

TOXIC TEACHINGS

RECOVERY. . .OR REDEMPTION?

A Critique of *Toxic Faith*, by Steve Arterburn and Jack Felton

INTRODUCTION	Page 1
WHAT IS "TOXIC FAITH?"	Page 3
THE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE	Page 5
"ADDICTION" - CLARIFICATION OR CONFUSION	Page 10
CHANGES IN THE HEART	Page 14
TO PLEASE GOD, TO FEAR GOD	Page 20
ME, MYSELF, AND I - SELF, SELF, SELF	Page 24
WHATEVER BECAME OF REPENTANCE?	Page 26
TOXIC FOUNDATIONS	Page 28
SUPPORT GROUPS - DISCIPLESHIP OR DISASTER?	Page 31
THE FALSE PRACTICE OF RELIGION - A BIBLICAL VIEW	Page 34

TOXIC TEACHINGS RECOVERY...OR REDEMPTION?

In reviewing this book, one cannot help but acknowledge the sincere faith of its authors in the Lord Jesus Christ, and their desire to help those who are struggling with life. They do identify some very real problems in both religious belief and behavior. Some of their comments are very biblical and point us to a proper understanding of the Christian faith and how we are to be rightly related to God. However, there are serious theological flaws in the standards that are used to locate causes and propose solutions. There are contradictions in their writing, particularly noticeable when we consider their view of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Proper discernment is a tremendous challenge here, because there are truths and errors thoroughly entangled together. One must almost pick the book apart sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, to sort it all out correctly. That is a difficult and time-consuming process. When biblical truth and psychological error stand side by side as they do in this book, it is as if one were sifting through a large bowl of white and brown rice, separating it grain by grain into two piles. It can easily be confusing, and yet, we are called to be like the Bereans (Acts 17), who studied Scripture daily to test the teachings of the Apostle Paul.

One of the major weaknesses that appears early in the book is the lumping together of misunderstandings of the Bible with various non-Christian cults. Jesus Christ is *THE* way, *THE* truth, and *THE* life, and He is *THE* only way to the Father. False religions that proclaim other gods (idols) are of course going to be "toxic," because they lead the soul to eternal destruction. The authors are correct in pointing out the destructive beliefs and practices of these false faiths, but they fail to point out the real depth of the problem. The issue is not merely switching from a "toxic" to a "healthy" practice of one's religion, but exchanging lies for the truth of God's Word. The consequences go beyond living a "healthy" or "dysfunctional" life on this earth; the consequences are eternal in significance--eternal life with God, or eternity separated from Him. The authors note incidents involving Buddhism, Hare Krishnas, Christian Science, New Age teachings--right alongside misuses and misunderstandings of the Bible, i.e., doctrinal errors. There are even two striking examples of Satanism that deserve special mention. In the first chapter, there is the case of a teen-age boy who worshipped the devil and was "cured" by the inpatient psychiatric treatment program. Near the end, in discussing their work with families, they note a teen-age girl involved in Satanism whose "treatment helped her see why she needed something so destructive and helped her find more positive ways to obtain the same things." There is not so much as one word as to whether either of these young people received Christ as Lord. Instead, psychiatric treatment is posed as the "cure" to what the authors

consider religious "addiction." Satan is undoubtedly pleased, as he does not particularly care whether he traps souls by direct worship or more subtle deception. This mixture of cults with doctrinal errors is unfortunate, or to use their own term, "toxic." Christianity is not one religion among many valid choices, but the only way to God and to His truth. The categories are totally incompatible.

The categorical confusion noted above is made possible by the psychological perspective of the authors. Even when rightly pointing out examples of Christians who have misunderstood the teachings of their faith, the authors point us to a psychological understanding of the causes, a psychological diagnosis, and a psychological solution. The problems they describe, however, are **spiritual** in nature. What they term "addiction" is rooted in the sinful heart of man. While they direct us to a "professional" psychological treatment and therapy, along with the increasingly popular twelve-step theology, the real solution to every "toxic faith" belief or characteristic can be found in the pure wisdom of God's Word. It is unfortunate and confusing that the problems of misguided Christians are mixed with the more serious spiritual errors of the cults. It is even more unfortunate that both groups are encouraged to call a psychological treatment program offering expensive therapy and treatment for their "affliction," rather than calling out to the Lord and seeking the truth and salvation that He offers free of charge. Some of the most desperate do not have the finances, the insurance, or the time away from work and family responsibilities to enter the authors' inpatient program, which is the primary avenue of "hope" advanced by this book. It is my prayer that the brokenhearted, and those deceived by false religions, will embrace the words of Isaiah:

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David." Isaiah 55:1-3

WHAT IS A "TOXIC" FAITH?

We must first understand our authors' definitions before we pose biblical questions and critique their writing. They tell us that "faith becomes toxic when individuals use God or religion for profit, power, pleasure, and/or prestige." Notice the ungodly motives in this sentence; we will discuss the biblical concept of heart and the importance of examining it before God in a later section. We are further informed that "faith is slowly poisoned as lies and false beliefs are integrated into a person's beliefs about

God," and that "within us all are poisonous beliefs that need to be neutralized." We do indeed harbor false beliefs in our hearts: "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised--amen" (Romans 1:25). However, we must begin to ask some searching questions, such as: Is this condition an "affliction" or "disease," or are we describing the sinful condition of the heart of man? Do "poisonous" beliefs need to be "neutralized," or do we need to repent before a holy God and diligently study His Word?

The authors spend many pages describing the belief system of a "toxic faith," the stages of "religious addiction," the characteristics of a "toxic faith system," the roles and rules of such a system, and finally their proposed treatment program along with the characteristics of a "healthy faith." Following is a summary description of what the authors claim is "toxic" faith:

The person is controlled by the practice of religion rather than a relationship with God. There is "compulsive" religious activity, "addiction" to a religious "high," and a frenzy of religious activity designed to achieve "religious catharsis." Authors claim that there is underlying hurt and depression that must be released (a highly questionable, Freudian, unbiblical theory).

There is a perfectionism in the religious activity, designed to earn God's favor and entrance into heaven, as well as to alleviate a "psychologized" *FEELING* of guilt. This characteristic is illustrated by reference to the practice of Buddhism; note again the mixing of incompatible categories.

The individual displays a laziness, expecting God to wipe out hurts and consequences; there is an avoidance of reality and responsibility.

"Toxic" faith serves self rather than God. Giving is motivated by the desire to receive benefits. There is an obsession with self and an exclusion of family and friends in the pursuit of religion.

There is an extreme intolerance for the beliefs of others. Meanwhile, the person eagerly seeks new recruits to the "toxic faith system."

The leader of a "toxic faith system" is abusive, manipulative, and controlling. The new recruit experiences an "intoxication of belonging" and often an "addictive" first experience which may include special individual attention, group warmth, and absence of pressure to join or give money. (Note how these characteristics, particularly in the extreme, are more descriptive of cults than legitimate Christian churches. Note also that some of these characteristics could be perfectly innocent.)

The "addicted" person becomes willing to lie, cheat, steal, or even kill for their "faith," eventually "hitting bottom" and either changing, experiencing a mental/emotional breakdown, or committing suicide. Meanwhile, the person vigorously defends his beliefs, which are more sacred than God, supported by others in the system, and reinforced by "denial." The person's view of God is distorted and inaccurate. (Again, note how descriptive this is of cult experiences as opposed to a genuine conversion to faith in Christ.)

All of this raises questions that we are challenged to answer in terms of biblical truth. How do emotions relate to our relationship with God and our practice of faith? What does the Bible tell us about correctly handling our negative emotions? What part do motives play in our practice of faith? Is there a proper way to please God, or is His love so unconditional that we need have no fear of Him? How do we define guilt? Is it determined by feelings, or some objective standard? What is the proper view of self? How do we relate to the beliefs of others which are not in agreement with our own faith? How does the individual Christian relate to the church body? Should a Christian join a support group either in addition to, or instead of a church fellowship? Are twelve-step groups compatible with Christianity? Where does the biblical concept of repentance fit into all of this talk of "toxic" faith? Is "addiction" a valid term for cult practices, or for the improper practice and understanding of the Christian faith? What are the real foundations of a "toxic" faith? Do childhood experiences really determine a person's adult view of God? Finally, what does the Bible have to say about the false practice of religion? These and similar questions will be addressed throughout this critique. First, however, we must consider the sufficiency and authority of Scripture as the basic standard for our evaluations.

