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## **Christianity vs. Modern Psychology**

### *Centered Ministry or Problem Centered Counseling?*

Modern psychology often contradicts the basic teachings of Jesus Christ. This study looks at some of the differences.

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# On Personal Suffering

## Modern Psychology

Removing personal suffering is the goal of Modern psychology. There are different methods, one method tries to make you feel better by improving your self-esteem. Another method may try to remove guilt. Albert Ellis, a pioneer of cognitive-behavioral therapy and one of the most influential psychotherapists in history, believed that religion contributed to psychological distress. He also believed that God's command forbidding fornication harmed emotional health. Psychologists who base their therapy on Albert Ellis theories, are mistaken in believing that much of our suffering comes from these commandments, rather than our breaking them.

Everything in Modern Psychology is about feeling good. Often, when psychotherapy fails to help the patient, he is medicated. While medication may deaden the pain and thus make you feel better, medication is [addictive](#), does not deal with and often increases the underlying problems.

## Christian doctrine

God meant our suffering to bring us closer to Christ.

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the **fellowship of his sufferings**, being made conformable unto his death; - Philippians 3:10*

Jesus himself also suffered, to the point that Isaiah called him a man of sorrows. Yet it was for a purpose.

*Though [Jesus] were a Son, yet learned he **obedience [submission] by the things which he suffered**; And being made perfect [complete], he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. - Hebrews 5:8-9*

Suffering will build character in our lives if we let it.

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have **suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.** - 1 Peter 5:10*

Often, our suffering is caused by disobedience to God's commandments. Rather than teaching that His commandments cause the neurosis, the disciples of Jesus are empowered to keep His commands and thus alleviate the pain. A Christian knows that our suffering is neither inevitable nor will it last forever.

Many having tried it, are finding out that living for pleasure is not enough. These people are not suffering a chemical imbalance, nor is medication the solution. For those who find him, serving God, gives meaning to what was otherwise an empty life.

Our Bible study, [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#), takes a deeper look into God's purpose and our hope, for those who are interested.

*Blessed are they that **mourn**: for they shall be comforted. - Matthew 5:4*

# Self Love

## Modern Psychology

Modern psychology teaches that we should love ourselves. Christians are often asked the question, "How can we love others as ourselves, if we do not love ourselves first?" While I do not speak for all psychotherapists, many believe that getting a person to see the good things about themselves, or to like themselves better, would cure many self-destructive behaviors.

## Christian doctrine

The fact is that Jesus teaches us quite differently, in the Gospel of Matthew we read:

*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. - Matthew 16:24-25*

Paul actually condemned the **love yourself mentality**, he could not have said it any clearer:

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. **For men shall be lovers of their own selves**, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, - 2nd Timothy 3:1-2*

What Christians have believed for a long time, modern science is now starting to concur. A recent study by the University of British Columbia and Harvard University asked Canadian students to rate their happiness. Then at random, they gave each student an envelope containing from five to twenty dollars. The researchers instructed half of the students to spend this money on themselves, the other half were to buy a gift for someone else.

That evening the students were called together again and asked to rate their happiness. According to the researchers, the amount of money they spent had no impact on their happiness; however, those assigned to buy something for another person reported greater happiness than those who purchased things for themselves. (Schmid, 2008)

Loving yourself, does not buy the happiness that loving others does. Nor did they have to learn how to love themselves first.

# High Self Esteem

## Modern Psychology

Most psychologists, even Christian ones, teach that self-esteem is essential to a healthy mind.

Fortunately not all psychologists believe this, some recent studies suggest that self-esteem training may be harmful. It leads many students to overestimate their abilities. Our jails are full of people with high self-esteem. One study even shows that people with high self-esteem are more likely to be violent or racist.

Scientific American reported that teenagers "*with high self-esteem are less inhibited, more willing to disregard risks and more prone to engage in sex.*" (By Roy F. Baumeister, 2004) In spite of this, many psychologists still teach that high self-esteem is essential to mental health.

### **Christian doctrine**

Teaching that we need high self-esteem is counterproductive at best. The headlines of one news article went something like this: "*Students in the US may have some of the lowest grades in the industrialized world, but they do feel good about themselves.*"

The Gospels teach us the opposite of high self-esteem, humility, Jesus said:

*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants:** we have done that which was our duty to do. - Luke 17:10*

In the Gospel of Matthew, the centurion answered Jesus:

*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. - Matthew 8:8b*

Rather than rebuking the centurion on his low self-esteem, Jesus commended him on his faith. John the Baptist, in another example of faith, said:

*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. - Matthew 3:11a*

Paul also urged in his letters:

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. - Philippians 2:3*

Speaking of himself, Paul said:

*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?  
- Romans 7:24*

If Jesus died a horrible death to pay for our sins, we have no reason to be proud. When you become a disciple of Jesus, you will learn how to take you mind off yourself.

