behaviors, sensitivity to realities within and without, flexible adaptiveness--which are by their very nature *unpredictable* in their specifics. The conditions we have established predict behavior which is essentially 'free.'" (398)

Thus Rogers concludes that "we can choose to use the behavioral sciences in ways which will free, not control" (400). Also:

"Unless as individuals and groups we choose to relinquish our capacity of subjective choice, we will always remain free persons, not simply pawns of a self-created behavioral science." (401)

This is all an odd combination of autonomy and determinism. Rogers seems to desire both a radical individual freedom and a radical control that will create such freedom. Christians have something far superior in God's truth. It is God who is sovereign, who controls whatever comes to pass. It is God who creates, God who commands, God who holds the future in His hand. Christians have a glorious freedom--from sin's power and eternal consequences. That freedom far surpasses the illusion of control created by Rogerian therapy.

Behavioral research, whether from Skinner's or Rogers' perspective, fails to include God's power or His work in the believer's heart and life. It fails to give any account of His existence, although it must presuppose Him in order to assume that any sort of *law* or *order* in fact exists. Rogers' religious scheme is one that rejects the God of Scripture, yet his search for "law and order" in human behavior cannot possibly exclude Him.

### **Rogers' Emerging Spiritual Interests**

In his later years, Rogers developed a growing interest in spiritual matters, but nothing that could be mistaken as a turn toward the Christian faith. It is more like an entrance into the world of the occult. One of his last writings, *A Way of Being*, documents Rogers' journey into this spiritual twilight zone. In Rogers' own words about his later years:

"During these years I have been, I think, more open to new ideas. The ones of most importance to me have to do with inner space--the realm of the psychological powers and the psychic capabilities of the human person. In my estimation, this area constitutes the new frontier of knowledge, the cutting edge of discovery." (82-83, *A Way of Being*)

But the road doesn't end there:

"I am open to even more mysterious phenomena--precognition, thought transference, clairvoyance, human auras, Kirlian photography, even out-of-the-body experiences. These phenomena may not fit with known scientific laws, but perhaps we are on the verge of discovering new types of lawful order. I feel I am learning a great deal in a new area, and I find the experience enjoyable and exciting." (83, *A Way of Being*)

The journey becomes increasingly ominous as we turn the pages. An account is given of the death of Rogers' wife, Helen. She had been "a great skeptic about psychic phenomena and immortality," yet shortly before her death attended a seance with her husband in which they supposedly spoke with her deceased sister thanks to the services of a medium (90, *A Way of Being*). In her closing days:

"Helen had visions of an inspiring white light which came close, lifted her from the bed, and then deposited her back on the bed." (90, *A Way of Being*)

She also, however, saw "evil figures and the devil by her hospital bed," which were quickly dismissed, at a friend's suggestion, as "creations of her own mind" (90, *A Way of Being*). She told the devil "she was not going with him," and "he never reappeared" (90, *A Way of Being*). After Helen's death, Rogers consulted the medium yet again and claims to have contacted his recently departed wife, learning about her experience of "the white light and spirits coming for her" (91, *A Way of Being*).

Knowing the biblical prohibitions against consulting mediums, and the ability of demonic spirit beings, Satan included, to masquerade as "angels of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), need we say much more? Clearly, Rogers entered a deadly spiritual path, the one that leads to destruction.

## **Conclusions**

Rogers speaks of "becoming a person," as if human beings were something *other* than real "persons" apart from his particular type

of therapy. As believers, our concern is far greater. Christ commanded us to go into all the world and make disciples--Christians. When we do, we must regard God's Word, not man's feeling or experience, as authoritative and infallible. We must recognize man as a sinner in need of redemption, not an inherently good creature waiting for someone to merely uncover his goodness and potential. The account of Rogers' "spiritual transformation" puts the icing on the cake!

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