THE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

It is my firm conviction that the Word of God is a fully adequate basis for the counseling of persons who struggle with problems of living (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:3, 4), and that we dare not add to His Word (Proverbs 30:5, 6) or integrate Scripture with the so-called wisdom of unbelievers (Psalm 1:1; Isaiah 30:1-5 and 31:1-3). Both the Bible and the psychological opinions of men address certain fundamental questions: Who is man; what is his basic nature? What is man's problem? How can he be changed? How can he be rightly related to his fellow human beings and to God? Because both systems address the *SAME* questions, there is either a redundancy (if the answers are the same), or there is competition. Since the Bible is the Word of *GOD* revealed to man, differing answers must mean that man's psychological "wisdom" is in error. I have written a longer essay on this matter, and several authors have written entire books on the issue (Martin and Deidre

Bobgan; Jay Adams; William Kilpatrick).

It is quite interesting to note, first, how these authors express a high view of Scripture in a couple of places:

"To possess pure faith, a person must come to believe in a source of knowledge, a point of reference held up as an authority. That authority for me and millions of others is the Bible. Men and women distort what is there; they add to it, subtract from it, and make it say something it never intended. In its untainted form, it is the means by which faith in God is developed. *ALL OF THE TRUTH NEEDED IS WITHIN THE BIBLE'S COVERS*. It is the Word of God. Faith in God cannot be developed without knowing God's Word. It may seem easier to make up our beliefs as we go, but relying on the source of faith that has been used for thousands of years has never failed. To detoxify the mind and purify faith, God's Word is the cleansing agent." (Excerpt from page 97--emphasis added.)

In defining the "characteristics of a healthy faith," the authors first correctly point out that faith must be focused on God, and that "the Bible is the Word of God and can be trusted to reveal to us who God is. Through studying it, we can grow in knowledge of God and in faith."

These statements, standing alone, spell out a proper view of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Unfortunately, most of the rest of the book refutes these statements and reveals that the authors have more faith in psychotherapy than in God's power, and in man's psychological opinions than in God's revealed Word. Their position is most clearly revealed when they list "biblical exclusivity" as one of the "twenty-one toxic beliefs of a toxic faith." They tell us that "we must figure out some things for ourselves; when we do, we should base our figuring on the foundations of Scripture." It is true that some problems of living must be solved by deduction from the basic truths of Scripture; not every *specific* possible problem is outlined in minute detail. However, these authors use a common argument which is based on faulty reasoning; they claim, correctly, that the Bible fails to inform us about how to perform brain surgery, how to operate a computer, how to determine what music is good or bad, and whether or not to smoke cocaine. The Bible never claims to be a manual on brain surgery, computer operations, or music selection. (We could deduce, from passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, that we ought not to smoke cocaine.) It does, however, claim to give us "*everything we need for life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3, 4). While it may be harmless to learn computer operation from an atheist, it is certain to be disastrous to seek counsel for life and godliness from that same unbeliever!

The authors are highly critical of those who would seek to literally apply the words from their own passages as quoted earlier. In commenting on one case of "toxic faith," they claim

that "his pastor had enabled Rick's toxic faith by repeatedly negating the need for psychological or medical treatment" (emphasis added). There is no attempt to respect the view that spiritual problems can be handled through proper understanding and application of Scripture, because such difficulties are not "psychological" or "medical" in nature. They claim that many ministers "feel threatened" and therefore seek to keep their parishioners out of psychological treatment. (It's too bad that more of them don't do exactly that!) They fail to recognize that the problem is often exactly the opposite. Many pastors today are all too eager to refer those with "deep" problems to the psychological "expert," or to imitate the ungodly counseling methods developed by atheists (Freud, Rogers, Skinner, and others) as an alternative to sanctification in the body of Christ. It may well be that it is those with a vested interest in the practice of psychology who are "feeling threatened" by pastors who rightly seek to protect their flock from wolves in sheep's clothing. Pastors must be concerned by those who would encroach in their God-given territory, which includes giving godly counsel to those under their care. They must give an account to God for those souls (Hebrews 13:17)! The authors further reveal their faith in psychotherapy, which exceeds their faith in the power of God and His Word, when they say that "sometimes a relationship with God needs a cleansing of the past that will not occur without professional help. Those who are most against this type of help are often the ones who are in need of it most." There is no room in this psychological system for even a brotherly respect toward those who sincerely wish to seek the Lord's power and the pure wisdom of His Word. (For an excellent discussion of the counseling responsibilities of pastors, refer to *Essays on Counseling*, by Jay Adams.)

These authors reveal a defensiveness in their statements, a desire to protect psychology from those critics who take a high view of the sufficiency of Scripture. However, they tell us that "those in a healthy system refrain from defining the truth for others and welcome the chance to share what they believe the truth for them may be." The authors have defined the truth for others throughout this book, a "truth" founded on psychological opinions. This particular quote is suspicious in that it fails to recognize that God's truth is absolute, eternal, and unchanging. Truth is not individually defined according to one's whim. While we must show gentleness and respect in correcting others, that does not alter the eternal nature of what God has defined as His truth.

Toward the end of the book, the authors show us their view of "treatment and recovery" for those "afflicted" with "toxic faith." One of their recommendations is that the individual begin to work with "new information." Instead of directing us to God's wisdom, and to sources that would help us properly apply it, they recommend books on "recovery, codependency, counseling, and addiction." Although they state that such materials should be in accordance with biblical principles, many (or almost all!) such books, tapes, and lectures either deny the basic doctrines of Christianity (John Bradshaw is an excellent example) or subtly undermine them through

integration with the theories of ungodly men. The average Christian does not have the theological background to sort out truth from error in such materials. Even worse, this type of teaching regularly fails to highlight the basics of salvation--the death and resurrection of Christ, the call to repentance, the high cost of discipleship, for example. There are many excellent biblical resources for the person who is serious about overcoming life's problems in a way that pleases the Lord and applies His power. It's time to begin recommending books and tapes on holiness, godliness, sanctification, and other topics that glorify God.

We must not end this analysis with a simple statement of the sufficiency of Scripture. We must go one step further and illustrate, by way of examples from this book, how a biblically-oriented counselor would respond in cases where these authors proclaim the necessity of psychological treatment.

In their discussion regarding the "toxic" belief in biblical exclusivity, the authors cite the case of a woman who cut her wrists and then called her church where she had been advised to stop taking prescribed medication for the so-called "manic-depressive" condition. According to the authors, the woman survived for awhile on a "religious high" and then fell again into depression. After her near-suicide, her church embraced the psychological view of counseling. Was this change really necessary? First of all, we have a scarcity of data, but we can at least ask some pressing questions and consider how a church committed to biblical principles should have handled this person. Her church advised her that she was a new creature in Christ, that old things were behind her (including her depression), and that God would meet her needs. These statements are basically true. However, new (or immature) believers need close discipleship in order to know how to properly apply Scripture, and which particular Scriptures are relevant in their lives at a specific time. A good biblical counselor would have helped her locate specific sinful patterns of behavior and attitude, and shown her specifically what to "put off" and what to "put on" and how to do it. The woman needed instruction, guidance, prayer, and regular contact with more mature members of her church. Also, the church would have been wise to refer the woman to a competent medical doctor (not a psychiatrist) in determining how and when to stop the medication; one must always review the possibility of organic causes in depression, along with proper application of Scripture. If the church merely sent her home with a Bible and simple instructions to "have more faith," then proper discipleship was not followed through. The answer to this problem does not lie in adopting the psychological view or methods, but in taking the time and effort necessary to thoroughly minister God's Word and disciple every member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Another example concerned a man (Van) who grew up in a "dysfunctional" home with an angry, drunken father who severely abused him. He later became a Christian, but he misused his religion in the following manner:

1. He taught the Bible in order to be affirmed by others and accepted, rather than out of love for the Lord.
2. He used Bible teachings to shame and "bully" his sister and brothers.
3. He condemned and belittled his wife for her lack of commitment to Christianity.
4. He stayed up late at night witnessing, then failed to show up for work. When confronted by his employer, he claimed religious discrimination.