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6*

# Venting Your Anger

## Modern Psychology

Dr. Robert Epstein, the former editor-in-chief of Psychology Today, speaking against venting anger, says,

The idea behind catharsis is that current psychological pain is the result of pent-up energy left over from unresolved trauma. Like a fluid trapped under high pressure, energy is vented when someone relives an old experience while expressing intense emotion. In the 1960s, when extreme self-expression was all the rage, therapies in which people screamed (primal-scream therapy) or were goaded into states of near-panic (implosive therapy) became mainstream. Most people still believe that anger is some sort of force that can be "bottled up," and that it's healthy to "vent" or "let go." (PAL V13N4, 2005)

However, many still believe that anger is some sort of force that you can bottle up. Paul Meier, who has his own clinic and has written many self help books, taught that repressed anger causes depression and therefore he recommended ventilating anger, verbally expressing anger, and talking about anger.

## Christian doctrine

While many teach that anger can be bottled up, and therefore it is healthy to vent or let go, research has demonstrated just the opposite. When you express anger it increases; when children, for instance, are encouraged to act out their anger, they become more aggressive and belligerent in their subsequent behavior. While people may initially feel relieved to "get it all out", their anger does not go away. It actually (like an addiction) continues to grow and cause further problems. As researcher Dr. Carol Tavris declares in her article "Anger Diffused":

"The psychological rationale for ventilating anger does not stand up under experimental scrutiny. The weight of the evidence indicates precisely the opposite: **Expressing anger makes you angrier**, solidifies an angry attitude, and establishes a hostile habit."(Tavris)

The understanding that venting anger causes more anger makes sense as all sin is addictive. The longer you practice any sin, the harder it will be to stop. However, with God's help, he expects us to control our anger.

*He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. - Proverbs 14:29*

AND

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: - Ephesians 4:31*

AND

*But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. - Colossians 3:8*

## Past Problems

### Modern Psychology

Since its early days psychotherapy, especially psychoanalysis, has centered on dealing with past problems. Somewhere in the past is the key that will unlock the ... well, I do not know, but for \$85 and one hour with a psychologist, you can find out.

### Christian doctrine

To dredge up the past on a weekly basis, especially if you are not doing it for the purpose of trying to forgive, is unprofitable. The Gospel teaches that there comes a time to forget the past, especially the problems. Quoting the apostle Paul:

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but **this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.***  
- *Philippians 3:13-14*

AND

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things.*** - *Philippians 4:8*

We must forgive others for past wrongs and then move on. If someone needs to forgive you (Matt 5-23), first reconcile, and then move on. There is no profit in revisiting past wrongs.

## Recovered Memories

### Psychology

This psychotherapy launched a thousand lawsuits. Numerous individuals, some I have known personally, have falsely remembered and relived horrendous experiences that never happened. However, these memories take a terrible toll on the patient, as they keep reaching into the past for answers.

The source of many recovered memories are the therapist's leading questions. When combined with drugs, hypnosis and/or suggestive dream interpretation, therapists can easily produce false memories that seem quite real to their patients. Even though this therapy is dangerous, has been debunked and resulted in many lawsuits, many counselors are still practicing it.

### The Christian doctrine

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we must unconditionally forgive all the real and imagined offences against us. There is not a single suggestion in the New Testament that we should go back to our childhood for healing. Rather, remember what Paul said:

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*  
- Philippians 3:13-14

## Our Source of Healing

### Modern Psychology

Psychologists call sin by other words such as 'addiction' or 'disease'. This often places the individuals responsibility for self control on someone or something else. Modern psychology offers about 400 different and ever changing types of psychotherapy, many of which are contradictory one to another. After all, what is true for you may not be true for me. While a few therapies, like the 12 step program, may appeal to a higher power, most that do will let you appeal to any God or force in your life as a source for healing.

If psychotherapy does not work, the doctor may try medication. While drugs are not a [real cure](#), they do help the patient control his outward behavior.

### Christian doctrine

Jesus Christ called our *addictions* and *mental diseases* sin. All sin is addictive. Jesus said it similarly,

*Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.** And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever. **If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.** - John 8:34-36*

Unfortunately many want healing for their mental illnesses but because they enjoy their sin, they will not turn to the cure:

*For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, **and I should heal them.** - Matthew 13:15*

Christians should be very careful before they recommend medication, for any mental disorder. Not only do they have [dangerous side effects](#) (even the medication for treating [ADHD has dangerous side effects](#)), we are removing the responsibility to change behavior and dulling the senses for the need to change.

Our study, [Healing for Depression](#) shows, scientifically, how obedience to the gospel of Jesus can heal mental disorders. You can personally experience a sound mind (the power to think right), in your own life. The millions who have recovered from mental disorders, prove this power is real.

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. - 2nd Timothy 1:7*

## **There are Hundreds of Different Psychotherapies**

Modern Psychology is not scientific; [Yahoo News](#) shared what many might think was abuse of a patient. However, the psychologist claimed the therapy was within ethical guidelines, I suppose he also thought it was also therapeutic, was it?

