

Critical Issues Commentary

A monthly commentary on Biblical concerns that impact you

Why the Confusion?

Inner Healing

written by Bob DeWaay

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1-3)

The focus of the last several issues of CIC has been Biblical counseling, specifically as it concerns sin as the basic root problem of all human beings. There is another important related issue: things that have happened to a person over which he or she had no control. Clearly, because of the fallen world in which we live, all people have experienced hurtful or traumatic events that have a lasting influence on them. God gave us the ability to remember the past. Sometimes these memories are painful. What help or remedy does the Bible offer to those who are hurting emotionally from unchosen experiences?

Jesus Heals the Soul

Jesus quoted part of the prophetic passage referenced above as he read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, His home town. He made a startling claim to His friends and relatives, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

(Luke 4:21). The Anointed One (Messiah) had come to set people free. The poor, the captives, the downtrodden, the blind, and all those who have suffered in this life hear the good news of deliverance through Israel's promised Messiah. The “favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19) is a reference to the year of Jubilee when every Israelite who had become enslaved was to be set free. The Anointed One of God had come to bring freedom to those suffering the consequences of past events over which they never or no longer had any control.

In 1976 I was asked to teach a class on inner healing for people being trained to be phone counselors for a Christian crisis line. I had not read any of the books that were then becoming popular on inner healing. I used the King James Bible at the time that included the phrase “to bind up the broken hearted” (from Isaiah 61:1) in Luke 4:18. I reasoned that if Jesus said He came to heal the broken hearted, He must have done so. I then proceeded with a study of the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ to hurting people as recorded in the Gospels. Little did I realize that I was avoiding much error and confusion by using this simple approach rather than following the teachings of the inner healers who were to become popular in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

The outline from which I taught included the following seven points: repentance, forgiveness, confession, right relationships to the body of Christ (being a part of God's family), the renewal of the mind through God's word, deliverance, and faith. These were the things that Jesus did and taught as He ministered to hurting people. This simple approach will always be valid because it is based on timeless truths that are foundational to Biblical Christianity.

Confusion over inner healing has multiplied to this day. It is not that Christ does not heal the inner person, but popular teachers who joined certain Biblical concepts with deterministic, psychological theories so defined “inner healing” in the popular arena that the term became obscured and perhaps tainted. It was taught that past events, even events that happened in our mother's womb, determine who and what we are. It was taught that we have a “sub-conscious mind” (equated by some with the Biblical word “heart”) with unknown content that determines our thoughts and actions. It was taught that we need a “healer” who can use personal revelation to discover forgotten events of our past and thereby deliver us from their influence.

It was taught that unknown “curses” placed upon us from previous generations determine our attitudes and actions until such time that an inner healer can ascertain the source of the curses and break them. It was taught that we must “visualize Jesus.” This visualized Jesus would take us on a journey back through our childhood. Some Christians were taken by a counselor on a journey starting from the point of conception, month by month, year by year, identifying and healing each hurt (discovered by supernatural revelation) until they were finally (after months and years of therapy) freed from the past. The first trip through the past often did not work, requiring another inner healer who could go through the process again, finding things missed by the first healer.

These are only a few examples of the many teachings that have made their way through the popular Christian press and counseling room during the last few decades. Now, newer versions are arising, taking their cue from the recovery movement and the dysfunctional family approaches that have eclipsed the earlier versions of inner healing. The recovery of the “inner child” is now a hot item in religious

circles. Our problems are deemed to have come from parents who messed up the sinless, pristine child which we were by nature (this of course is a denial of the sin nature).

What these theories have in common is that they are not what Jesus taught and not what He did. Mark succinctly tells of Jesus' message, "And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (**Mark 1:14,15**). Repentance for the forgiveness of sins **does result in inner healing!** People have been hurt and abused by others. People have suffered traumas that were not caused by their own sin. People have been rejected by family members. However, we all must enter the kingdom the same way, by faith through grace. Jesus said "repent and believe the gospel," not "repent and believe the gospel unless you are a victim of someone else's wrong doing." Jesus' message is compassionate. It puts us all on the same level of need. Those who suffered the most are often those who responded most readily to Messiah. The "healthy" did not see their need for a physician. God calls the hurting, rejected, downtrodden, and hopeless to Himself, and many of them respond (see **1Corinthians 1:26-30**). Others are called, but many fail to heed the call due to self-sufficiency or self-righteousness.

Forgiveness and Inner Healing

A fundamental aspect of inner healing is that Christ offers us healing of our inner person; but to obtain it requires forgiveness. Jesus forgave sins and He taught His followers that they must forgive. We cannot change the past because it is forever locked in history; but we can change our **relationship** to the past! This is what forgiveness does. Forgiveness deals with our own sin **and** what was done to us. Just as there is no depth of sin that the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse, there is no hurt inflicted upon us so great that

He does not ask us to forgive.