Eventually, his wife divorced him and his employer discharged him. However, none of these problems require psychological therapy or "medical" treatment. Each behavior noted above can be corrected by the right understanding and application of the Word of God. For example:

1. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Philippians 2:3
2. "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." 2 Timothy 2:24, 25
3. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Ephesians 5:25
4. "Slaves, obey your earthly master in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." Colossians 3:22, 23

At the end of their book, the authors remind the so-called "addict" that "you are vulnerable to false teachers and false teachings. I encourage you to consider the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:21: 'Test all things; hold fast what is good.'" Indeed we must. And we are especially vulnerable, in these perilous days, to the false teachings of psychology. We must test the teachings that propose to instruct us regarding counseling, "addiction," "recovery," "codependency," and the like. We must hold fast to what is good--and that, my friends, is not to be found in the psychological opinions of men, but in the sure wisdom of God's eternal Word!

"ADDICTION" - CLARIFICATION OR CONFUSION?

The authors are vigorous in their defense of the term "addiction," yet strangely, they list "labeling" under their "ten characteristics of a toxic faith system!" They say that "the technique of labeling is used to discount a person who opposes the beliefs of the religious addict." In illustrating their point, they use the controversial abortion issue, the terms "pro-life" and "pro-choice," but fail to acknowledge the serious biblical commands that are so much a part of this controversy. That matter is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is quite interesting how labels are used in the "mental health" profession to discount and discredit individuals who are pronounced "sick" or "disturbed" or "troubled" or "insane" or whatever. Twelve-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous assign lifetime labels that are based on sinful behavior that can be forgiven and cleansed by those who receive Christ as Lord.

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The Bible uses many labels. Note, however, that these labels do not carry the permanence of the twelve-step "addiction" labels, but offer the hope of sanctification. In biblical terms, we are ALL sinners and all equal before the Cross of Christ. Even the label "sinner" does not discount or discredit in the manner of the numerous psychological disorder labels, because the hope of the gospel is offered. These supposedly anti-labeling authors use an abundance of labels borrowed from popular psychological jargon, along with a variety of their own invention. So we must begin this section with a recognition that there is contradiction within this book over the use of labeling in general. Now we must examine the specific term "addiction" and question its validity. Does it properly identify the foundation of the problem? Does it point to the correct solutions? Does it clarify, or confuse? Is there a better biblical term for what is being examined?

There is a lengthy section of the book explaining the authors' reasoning in defense of the term "addiction." Here are three major reasons they list for using the label:

1. Authors claim that "persons who seem to be doing the most with their lives are those who have had addiction problems," that while the "rest of the world" lives "in denial," the addicts are doing an "inside job" on themselves to "devictimize themselves from the addiction."

2. They claim that our culture offers hope for addiction and knows how to fight it.

3. Addiction supposedly "identifies a specific condition with a specific set of symptoms."

If this type of labeling (referring to the first reason above) doesn't discredit a good portion of the world's population, I don't know what would! Everyone who doesn't embrace the term "addict" is destined to live "in denial." This is a closed system! Secondly, what type of "hope" does our culture offer? The Christian's citizenship is in heaven, not in the world. We are called to be separate, set apart, the salt and light of the earth. Do we dare embrace the world's concepts, labels, and proposed solutions when we have the whole counsel of God through His Word, and the gospel of Jesus Christ? Frankly, we are closer to real solutions when we properly identify our problems in biblical terms, when we correctly use the word *sin*, for which we Christians have an answer! As to identification of a "specific condition" with a "specific set of symptoms," we could make similar comments. The condition of man is sinful, and the Bible points out specific behaviors and attitudes that require us to "put off" and "put on" according to God's commandments. Furthermore, terms such as "condition" and "symptoms" point us to a disease model which causes extreme confusion in terms of defining responsibility and power for change. For example, note the phrase "devictimize themselves from the addiction." How does this help place responsibility for change? It doesn't.

The authors acknowledge this confusion and attempt to overcome it, but their words fail to clarify or offer hope. First, we need to look at how they view the concept of "addiction." What exactly does it mean? They tell us that the addict is hooked on false hopes and mood alteration, that he distorts reality, seeking safety and relief from feelings of pain and worthlessness. They say that addiction involves excessive devotion, with the person surrendering habitually and compulsively to the behavior that has become the central focus of his life. They point out that there is an illusion of control; while the addict believes that he is in control, he is actually being controlled by his particular behavior or substance. That control needs to be given to God in order to experience freedom from bondage. The "religious addict," in particular, often does not know the nature of his "affliction," but comes for help identifying problems in other areas. Authors warn against intellectualizing the problem and becoming "addicted" to knowledge.

The behaviors and attitudes described in connection with the term "addiction" do indeed present a very real and serious problem for many people. However, what is the true nature of the problem, and how do we reconcile the cultural concept of "addiction" with the biblical concept of sin? The authors describe the case of a young man in their treatment program (Rick) who experienced a deliverance from his compulsive sexual behavior while on their

unit. Here, and in the pages that follow, they often enclose words like "sin," "sinful," and "deliverance" in quotes--showing their preference for psychological explanations and solutions. For example, they say that Rick's "sinful" behavior is rooted in addiction and that he must take personal responsibility. They state that "if he acts out again, he would feel that the reason was sin, not addiction, and that God can and will forgive and deliver him from sin." They are critical of Rick for placing the responsibility for change on God. Their analysis is *partially* correct, yet in some respects, their patient is closer to a biblical solution than they are. God does not magically remove all experience of temptation and pain from our lives. It is His power, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, the study and application of His Word, and the guidance of other Christians, that enables us to withstand situations of temptation successfully. That puts a very real responsibility on Him, but at the same time, we have the responsibility to trust in Him and obey Him. There is a tension there that can easily baffle the new Christian (and the rest of us at times). Note this portion of Philippians 2:12, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...for it is God *who works in you* to will and to act according to His good purpose." The young man is absolutely right in calling his sexual immorality *sin*, and he is correct in knowing that God can and will forgive and deliver him. Probably, however, he needs more direction and training in the "how to" of putting off sinful behaviors and putting on righteousness. There is a battle--a spiritual battle--and we are not necessarily going to experience instantaneous deliverance from every stronghold of sin. However, applying the term "addiction" adds confusion that is neither necessary nor biblically correct.

The authors take great pains to say that addiction and responsibility are not mutually exclusive terms, nor are addiction and sin. They claim that the term "addiction" invites the person to assume responsibility for change. They also claim that addiction does involve sinful behavior, but simultaneously acknowledge that many have tried to remove the issue of sin and morality from "addiction" because of the demeaning manner in which the Church has historically treated addicts. Since such confusion admittedly exists, why should the Christian be compelled to accept the terminology of the secular world? The authors' own analysis switches back and forth from sin to sickness, sickness to sin--a very mixed message. This confuses the issue of who is responsible for what in the process of change. The Christian need not be in bondage to such confusion! The term *sin* properly clarifies the matter and points to the Cross of Christ.

It was noted at the beginning of this critique that truth stands right alongside error in this book, making discernment an enormous challenge. The issue of addiction versus sin is one of the best examples. Along the way, the authors identify the proper biblical term for what the world euphemistically calls "addiction." It is a term that is even more specific than the more general term "sin." It is *idolatry*. There is a strong element of worship in

the practice of so-called "addictive" behaviors. Earlier we quoted from Romans 1, where it is explained that man has exchanged God's truth for a lie, and the worship of God for the worship of created things. Herein lies the fundamental problem. Our concept of idolatry may need expansion from the golden calves of ancient times to the bottles and greed and gluttony and relationships of the world today. And yet, it isn't really all that different. In Ezekiel 14, the prophets went before the Lord to inquire on behalf of the people. God replied that the people had set up idols *in their hearts*--wicked stumbling blocks before their faces which would affect every area of life and separate them from their God. If this sounds strangely similar to addiction, that's because it's exactly the same thing. It's no wonder, as the authors rightly observe, that one "addiction" often leads to one or more other "addictive" (idolatrous) behaviors; there is only one true God, but many, many false ones. When we put the problem in biblical terms, we see the real seriousness of the problem--our worship of anything and everything in place of the true living God. We're not merely talking about annoying or even destructive habits that we can't break, but about the worship of **false gods**! The matter is far more serious than acknowledged by the "experts" of psychology.

