

THROUGH THE BIBLICAL LOOKING GLASS A LOOK AT DR. WILLIAM GLASSER

In the 1960's, Dr. William Glasser reacted against the current Freudian theories with his book, *Reality Therapy*. Some thirty years later, he has repackaged similar theories under the title *Choice Therapy*. Weary of pop psychology, where everyone is a victim of someone else's sins, Christians might initially welcome a therapy that touts personal responsibility. However, a closer look reveals Glasser's lack of biblical standards in defining "responsibility," and his emphasis on unfulfilled needs as man's fundamental problem. Although Glasser parts company with Freud, he fails to give biblical direction to those he counsels.

Freudian failures. Glasser rejects the term "mental illness" and refuses to focus counseling on journeys into either the past or the "unconscious." He insists that counseling revolve around a person's present behavior and relationships. Responsible behavior is the goal he presents to readers.

We can agree that godly living does not necessitate digging up memories of the past or searching the Freudian "unconscious." However, responsibility must be rooted in a biblical view of human nature coupled with biblical standards of conduct. Man is not responsible in a vacuum, but rather is responsible before God. When God is excluded from the counseling room, responsibility is emptied of any meaningful content.

The nature of man. Glasser views man as the product of evolution, not the image of God. He proposes certain basic, "genetically programmed" needs that must be met, including relationships, love, survival, freedom, power, and fun. He simultaneously exalts an extreme view of man's free will and a deterministic, fixed-at-birth manner of relating to others. Human misery, he asserts, is a "choice," an attempt to be in control of circumstances and to fulfill one's basic needs.

Man's basic problems. Glasser's books attribute man's "psychiatric" problems to two fundamental sources. One is the failure to satisfy basic needs, particularly in human relationships. The other is "external control psychology."

Biblically, man's fundamental need is redemption from sin and reconciliation to his Creator. Glasser's emphasis on relationships excludes the most important relationship of all: God and man. While Glasser holds up essential needs for power, freedom, and such, he never addresses real guilt for sin, nor does he offer any solution. Instead, he encourages people to "feel worthwhile" to self and others. Living to serve Christ, in a manner worthy of one's calling in Him (Ephesians 4:1), is not a part of Glasser's system.

"External control" is not a biblically defined human problem. God is the ultimate lawgiver, and He has established authority structures in the home, church, and state. Sometimes authority is sinfully misused to hurt others. However, the real problem is man's rebellion against "external control," not the mere existence of such control. Glasser claims to recognize responsibility and morality in his counseling, yet fails to acknowledge God's commandments and authority.

The counselor. Unlike the detached impersonal psychoanalyst, Glasser advocates establishing a real, personal involvement between counselor and counselee. While this is apparently a refreshing improvement, the goals and content of Glasser's therapy fail to meet biblical standards. As believers, we are drawn together by our common salvation, exhorting and admonishing one another according to the riches of Scripture. We have no need for modern psychology to define the type of relationship in which good counsel can be given and received. We look to *the* Counselor as brothers and sisters in Christ, equal at the foot of the cross.

By what standard? Glasser takes issue with Freud's failure to consider morality in counseling, noting that psychoanalysis has led to greater delinquency and defiance of authority. He recognizes that counseling is not a morally neutral endeavor. However, he has no concept of the universal moral standards established by God. His best attempt to articulate a universal standard is to say that behavior is "right or moral" if a person gives and receives love, and "feels worthwhile" to himself and others. Meanwhile, he claims that responsible people may have widely different values in the fulfillment of their basic needs. Glasser has no anchor for morality, because he excludes God and His Word.

Conclusion. Glasser claims to give hope and compassion to those he counsels by calling them to make responsible choices. As believers, our real hope is in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us about our sin and God's plan of redemption. We are responsible before God but redeemed by Christ from the penalty and power of sin. Glasser can only tell us about our sin, in veiled terminology, and the only "redemption" he offers is a self-determined "choice therapy" focused on meeting "genetically programmed" needs. His system is a sorry substitute for biblically responsible living.