The classic passage of Scripture about this is **Matthew 18:23-35**. Jesus used this parable to illustrate the need to forgive. A man who had been forgiven a huge debt later refused to forgive some else who owed him a small debt. The meaning of the parable is that God forgave us a enormous debt (our sin against Him) and therefore we must forgive people who "owe" us. The Lord's prayer involves a commitment to this type of forgiveness. Many stumble over this because they erroneously think that forgiveness is a feeling or an erasure of the past. Forgiveness is an act of the will (enabled by God's grace) that releases another person from debt. It is like a financial transaction. The forgiveness of a financial debt involves a commitment never to seek to collect on the note again - it becomes history.

Forgiveness of a wrong someone has done to us involves a commitment to release that person from the responsibility of repayment and to live life without blaming that person for one's present condition. We cannot erase the past or blank out memories of it because the past is fixed in history and God created us with the ability to remember. The good news is that our motivation and perspective can change.

Joseph's response to his brothers who had done him much harm and injustice serves as a wonderful example of a gracious, faith-filled response to wrongs one has suffered. It is recorded in these two passages: "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (**Genesis 45:5; 50:20**).

This attitude of forgiveness toward others and faith in God is a great deliverance because harboring unforgiveness and bitterness causes one to be held in perpetual bondage to the past. This attitude often results in personal failures because a person carries around a load of excuses (the things

people did) and reasons why the person is not responsible for his or her own actions and attitudes. Forgiveness releases us from the past not by changing or erasing the past, but by changing our relationship to it. Now those things people may have meant for evil are viewed as things that God sovereignly allowed and will ultimately use for His glory and our greater good!

God Changes Us

The fact that the past is unchangeable causes hopelessness only if we believe the deterministic lies of our modern culture. I once heard an inner healing teacher state, "we are the sum total of our experiences." Wherever he got that statement, it does not reflect a Biblical view of man. It is mechanistic, like saying that the input equals the output; as if we are determined by the laws of the conservation of matter and the conservation of energy. This dehumanizing concept is much less than the Biblical view of man created in God's image. We are more than our experiences and memories, we have the ability to love God and love our neighbors that is not determined by the past -- it is a part of what being human is in its essence. The fallenness that has perverted and distorted this capacity to love and relate has not obliterated it beyond remedy.

God loves us and we can love Him through the Holy Spirit whom He has given us - **Romans 5:5**. The commands to love God and others summarize the requirements of the law (**Matthew 22:37-40**). Those who walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh are characterized by love (see **Galatians 5:13-16**). The events of the past cannot keep the child of God from God's love! (**Ro**

mans 8:33-39) The Bible teaches that God's love is revealed to us through the person of Jesus the Messiah (see **John 3:16** and **1John 3:16**). Jesus said that He would set free the downtrodden and that He does. The message of God's love revealed through Messiah is neither trite nor impertinent.

We stumble over the simple things as we seek those which are hopelessly complex and confusing. This is the tragedy of the inner healing movement in its excesses. Seeking to analyze and comprehend things that defy understanding will confuse people as they search for healing. Jesus' teaching to needy people like the immoral woman who cried on His feet (**Luke 7:37-50**), the Samaritan woman (**John 4**), and blind Bartimaeus (**Mark 10:46-52**) was very simple and compassionate. The complex, modern theories now taught have little or no similarity to the teaching and ministry of Jesus. Do they work as well?

Doubtless I will be accused of trivializing the nature of the problem and the complexity of the human situation. I realize that life is complex. The variables are many and no two people are the same. There are more intricacies in the inner workings of the human heart than we can possibly comprehend. However, the issue is how we approach healing. Is it possible that we will never comprehend the complex maize of factors that makes each human unique?

The problem with inner healing theories that depend upon often secret, revelational knowledge of hidden processes of the mind and dimly remembered or forgotten events of the past is that they give no assurance that the healing process is or ever will be complete. Those who have an inner healer take them on a journey through their past can only possibly be touching a tiny fraction of all the experiences, remembered or forgotten, that influenced them. We continue to have more experiences moment to moment and these influence us. If we had a one hour counseling session each week, we would be losing ground. Most people have at least an hour of negative expe-

riences of some sort each week! Healing is not based on memories, knowledge, utterances, or psychic processes, **it is based on a relationship with Messiah.**

Grace and Inner Healing

God alone knows the desperate condition of the heart (**Jeremiah 17:9,10**). When we can look at our past as Joseph did, even when purposeful wrong doing has been perpetrated upon us, and say "God sent me," we are experiencing God's healing. The situation is so complex that only a supernatural remedy will suffice. The inner healing remedy of Scripture is a remedy of God's grace revealed through the crucified Messiah.

Often grace is thought of only in terms of personal salvation. The New Testament word for grace comes from a root that means "gift." God gives us, in Christ, that which we did not deserve and could not attain. Grace is not only unmerited favor, but it is enabling power. Grace that is sufficient is grace that is efficacious. At issue in inner healing are those unpleasant and seemingly harmful past experiences that we cannot change. Often the events of the past have left us changed in many ways, physically and emotionally. God heals us by changing our relationship to the past. We change from being bitter victims to thankful victors!