The authors speak of a certain paradox in the "religious addiction concept, which gives us another excellent reason to throw out the term. While other addictions require moderation or complete abstinence, one cannot love God too much, serve God too much, trust God too much, or worship God too much. It is a matter of worshipping Him with the proper heart, with godly motives and actions. As we have just seen, it is a matter of worshipping *Him*, not worshipping anyone or anything in His place. We're not talking about a "disease" that directs us to "recovery" programs or psychological "treatment." We're talking about the fundamental basis of all sin--idolatry. That doesn't require "recovery." **IT REQUIRES THE REDEMPTION THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS ACCOMPLISHED FOR US ON THE CROSS!**

CHANGES IN THE HEART

The serious problem of idolatry (now that we have identified the proper term) necessitates a change at the level of the heart. The word "heart" is widely misunderstood; what the Bible means is **not** what modern psychologists mean. This book, however, mixes the biblical concept with the psychological concept. The same word, "heart," is used both correctly and incorrectly. Here is a quote showing the correct usage:

"If addicts recognize a need for change, it will be in the area of behavior, not the heart. They will try to do things differently rather than change any thoughts or beliefs."
(page 154)

Biblically, the heart refers to the whole inner man (motives,

thoughts, beliefs, emotions), and is contrasted with the "outward appearance" (1 Samuel 16:7) and also with the mouth or lips (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8). The quote above doesn't mention motives, a significant area of the heart of man, but it rightfully incorporates thoughts and beliefs into the concept. In other places, the authors do speak to the importance of motives, even without using the specific word "heart," and some of what they say is very balanced and biblical. For example, they comment on godly motives for financial giving to one's church; giving is an act of worship, not a means to receiving material blessings from the Lord. They give a balanced view of growing through the trials of life, rather than entering into one's faith with the expectation that God will magically dissolve all problems--an ungodly motive. They wisely mention that a person must trust God, forsaking the comforts of trusting in a person or system; here we see the proper motive of seeking to please God rather than man. They comment on the undesirable motives of leaders who seek material gain, self-importance, or control over others. They point out the difference between seeking fleeting happiness and knowing the deeper joy that comes from seeking God independent of circumstances. They look at our motives in helping and serving others, although it is unfortunate that they credit the heretical "codependent" movement for opening our eyes to motives (the Bible shows us this without the heresies which accompany "codependent" teachings). They even mention the necessity of confessing the sinful basis for some of our negative emotions. In general, this book does, in many places, acknowledge the importance of the motives in the heart of man.

However...psychologists all too frequently use the word "heart" to refer to the emotions. These authors are no exception:

"Thinking with the heart is the condition where feelings, not facts, are the basis of reality: 'I feel bad; therefore, I must be bad'; 'I feel hopeless and powerless; therefore, I must be hopeless and powerless.'" (page 278)

There is some good truth in this statement, as we truly must not judge reality strictly by our feelings, but the word "heart" is improperly used, and it doesn't match the authors' use in other places. In spite of this statement, they are typical of those with a psychological view of man, who place great emphasis on emotions. In this book, there is great focus on anger and guilt in particular. We will spend some time here looking at their view of the role of anger in "addiction" (idolatry), including anger toward God. We will also see how they have psychologized the very important matter of guilt.

Over and over, these authors emphasize the Freudian belief that people live in "denial" of their emotions, particularly anger. They tell us that anger must be "resolved" or "dealt with" or "ventilated" or "expressed." They see "addiction" as a strategy to circumvent anger and depression. They claim that denied, or "buried" anger will lead to despair and physical illness. They state that the families of "addicts" are very often very angry,

too. Denial of one's emotions, they say, leads to the experience of victimization and exploitation by others--leaders in the "toxic faith system." In defining the various roles of such a system, there is much ado about anger. The "enabler," for example is outwardly supportive but inwardly angry, and unable to trust God. They claim that men are more likely to deny sadness, while women deny anger.

The solution to all this? They repeatedly insist on expression and ventilation. One of their examples concerns a woman who took *three years* to "resolve her anger" and know God's peace following an experience of tragedy. They don't seem to believe that God can give His comfort and peace very quickly in the midst of trials. In an example from the author's own life, he claims (after ending a relationship with a girlfriend) that "I should have grieved and expressed my anger and rage at myself until I rid myself of every ounce of the venomous emotions." He goes on to claim that anger must be expressed in order to set boundaries, protect self, address God, get victimizers out of our lives, become assertive and assume responsibility. He says that women have often had to "sacrifice their anger in order to please others who are more powerful. He is critical of Christians who believe they must "work on the sinful attitude at the heart of the anger," and be completely loving and forgiving at all times. When the so-called "toxic faith" fails, the authors claim that its victims "project" their anger and resentment onto others (another Freudian invention). As support for all of this, Christ's anger (particularly His cleansing of the temple) and the emotional expression of men in the Old Testament are noted as examples. The men of Israel "would wail before the Lord to process their sense of shame and pain. That extremely freeing experience allowed them to express their emotions to the full degree and then move on without the needless baggage of building negative feelings." These authors are thoroughly convinced that we must "embrace" our emotions and refrain from hiding them in order to have a "healthy" faith. Even anger at God must supposedly find expression; they claim that it is a "toxic faith" belief to state that "you can't be angry at God." One of their examples concerns an overeater, convinced that she could not find emotional relief because of her sin and depravity; she was angry and bitter toward God at having to perform and merit His acceptance.

What about all of this? Can we find a biblical basis to support the conclusions of these authors--or to refute them? The biblical view of anger could be the subject of a full book, but I want to briefly review Scriptures that will dispute the ventilation/expression theories of these authors and other psychological "experts." First of all, anger at God is in all cases sinful and must be confessed as such:

"A man's own folly ruins his own life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." Proverbs 19:3

"Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a

potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands?'" Isaiah 45:9

It is indeed dangerous to ventilate anger toward a sovereign, holy, righteous God. Beware of anyone who would encourage such heresy. Secondly, the Bible never, never encourages ventilation for the sake of ventilation. There is a distinction made between righteous anger (which is always true of God's anger), and sinful, self-focused anger, which frequently characterizes human anger. Anger is not to be ventilated, nor is it to be internalized so that it turns into bitterness:

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." Proverbs 25:28

"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Proverbs 29:11

"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32

"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth." James 3:14

Note that the word "deny" in James refers to a *conscious* and deliberate denial, distinguishing it from the *unconscious* denial concept promoted so heavily by psychologists. These verses are representative of the biblical view, but are by no means exhaustive. Scripture gives a fully adequate and righteous account of how we are to handle our anger in a manner that pleases the Lord--without the need for additions that are based on the theories of atheists such as Sigmund Freud, who is the source of the "ventilation" and "denial" theories. Such concepts are based on Freud's invention of the "unconscious," a big, black hole that supposedly absorbs our denied emotions and then becomes the driving force behind our sinful actions. The "unconscious" has no scriptural basis nor has science proved its existence. It must be dismissed entirely in order to view anger, and other negative emotions, according to the Bible.

We must particularly note and critique in some detail the comments of the authors regarding the anger of Jesus Christ and the men of the Old Testament. No Old Testament examples are offered. However, there is no indication in Scripture that such men were attempting to "process their sense of shame and pain." Such incidents involved confession, repentance, and petition before the Lord:

"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5, 6

"...So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with all who love Him and obey His commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from Your commands and laws. We have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land...O Lord, in keeping with all Your righteous acts, turn away Your anger and Your wrath from Jerusalem, Your city, Your holy hill...Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of Your servant. For Your sake, O Lord, look with favor on Your desolate sanctuary.'" Daniel 9:3-6, 16a, 17 (A full reading of verses 1-19 in this chapter would be even more helpful.)

"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads...They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers...Standing on the stairs were the Levites--Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani--who called with loud voices to the Lord their God..." Nehemiah 9:1, 2b, 4 (Again, a full reading of Nehemiah 9 will illustrate the process of confession, repentance, and petition.)