### **Psychology's 12-step program**

For an example of variations and integration, search [Google](#) for 12 step programs. You will find hundreds of them; many of these therapies plainly contradict each other. Actually, there are hundreds of different psychotherapies of all kinds. Some are simply ineffective, others are dangerous. With integrationists, as well as with other psychologists, *truth* can be contradictory and is changeable. New *truth* replaces old *truth* as new *truth* is theorized, conceived or discovered. Are you willing to depend upon a *truth* that is changeable?

### **Christ's 12-step program for healing depression**

*I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. - 1 John 2:21*

Christians have preached the same gospel for nearly 2000 years. The truth that never changes has helped countless people become healed of alcoholism, drug addiction, uncontrollable anger and many other mental illnesses.

Here is a 12 step program for depression, that is based on Christian principles:.

**Step 1.** Go out and find someone you can help; minister to them freely and sacrificially.

**Steps 2-12** Repeat step one.

If this 12-step program does not help you with your depression, go through the program again.

## **The Center of Our Focus**

### **Modern Psychology**

When you go to a counselor week after week, what do you talk about? Since none of the founders of modern psychology were Christian, you probably did not talk much or talk positively about Christianity.

*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. - Romans 8:7*

It is unfortunate that today many Christian leaders have tried to integrate this atheistic philosophy into their gospel, and that the church has become a major referral service to psychology.

### **Christian doctrine**

When you become a disciple of Jesus, what do you talk about?

*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. - 2nd Corinthians 5:15*

AND

*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. - Mark 12:30*

To be always thinking on your dysfunction or on an overwhelming problem would have to be depressing, and at the least cause some sort of neurosis. To focus on God and His will, replaces depression with purpose.

*Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. - Malachi 3:16-17*

## **One-Errorisms of Problem-Centered Counseling**

There are Christian counselors who have rejected many of the tenants of modern psychology. However, there are still some major problems with *problem-centered counseling*.

Using the number one, I will describe six errors of *problem-centered counseling*, I call them the one-errorisms. If problem-centered counseling did not have any other problems, these six alone would make it questionable for Christian use.

### **One-hour**

The one-hour restriction in a counseling session is for the counselor, not the patient. Supposing the counselor's patient is having a crisis and needs him while he is in the middle of counseling another patient? What if the patient is desperate and needs more time when it is three minutes before the next patient's appointment?

### **One-patient after another**

It is not possible to have an intimate caring relationship with someone when you are seeing one patient after another, day after day, week after week, month after month. These relationships are always superficial, and seldom extend outside the counseling room.

### **One-day a week**

Is this enough for someone in deep depression? Is the once a week schedule for the patient, or for the counselor? Do you think the counselor will be glad if his patient showed up at his house in the evening or on the weekend? This, like the structuring *One patient after another*, is because counseling is a business before it is a ministry.

### **One-week after another**

This sets a pattern for long-term care. In time, this can develop into a dependency on the counselor instead of on the Lord. Compare this to a relationship of mutual care and encouragement by believers as they are growing together in Christ.

### **One-fixed price**

Most counselors charge the same amount per hour no matter what the particular illness is. However, nowhere in Scripture do we see the saints charging money to help the hurting. Nor did Jesus authorize charging fixed rates for delivering people from sin (the counselor may call it addiction, illness or some other name).

One may argue that you pay a pastor; why not pay a counselor? This will become a problem when the pastor starts charging a fee in order to attend his church.

### **One-up one-down**

This is the counselor-patient relationship. The counselor looks down on the patient because of all his knowledge and training, while the patient looks up to the counselor in complete submission.

*Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. - Matthew 23:10 -12*

AND

*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. - James 3:1-2*

As Christians, we are *the patient* and Jesus alone is the *wonderful Counselor*. It is wrong to esteem men too highly: when we do, their failings cause others to stumble.

*How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only - John 5:44*

How do you know that your counselor is not suffering from depression, substance abuse or some other criminal or self-destructive behavior? If you do not believe this is a problem check out [www.psychsearch.net](http://www.psychsearch.net).

## **The Bible's Sufficiency**

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. - Psalms 119:11*

AND

*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. - Hebrews 13:9*

Paul shared the following admonitions in his letters to Timothy:

*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, - 1st Timothy 6:3-4*

AND

*And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. - 2nd Timothy 3:15-17*

For nearly two thousand years, the Gospel of Jesus has delivered people from *addictions* and *illnesses*. He has given them sound minds. He has delivered countless believers, like myself, from depression. Finally, even in our trials He has given meaning and purpose.

#### **A One Question Test:**

You have a young women suffering from postpartum depression in your church. You can either

Recommend that she go see a counselor. Assure her that after a few therapy sessions she will feel better.

Send some of the ladies in the church over to go visit her (or go yourself). Bring some prepared meals over. Make pleasure out of tidying up the place. In some cases, you can take her kids out to the park or run errands for her. On the other hand, maybe just visit, but do not judge her for being tired and depressed (as Job's comforters did).

In order to see how you did on the test. Which of these options you would want done for you?

Written by [Jeff Barnes](#)

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## Beth-Haran Ministries

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