Paul said that "forgetting what lies behind," he pressed on toward the goal (**Philippians 3:13**). This does not mean an inability to recall the past as is shown by **Philippians 3:4-7** in which he tells of his past. It means that the past now has a different significance. Paul was doubtless influenced by his training under Gamaliel and his rigid background as a Pharisee, as well as his sin of persecuting the church. This past made up part of what made Paul who he was; yet they were not the determinative things! "But by the grace

of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (**1Corinthians 15:10**). Grace was the factor that determined the condition of the redeemed Paul; but this grace did not lessen Paul's responsibility to work hard in obedience to God by the grace of God.

Inner healing does not necessitate changing the past or "deprogramming" ourselves. We were not "programmed" like a computer to begin with. Inner healing requires forgiveness, faith, relationship with God and His people, and a life of obedience by God's grace. We are responsible moral agents, offered grace and forgiveness through the work of Christ. We are not programmed robots mechanistically trudging through life until someone tinkers with the program to make us mechanistically go in some new, determined direction.

"God heals us by changing our relationship to the past. We change from being bitter victims to thankful victors!"

When Jesus heals us from the bondage of the past, grace becomes the significant factor in our lives, taking those things about us from the unchangeable past and making them opportunities for God's use. God can use the tax gatherer, the fisherman, and even the Pharisee; but only when they are crucified tax gathers, fishermen and Pharisees. Grace does not mean the past does not influence us, it means that it does not determine us in an evil way. The scars that persist can be marks of God's mercy rather than marks of self-conscious shame.

In **2Corinthians 12**, God answered Paul's request for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh" as follows: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (**verse 9**). The issue was not forgiveness of sins, but living in the present with an unchangeable weakness. If there are things about us that we cannot change and God does

not change, these are candidates for grace. Grace turns the weakness into a testimony of God's power.

I have counseled people who have suffered with many unchangeable things that persist from past events. Some have lost families, with no possibility of reconciliation. Some have memories of things they wish never happened. Yet each one can find the grace that God has to live in His power **now**. We remember the past, we even live with certain consequences of the past (some Christians are serving God in jail with life sentences) but we are not doomed by the past. God gives grace that His will might be done in our lives now. Is this not His ultimate purpose for us, that we might love Him, our neighbor, and live for His glory?

Providence and Inner Healing

Providence is God's sovereign hand that works all things together for His purpose and the ultimate good of His people. We must believe that what God has allowed, He has allowed for a greater purpose and for our ultimate good. Some ridicule this notion, but it is Biblical. God allowed wicked men to crucify Messiah for the greater good of our eternal redemption (**Acts 2:22-24**). We reject the Biblical teaching on providence to our own loss and to the depreciation of the message of Scripture. We gladly see God's hand in the rain that falls on the crops, but see the drought as evil that is somehow outside God's control and providential purpose. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (**Hebrews 11:6**). We cannot say that we sought God and He did not reward us because He did not change things that we thought He should have changed.

Some have taught that we must "forgive God" for allowing negative circumstances. I recoil at this notion because it seems to presuppose that God has done evil. **Romans 8:18-39**

teaches God's good purpose for us that is being providentially worked out. God has done all things right and deserves our worship but needs not forgiveness from man. We need His forgiveness! Since God has never done anything wrong or to our detriment, we must worship Him and confess His goodness. How God can use us in spite of our own past sin and the evil motives of others is beyond complete explanation, but we know it is true.

1John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Everyone has regrets, yet God is greater than our sin and has provided for forgiveness and redemption. There are often "scars," residual damages we carry around physically and mentally because of our previous rebellion. God graciously uses us in spite of these things and sees us spotless, holy, and acceptable in Christ. Practically, the Holy Spirit is at work to enable us to obey God now in spite of hindrances and handicaps from the past.

Paul said ". . . but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (**Romans 5:20b**). Biblical counsel involves starting where we are now and going on by grace. The feeling of being unworthy, yet thankful is a good one. **1Timothy 1:15**, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

The Promise of Inner Healing

We read in **Isaiah 61:1-3** (referenced in **Luke 4:18,19** by Christ) that He, Messiah, came to heal the broken hearted, the downtrodden, the poor, and whoever may be in bondage due to things past. We can be assured that He did and does just what He promised. We can be assured that the promise of these passages did not sit ineffective and unapplied for centuries of church history until the modern inner healing movement happened in the last two decades. Jesus healed the brokenness of

people's hearts in His own ministry, and has done so for those who have fallen upon Him in faith and dependence throughout the church age. He takes our wretchedness and gives us a new life of meaning and eternal relationship.

The issue of inner healing is not "how to" (as the titles of the pop books suggest) but **who**. We do not have an engineering problem, but a relational problem. Human beings are relational beings, made to love God and others. Inner healing involves a supernatural renovation of our relationships, beginning with our relationship with God. It is not totally complete until the resurrection of the dead, but it is substantial and effectual now. Our relationship to the past is changed, though the past itself remains the same.

When viewed through the eyes of faith, those things that we thought were the worst evils that caused hopelessness and despair turn out to be the very things God turns to His good purpose. We could say that inner healing is **re-relationship**. We are re-related to God, others, and our own past. This happens through the agency of the crucified Messiah. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (**Galatians 2:20**). God has a new life for us, just as we are, the past as it is, but changed and transformed through His supernatural, renovating work of grace.

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