Christ's anger in cleansing the temple is cited to support the statement that "without our anger, we cannot get those people who violate the sanctity of our beings out of our lives." First of all, this flies in the face of scriptural teachings about how we are to respond righteously to those who sin against us; that response includes both rebuke and restoration, in a spirit of love and gentleness (Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1, 2; Romans 12:14-21), examining our own sinfulness. Christ's anger must be distinguished from human anger, because Christ was absolutely *without sin*, and we are not. He cleansed the temple for the honor of His Father, not in a spirit of *self-righteousness* or *self-protection*. Interestingly, He was angry over the way the temple had been made into a den of thieves, a place of financial profit instead of worship. These authors, with all of their talk about a "healthy faith," end their book with advertisements for an expensive inpatient psychiatric treatment program in which they have a vested interest. Similar advertisements abound in the church, over Christian radio stations, and throughout Christian bookstores. One might conclude that the temple has again become a den of thieves--but that is another story. For now, we must recognize that Christ's anger is not to be used as a model to justify our sinful wrath, and the wailing of Old Testament men ought to remind us of God's call to repentance and confession. Remember the warning of James:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be

quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:19, 20

If you have somehow gotten the idea that I am angry, you are right! I am angry that God's people are being put to unnecessary expense, suffering, and time in psychological "treatment," when the Lord offers His forgiveness and cleansing without charge--not that sanctification is an easy or painless process, but through His power and the pure wisdom of His Word, it is a joyful journey even in the midst of great trial (James 1:1). I am angry that God's people are being sold psychological concepts (literally sold--the financial burden is outrageous), so entangled with Scripture that one is forever under pressure to be discerning; our Christian bookstores cannot be trusted, and the new believer is easily led on the trail of another gospel. I am angry that God's people, who are called to be the salt and light of the earth, and to make disciples of all nations, are in bondage to psychotherapy along with the rest of the world. I am angry that the shepherds of God's flock are referring the sheep to other pastures where the grass looks greener but is poisoned with the counsel of the ungodly. I am angry that the real seriousness of life's problems, the urgency of our earthly destiny, is buried underneath the psychologists' cries to lead a "healthy" life (never mind eternity) and embrace self, self, self. Yes, I am angry, and I could go on (and on and on and on!). I am not here to "ventilate," but to warn, and to "hold out the Word of life" (Philippians 2:16).

Before we leave the topic of the heart, and the authors' treatment of emotions, we must look at their view of guilt and forgiveness. They tell us that persons often seek relief from the *feeling* of guilt, and that this desire for relief may finally lead to surrendering one's life to God. They also claim that the "toxic believer" must *feel* forgiven by God in order to be free and to have a proper relationship with Him. Additionally, they say that some individuals attempt to find relief from the *feeling* of being responsible for their behavior. The exaltation of emotion is rampant in the practice of psychotherapy, as well as in the popular twelve-step movement. Guilt is *not* a feeling; it is objectively defined by the eternal standards that God has given in His Word. Responsibility is not a feeling; our rightful responsibilities are also given to us by God and have nothing to do with whether we *feel* like following through with them. Nor is forgiveness a *feeling*. God's forgiveness was accomplished by the work of Christ on the cross, regardless of whether we *feel* forgiven; He promises to no longer remember our sins, and we are no longer liable for the punishment that would otherwise be ours. Our forgiveness of others has nothing to do with whether we *feel* like forgiving; instead, we make a similar promise to not bring up that sin ever again--to the other person, to others (gossip), or to ourselves. The unbiblical concept of "forgiving self," highlighted by these authors as a "key to recovery," also grows out of this exaltation of feelings.

It is by no means my intention to express a lack of compassion

or to be uncaring. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). I know what it is to cry out to the Lord in anguish and desperation, even to the point of considering suicide. I also know that psychotherapy offers no lasting hope. Ventilation is an endless treadmill--you never get off; it is like pouring gasoline on a raging fire. The only genuine hope is found in the Word that **God Himself** has revealed to us. His statutes are a delight, a comfort to the broken, weary soul. Jesus Christ changes the heart, its motives, its desires, its entire focus and perspective.

The motives and thoughts of one's heart are indeed a key concept in our practice of Christian faith. As we have seen, these authors make some very helpful observations, but unfortunately mix the truth with a huge amount of psychological error revolving around their improper focus on the role of emotions.

TO PLEASE GOD, TO FEAR GOD

The authors point out, rightly, that some people engage in the practice of religion in order to earn favor with God and to work their way to heaven. Some people recognize God's righteousness, holiness, and justice without the proper view of His mercy and forgiveness, offered through the cross of Christ. Here are some of the comments they make to illustrate this problem:

"Some people have lived such terrible lives that they fear God and don't totally trust Him."

"The toxic believer obeys God out of a fear of God's anger or a fear of rejection from the system."

"Some people do not accept a real God because they fear Him too much."

"An angry God is used as an excuse for too many behaviors and mistakes."

They point out the very real problems that accompany religious legalism, which often includes rules related to hair styles, dress, and makeup. They recognize that some individuals live to please the leaders of their particular faith system, rather than pleasing the Lord. They show how some persons depend on their excessive church work, rather than depending on and trusting in God Himself. Sometimes a perfect image is maintained in an organization, hiding problems that really do need to be addressed and solved. They pose a pressing question in their introduction:

"Where is the line between conviction to help people out of a love of God and addiction to compulsive work and striving to please God?"

Their concerns are valid. Some of their answers are also valid. For example, they tell us that genuine Christianity involves acknowledging one's sin with no illusion of perfection, then experiencing God's grace and mercy. The believer needs a personal relationship with God such that "no criticism or system can break the personal bonds between God and the believer." Yes--absolutely.

However...the authors fail to balance these statements with a proper understanding of the biblical requirements that we fear the Lord and live our lives to please Him. The proper "fear of the Lord" is a concept taught throughout Scripture and intricately tied to our obedience to Him. It is not a simple "being afraid of" God, but an awe, a reverence, a respect for His holiness and righteousness. It also involves an awareness of the greatness of the salvation offered by the Cross, and a gratitude for what we could never earn or deserve on our own. We are commanded to please God in the way we live, rather than pleasing self or seeking the approval of others:

"The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread, and He will be a sanctuary." Isaiah 8:13, 14a

"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."
Colossians 1:10

Legalism can indeed be deadly, and it can result in outward holiness that covers a wicked heart. But rejecting legalism does not mean that we have no call to obey the commands of the Lord. Jesus tells us that if we love Him, we will obey Him and feed His sheep (John 14:15 and 21:15-18). It is a matter of having the proper motive for obedience, the right heart--not abandoning His call to holiness. In one of the authors' examples of working one's way to heaven, they say: "It went well beyond servanthood; it was an *illness*." No, it wasn't! It was a sinful attitude of the heart, a trust in self, in one's own works rather than the unmerited grace of God. There is a huge difference. The authors believe that such behavior compensates for a feeling of inadequacy and low self-worth. No, it doesn't! It is rather a reliance on the adequacy of the efforts of self, a view of self that is far too high. The person who truly recognizes his lack of worth, the impossibility of ever earning or deserving his salvation...this is the person most likely to cry out to God for mercy, trusting solely in Him rather than attempting a salvation by works.

The question of obedience to leaders is an important one. Scripture instructs us to obey our spiritual leaders and hold them in high esteem:

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be

of no advantage to you." Hebrews 13:17

"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other."
1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13

The problem arises when those leaders are placed above God; at that point they become idols. Our obedience to them must never supersede our obedience to God, and we must carefully test their teachings against Scripture. However, we must proceed with caution and gentleness if we must disagree with the shepherds who care for our souls. Those leaders are warned not to tyrannize the flock, but to serve as examples and rule in love (1 Peter 5:2, 3). They are not to maintain legalistic, inflexible rules; however, there is a proper place for confrontation and correction with a view to the restoration of the person entangled in sin. While the authors correctly identify some abuses of spiritual authority, they fail to show how God's delegated authority is to be properly exercised in His Church.

Like many psychologists, the authors tell us that we must not surround ourselves with "shoulds." Better to say, "It would be nice if I were more obedient," they insist. They do properly recognize that our expectations of others may be motivated by anger and frustration (self-concern) rather than genuine concern for their spiritual welfare. Such motivation is indeed questionable. However, the Bible is filled with "shoulds" and "musts." While we must honestly recognize our humanity and sinful nature, that recognition is never meant to become an excuse to abandon the striving for holiness, or a license to continue in sin.

In regard to maintaining the image of either an organization or a person, balance is again needed. A pretense of perfection or a hiding of sin is truly out of line. Real problems must be confronted in love and solved at whatever level they occur--in one person's life, between two or more persons, or at the level of the church body. However, God gives us a responsibility to be the salt and light of the earth, to be an example that will turn hearts to Him:

"...let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Again, we must view the authors' statements with caution and look more deeply into the wisdom of God's Word.

The authors never distinguish between being afraid of God and having a proper fear of Him as taught by the Bible. Fear of God and trust in Him are not mutually exclusive. We are God's children. A tiny child may have a rightful fear of his father's anger if he disobeys, yet love and trust that same daddy who faithfully cares for his needs. We are to do the same in relationship to our Heavenly Father. Note how Scripture warns us

about fully trusting in God rather than in the flesh:

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17:5-7

As we place our trust in Him, we must realize that He disciplines those He loves--not for the purpose of destruction, but so that we might grow and be conformed to the image of His Son:

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.'" Hebrews 12:5,6

The authors fail to give this perspective, but rather caution against seeing God as a "Critical Parent." This unfortunate analogy rests on the Freudian-based theory that our view of God is determined by our relationship with earthly parents. We could spend several pages refuting this theory, which is the invention of a man who saw God as a myth of man's imaginations. It is dangerous to rest our knowledge about our Heavenly Father on this kind of ungodly counsel.

One of the authors' "characteristics of a healthy faith" is the ability to be "real," or vulnerable, with other people because we know we are accepted by God. While we are instructed to speak the truth to one another, and to fear God rather than man, being "real" is usually intended by psychologists to mean the expression of *emotions*, not God's truth. This book defines vulnerability as "the ability to risk rejection by laying before others all that we are and are not." Their definition has to do with self, not with speaking God's truth. We are to confess our sins and seek the forgiveness of others where biblically necessary, but laying our emotions before others may be both inappropriate and unloving. When our inner thoughts and feelings are sinfully based and unknown to others, our confession must be strictly before the Lord; otherwise we hurt others and engage in gossip or slander. Being "real" in this sense is not a biblically-defined value.

Generally, the important matter of living to please God, and in proper fear of Him, is not fully covered in this book according to biblical standards. Some truth is given, but it is so entangled with psychological error that we need to look far beyond their analysis to discern the truth that God has revealed in His Word regarding how to live a life that pleases Him.

ME, MYSELF, AND I - SELF, SELF, SELF

The authors correctly relate to us that "the common denominator of many popular religions today is the focus on self rather than on God." (Interestingly, this is particularly true of the twelve-step "Higher Power" theology that is promoted in this book.) They describe a perversion of the worship experience, in that it becomes a worship of self rather than God. They comment on how a "religious addict" begins to focus away from God and others, back toward self. As that happens, the individual's "compulsive" nature develops as he judges others and defends himself. (This is a good description of man's *sinful* nature.) The "toxic" believer uses his spiritual gifts in a self-oriented manner, rather than serving others in a spirit of humility. Numerous selfish motives for the pursuit of religion are discussed: relief from pain, problem-free living, feelings of self-righteousness, emotional "highs," belonging, and even material greed. Leaders of a so-called "toxic faith system" are said to be corrupted by power and usurping the authority of God, suffering from a "pathological need to be valued or esteemed," and frequently claim special, direct communication with God. (This sounds strangely like Satan's old lie from the Garden and his ambition to exalt himself above the throne of God.) In general, "toxic" faith involves a sinful self-obsession (idolatry), a distortion of Scripture, and a reliance on one's own ability to find favor with God; the person suffers from the delusion that "I'm OK."

Strangely enough, these authors cite love of self, forgiveness of self, care of self, and worthiness of self as keys to "recovery." They say of the "enabler" that "rather than take care of their own needs, they assist the persecutor in his or her helplessness." Truthfully, this type of person is already taking care of his own needs much too well, and failing to care enough for the welfare of the other to confront his sin in love. The authors claim that the codependent movement has been helpful to such "enablers," and yet, as they concede, it has "helped" far too much. Elsewhere they note that society has gone too far in showing people how to rid themselves of "undeserved guilt feelings," so that now many are focused on self and not others, obsessed with their needs and reluctant to love their neighbors as themselves. How true this is, but considering the sinful, inherently self-focused nature of man, what else would we expect? We could well do without the "help" of the codependent teachings. Also mentioned is the "hyperresponsible" person (also called "codependent" or afflicted with a "personality disorder") who theoretically suffers from low self-worth. Isn't this rather a form of pride, a taking over of God's role in the life of another, and/or a failure to trust that God is on the job, sovereignly taking care of His creation? They go on to claim that self-worth is one of the characteristics of a "healthy" faith--not a value by the world's standards, but a self-worth based in Christ. "Recovery is the healing of self-identity as it relates to God." Supposedly, "toxic faith" takes away the

individual's identity. Furthermore, they tell us that "healthy faith allows a person to love self, God, and others" (emphasis added). Along the way, they insist that black/white, good/bad, right/wrong thinking is "toxic," that "sin is an act; it is not a description of every facet of your character."

What do we do with the conglomeration of truth and error presented here? The authors correctly point out the sinful self-obsession that is rampant and characterizes false (not merely popular, but false) religions. They are getting close to the truth in affirming that our identity is to be based in Christ, and that we are to live in His image rather than that of another person. Yet they don't go far enough into the biblical view of self. Nowhere are we commanded to hate ourselves, or to neglect the basic care of the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). But neither are we commanded to love ourselves (because we already do that by nature), forgive ourselves, or look at our own worth in order to "recover" from the "disease of "religious addiction." Job, considered by God to be a righteous man, repented in dust and ashes before the Lord just before his fortunes were restored. Jesus commands us to look away from ourselves and fix our eyes on Him. We must be totally willing to lose our own lives, for Him--not for improper motives or the approval of man--if we would find eternal life. We are even taught that we must be baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6:1-7) in order to share in His resurrection and life. In regard to "black/white" or "good/bad" thinking, the authors fail to see the whole picture. While there are some legitimate shades of grey in life, there are also some definite blacks and whites outlined by Scripture in no uncertain terms. Throwing out absolutes may be popular with the psychologists, but it isn't biblical.

Psychology, along with the twelve-step theology, greatly encourages a self-focus, in the name of "therapy," that is neither commanded nor condoned by Scripture. It is another gospel of self, and it doesn't offer godly solutions to the problems of self that these authors expose and then seek to solve with more of that same self.

WHATEVER BECAME OF REPENTANCE?

"Christian psychology" (a dubious term) must be noted for its silence on the traditional Christian concept of repentance. The authors begin their book with the example of one of their own mothers, a woman of faith who struggled desperately following the death of her son from AIDS:

"Her depression was deep, and at times I didn't know if she would return to being the wonderful lady she had been all her life. Fortunately, she did return to that person. She made it out of her depression and back to reality because she dealt with her confusing ideas about faith and God. She yelled at God. She told Him it wasn't fair. She admitted she had come

to her a faith as a way of making life easier. As she shared her anger and frustration with a God who did not do things in accordance with her fondest wishes and expectations, she recovered from the death of my brother."

This is indeed a difficult experience, one in which any person will need to cling to the Lord for His comfort and peace. There is some good indication here of repentance in the statement that "she admitted she had come to her faith as a way of making life easier." Nevertheless, the authors do not clearly address the need for repentance, but rather imply that anger toward God must be fully expressed: "She yelled at God. She told Him it wasn't fair." We have already seen that anger toward God is sinful. Sin requires repentance:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Psalm 51:17

Elsewhere, the authors acknowledge that a Christian desires to become more like Jesus Christ, and that not measuring up should bring repentance and change. They point out the sinful human tendency to blame other people and even the devil for one's own behavior. These particular comments are biblical, and yet, not nearly enough attention is given to the need for a repentant heart. Instead, they mix their Christianity with the ungodly concepts of psychology.

One of their "ten characteristics of a toxic faith system" is its punitive nature. They note the case of a woman who confessed adultery to her minister and was required to do three things--go to the man's wife and confess her sin, go before the entire congregation and confess her sin again, and agree not to date for a period of one year. It is true that this full scenario does not have a biblical basis, particularly the third requirement. The woman had broken off the affair and repented of her sin. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul cautions the Church to quickly restore the repentant offender and reaffirm love. The second requirement may or may not have been necessary, depending on whether the matter was already one of public knowledge. The first requirement might very well have some biblical basis, since God does require us to confess our sins to those we have offended and make restitution. Such restitution is not punitive in nature, but it is a fruit of repentance and is often necessary in order to restore something to the one who has been hurt. While the Church has no authority to invent punishments beyond the scope of Scripture, such as the requirement to abstain from dating for one year, a pastor may well counsel someone regarding the fruits of repentance when a serious sin has been committed (Matthew 3:8). The authors do not distinguish between arbitrary punishment and godly restitution.

A concept that is vigorously promoted by the authors, and wholly without biblical support, is the advice to "forgive yourself." Nowhere does the Bible command a forgiveness of self. We are to give and receive forgiveness from others, and to receive

forgiveness from God. This view grows out of the psychological emphasis on feelings, and reveals an inadequate knowledge of godly sorrow versus worldly sorrow:

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11

Godly sorrow leaves no regret, no thoughts of needing to "forgive self." It leads to a focus on the Lord and an eagerness to obey Him. Only worldly sorrow would result in a desire to forgive oneself. In regretting merely the consequences of one's sin, and in not understanding God's power for change, it is understandable that a person might be eager to forgive himself and find relief from the feeling of guilt. The answer to this is a proper knowledge of guilt (which is not a feeling), God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, and a heart of true repentance. (For an excellent biblical view of forgiveness, see Jay Adams' book, *From Forgiveness To Forgiving*.)

The authors are anxious for those they counsel to love, esteem, and value self. This is inconsistent with the biblical view of repentance, which involves a death of the old self:

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Romans 6:3, 4

It is unfortunate that psychologists have removed repentance from their counsel. It is a vital ingredient in lasting, biblical change that pleases the Lord.

TOXIC FOUNDATIONS

Throughout this book, the authors frequently reveal a deterministic view of the foundations of "toxic faith." Here are some of the "common characteristics" they note of the "toxic" believer: victims of abuse in childhood, rigid parents, disappointments throughout life, low self-worth, alienated, isolated, victims of pressures to conform, unable to admit having been exploited. They claim that "toxic faith" may be generated either by negative childhood experiences or some major disappointment later in life. They say that "perversion becomes possible in the worship of God and the practice of religion because of the addict's neediness and brokenness in coming from a dysfunctional family" (emphasis added). It is also claimed that

roles in the "dysfunctional family" will "indelibly mark personal development," and "unless help is obtained, there is little hope to break the chains of dysfunction and stop the multigenerational trend." Along with the determinism of their view, which is remarkably similar to the anti-Christian theories of Freud, we also see their strong faith in the practice of psychotherapy.

One of the major elements of their viewpoint is that of inferiority, developed in childhood and carried through into adult years. This appears numerous times and also is identified by terms such as low self-image, low self-worth, and the like. In their discussion of the various roles of "toxic faith," this trait is listed consistently. For example, the "co-conspirators" are adults "who have felt inferior all their lives" and have "wanted security and significance all their lives." The "victim" of the system is one who believes that he deserves the abuse. In describing one man's "recovery" under their therapy, they say that "he saw that he was not 'crazy' but a victim of craziness and toxic faith."

A second major element that we must note is their conclusion that a person's view of God is determined by childhood relationships with his parents. They say that "our ideas of God are wrapped in our experience with our parents." In another place, their therapists supported a patient's decision not to return to church immediately following her release from the hospital, because she had been molested by her minister father during childhood; supposedly, she had difficulty trusting God because of abuse suffered from other males.

This type of perspective assumes that a particular type of response is embedded in the experience itself, that it is automatic. The Bible does not support this view. A person's understanding of his experiences is constructed on the basis of his own heart, a concept we have discussed earlier. It is the heart that must change; the victim must look at what has happened in himself, not merely what has happened to him. Psychologists often fail to recognize that since every person has an inherently sinful nature, the victim, even as a small child, responds sinfully to the evil that is committed against him. God's Word shows us how to respond righteously to persecution.

The supposed problem of inferiority is not identified in Scripture as a problem. The challenge that faces us is to recognize our sinful nature, our hopelessness apart from Christ. A realistically low view of self may be just what is needed to receive the salvation offered by the Cross. Paul exclaims in Romans 7:24, "What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death!" However, he goes on to give the only hope for all of humanity: "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). Man has no separate status apart from his relationship with His Creator--no meaning, no significance, certainly no security. We are never commanded to *pursue* meaning, significance, or security, but to pursue Jesus Christ and to identify with Him, putting off the old self.

In response to the psychological belief that our views of God are determined by our parents, there is no biblical support for

such an idea. This concept came from the atheistic, anti-Christian theories proposed by Freud. Many of his theories were drawn from Greek myths, not the Bible, not scientific research, nor anything else that might be reliable. This concept may do more harm than good by planting the idea in our heads that we cannot embrace our Heavenly Father because of the failings of our earthly fathers. God is also compared to a shepherd and to a king, yet nowhere do we see a claim that we must experience positive relationships with earthly shepherds or rulers to know God. The whole idea is a dangerous fallacy and could easily become an excuse for someone who does not wish to receive Christ or obey His commands. Even if the idea were not used as an excuse, it could become a stumbling block to someone who *DOES* want to know the Lord. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict, to save, and to lead our hearts to the truth, and that divine work is not dependent on any human power or relationship.

The interesting thing about this book is that the authors cite a case which refutes their own deterministic theories. It is the case of a man they call Lee, who witnessed the death of his father who had just broken his jaw. They say that Lee felt that "much of what he experienced must have been because a God somewhere was trying to punish him for being a bad person." He became a Christian later in life, but was "serving ego rather than God." He began to make rigid demands on his family and was very punitive. Rather than acknowledge the sin in this man's own heart, the authors make excuses for his behavior toward his children--he "could not help victimizing..." He had four children, and the authors describe in detail how each responded to their father's rigidity and punitive nature. *Each response was radically different*, supporting the biblical view that we respond according to the criteria of our own hearts. While three of these children, each in a different manner, did not embrace their father's Christian faith, one daughter found a real faith in God that even these deterministic authors concede was not "toxic." They have disproved their own theory in this example.

I want to make it abundantly clear that I am not without compassion for people who have suffered the evil of child abuse. It is a real and serious problem, and the devastation is not to be taken lightly. I have a deep personal concern for this problem, and it grows out of my own experience with betrayal and abandonment. While there may be some holding the biblical view who do not have a deep compassion for victims developed by such experience--I am not one of these. But I have discovered that years of psychotherapy left me without a shred of hope. It may bring some temporary, fleeting "relief" from pain--though very little. It may bring about some changes in behavior, or shifts from one sinful pattern to another that is less destructive. But overall, what it offers is an expensive illusion and a counterfeit. It does not conform the person to the image of Christ. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone, through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, who lifts the victim up out of the ash heap of destruction. He is the One who brings about a new perspective, an *ETERNAL*

viewpoint. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so far above psychotherapy is the pure wisdom and comfort of God's Word. I could give you dozens of Scriptures that ought to be written on the heart of every victim, but here are just a few that revive the brokenhearted:

"But You, O God, do see trouble and grief; You consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless." Psalm 10:14

"I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place." Psalm 31:7, 8

"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." Psalm 27:10

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." Isaiah 61:1

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8:18

SUPPORT GROUPS - DISCIPLESHIP OR DISASTER?

The authors are emphatic in their insistence on participation in support groups, as a part of one's "recovery" from "toxic faith." The Bible instructs us to assemble together in fellowship, prayer, praise, worship, study, and encouragement of one another. We are not to live in isolation, but in relationship with other believers. As we do, we exhort, admonish, encourage, instruct, love, and disciple one another in our common faith. However, does the biblical concept of meeting together coincide--or clash--with the modern "support" group advocated by these authors and others in the psychological camp?

An important element in the body of Christ is accountability, and the authors do correctly indicate that no one is meant to be accountable *solely* to God, forsaking relationships of accountability to others. Some of their writing in this area is very good. However, as we delve into the characteristics of a "healthy support group" which they enumerate, there are difficulties in reconciling their views with biblical teachings.

One troublesome area is their recommendation that there be acceptance and "unconditional positive regard," which they equate with love. The individual is free to express his emotions without having to live up to someone else's expectations. In Acts 20:26,

27, 31, Paul said:

"I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.... Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."

This statement is representative of New Testament teachings regarding the loving confrontation of others who are caught in their sin. Paul further instructs:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:1, 2

These authors are critical of those in the "toxic faith system" who do not confront sin, but either aid or "enable" it in some way. It is odd that they promote such passive acceptance in their "recovery" groups. Such passivity is the very opposite of the love demonstrated by Paul in the quotation from Acts. Because of his love, Paul pursued his brothers and sisters in Christ--with tears, with fervent concern for their welfare. He had expectations based on God's truth, and he did not hesitate to boldly proclaim them. In listing the "ten rules of a toxic faith system," one is, "Never point out the reality of a situation" and another is, "Don't do anything outside of your role." Yet that is the kind of teaching they seem to prefer when organizing support groups. As for the free expression of emotion, this poses major problems. We have already discussed the "ventilation" theory and how it differs from biblical truth. Such unbridled expression can hurt others and damage relationships. It can also turn quickly to gossip or slander regarding persons who are not present in the groups. Such gossip/slander is "legitimized" by the therapeutic nature of the group--but not really. (For a complete discussion on this issue, see "Group Therapy--or Slander?" from *Essays on Counseling*, by Jay Adams.)

Another area that they discuss is that the support group must be nonautocratic and noncontrolling. They say that "the addict needs a group where no one gives the orders and no one person is in control." They do claim, rightly, that our focus must be on people--on relationships--rather than rules. We must take time for people, and rules--for the sake of rules--should never supersede the welfare of people. Another valid comment they make is that we must stop judging each other and start listening. The "healthy" believer knows how to love and be loved. However...while some of the authors' claims are in accordance with biblical teachings, they fail to balance their nonjudgmental listening with the rightful authority delegated by God to pastors and elders in the Church, and the call to all Christians to restore a fallen brother, as discussed above. That authority is strong, because it is God-

given, but it is also limited by Scripture, and those delegated shepherds of God's flock are cautioned not to abuse their leadership positions. Church members are instructed to obey their spiritual leaders, but they, too, are cautioned--not to give blind obedience, but to test the Scriptures. The authors of this book have gone too far in reacting to the drastic abuses of power that are most evident in the cults, and sometimes in Christian churches as well.

One brief comment was made that "the bond to the addiction must be transferred to other people. If it isn't, the recovering addict will merely intellectualize the problem, and the new addiction will easily become knowledge." The new "addiction," or idol, could also become the group itself or some specific individual. This idea of transferring the bond to other people was not developed in the book, but it gives cause for concern. The bond of the idolatrous person must be transferred to the Lord alone, not to anyone or anything else.

Along with their own commercial advertisements at the end of the book, the authors list the twelve steps adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous. They believe that this type of support group is "most helpful." An entire book could be written (it has been--*Twelve Steps To Destruction*, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan) regarding the mushrooming twelve-step movement and how it differs in critical ways from the "faith once delivered to the saints." The primary problem with this movement is its worship of a vague, individually-defined "higher power." This is in essence another form of idolatry. The twelve steps do not mention the *one step* that is more crucial than any other step one might ever take in this life--receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, knowing that He died and rose again to provide our salvation from sin. There are other problems, as those steps substitute in subtle ways for repentance, confession of sin, restitution, discipleship, and evangelism. The authors note a major rift in the Christian community regarding the use of the twelve steps, and they say that "recovery never focuses on someone else's problem, it always focuses on the self." This is true; the twelve steps do indeed focus on self, self, and more self. Those who oppose them are concerned for the external welfare of others who naively assume that this is the way of salvation. The term "twelve-step theology," which appears once or twice in the book, is a phrase that reveals the fundamentally *religious* nature of this secularly-inspired program. The Christians who oppose this form of theology have a genuine and valid concern about being obedient to Jesus Christ and faithful to His Word. The authors say that "anyone who needs recovery can never find an excuse good enough to justify not being part of something that has helped thousands of people restore their relationship with God." There is never an excuse good enough for not receiving the salvation offered by God through Christ, and being justified before God. However, there is excellent reason to question any kind of "help" that does not acknowledge the only source of power for lasting change that is pleasing to God. There is *no other way* to restore one's relationship to God except through Jesus Christ, who is not named

or acknowledged by "twelve-step theology." When the consequences are eternal, when the "help" may lead to destruction, then there is **every** reason to justify **not** being part of that "something," no matter how good it appears.

After considering thoroughly the authors' views regarding the need to participate in a "support" group, we must conclude that such groups do not provide the discipleship envisioned in the New Testament "one another" teachings. They are a counterfeit, a substitute for fellowship and study in the body of Christ---the church.

THE FALSE PRACTICE OF RELIGION - A BIBLICAL VIEW

The book *Toxic Faith* is primarily about the false practice of religion, which has been transformed by the authors into a "disease." We can achieve a thorough understanding of this problem using Scripture alone. God has not left us without His wisdom on the matter. He speaks repeatedly to His people about the worship of false gods, idolatry, about the necessity for sound doctrine, and about the false practice of religion. He also gives the one and only solution, Jesus Christ, for those who are involved in cults or other false religions.

"Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways." Proverbs 2:12-15

This wisdom can be gained through God's Word, which provides us with sound doctrine for life on this earth and in eternity:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Both of Paul's letters to Timothy give us urgent warnings about the importance of sound doctrine. Many of the "toxic beliefs" addressed by these authors are errors in doctrine. In addition to these errors, we must question the many conflicting, highly popular teachings in psychology with a view to discernment and correct doctrine. Note the instruction and alarm sounded by Paul:

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage---with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep

your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."
2 Timothy 4:2-5

"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm."
1 Timothy 1:3-7

"He (an elder) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." Titus 1:9

"You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine."
Titus 2:1

The Lord would not have us discard His laws, even though our keeping of His commandments is not a method of *earning* the salvation that is only available by His grace:

"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which He entrusted to me." 1 Timothy 1:8-11

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." 1 Timothy 4:16

"If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain." 1 Timothy 6:3-5

In regard to the false *practice* of religion, which concerns an outward religiosity covering a sinful heart, both Old and New Testaments abound with warnings and calls to repentance. We are

not left to wonder about how our God deals with this issue, which is of great concern to Him:

"Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings--boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do--declares the Sovereign Lord." Amos 4:4, 5 (The book of Amos has a pertinent message regarding the false practice of religion. It would be helpful to study those verses in context.)

"Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'" Jeremiah 7:4

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them." Matthew 6:1 (see verses 1 through 4)

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:5 (see verses 5-15)

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:16 (see verses 16-18)

"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." Matthew 23:4 (see entire book of Matthew 23, regarding the Pharisees)

Other helpful references: Malachi
Ezekiel 8
Acts 16:16-20

This is not by any means an exhaustive list, and even these few passages are too lengthy to repeat in their entirety. The point is that Scripture leaves us adequately informed regarding the false practice of our faith and God's call to repent and turn our hearts toward Him.

Idolatry is a theme that permeates all of Scripture. We have seen how Romans 1 describes man's exchange of their worship of God for the worship of created things. We also looked at the messages of Ezekiel 14, where God's people have set up idols in their hearts and placed wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Viewing the Old Testament as a whole, God pursues His people with fierce warnings about their idolatry and glorious promises of restoration. There is no need for the modern label "addiction," which hides the

seriousness of the real problem that we must face--idolatry, the worship of false gods. It is tragic that this fundamental sin has been "diseased" by the psychologists of modern times. Such humanistic wisdom is representative of the "meaningless talk" referred to in 1 Timothy earlier. That might be expected of the unbelieving secular world, but it is inexcusable in the Church of Jesus Christ.

In concluding their book, the authors of *Toxic Faith* repeatedly stress "recovery"--mental "recovery," spiritual "recovery," physical "recovery," and social "recovery." The Word of God does not echo this worldly viewpoint, and never does it allow our sins to be "diseased." Neither must we! The Lord calls us to repentance and offers us His marvelous promise of redemption. We must no longer exchange the lie of "RECOVERY" for the truth of REDEMPTION, purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ:

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God."
1 Peter 1:17-21

Yes, our faith and our hope are in God, whom we know only through Christ. We live as strangers on this earth, putting behind us the "empty way of life" embraced by the world. We need not look to that empty way for wisdom, or understanding, or labels, or solutions. As Christians, we have the truth. We have a God who is sufficient to redeem us from our sins without the elaborate schemes and expensive therapies invented by modern man. Christ has given us living water, and we dare not muddy and dilute its power!

© Christian Discernment
Publications Ministry, Inc.
www.christiandiscernment.com
111 Magnolia Lane
Hubert, NC 28539

